

Recognising the Enemy's Tactics

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Date: 18 September 2016

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[0 : 0 0] We're now going to turn to our Bible reading for this morning. So please do open your Bible and turn to Nehemiah chapter 6. Nehemiah chapter 6.

And if you're using one of our blue church Bibles, that'll be found on page 401. We're going to read the full chapter this morning. So please do have that open. Now, when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it, although up to that time I had not set up the doors and the gates, Sanballat and Geshem sent to me saying, Come and let us meet together at Hakafirim in the plain of Ono.

But they intended to do me harm. And I sent messengers to them saying, I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?

And they sent to me four times in this way. And I answered them in the same manner. In the same way, Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand.

And it was written, It is reported among the nations and Geshem. And it was written, Also, it says that you and the Jews intend to rebel. That is why you are building the wall.

[1 : 3 4] And according to these reports, you wish to become their king. And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem. There is a king in Judah. And now the king will hear of these reports.

So now come and let us take counsel together. Then I sent to him saying, No such things as you say have been done. For you are inventing them out of your own mind.

For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking their hands will drop from the work and it will not be done. But now, O God, strengthen my hands.

Now when I went to the house of Shemaiah, the son of Deliah, son of Mehetabal, who was confined to his home, he said, Let us meet together in the house of God within the temple.

Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night. But I said, Should such a man as I run away, and what man such as I could go into the temple and live, I will not go in.

[2 : 4 1] And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin.

And so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me. Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess, Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, who wanted to make me afraid.

So the wall was finished on the 25th day of the month of Elul in 52 days. And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem.

For they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. Moreover, in those days, the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them.

For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shekaniah, the son of Arah. And his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Mishulam, the son of Berekiah, as his wife.

[3 : 55] Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid. Please do turn with me to Nehemiah chapter 6, page 401, if you have one of our visitors' Bibles.

It's a chapter all about recognizing the enemy's tactics. We're coming back to our study on battling builders for the kingdom of God, this book of Nehemiah.

We've had a few weeks break, but you'll remember, perhaps, those of you who are here, that some time ago we began with an overview of the great cosmic war that is, in fact, the story of the whole Bible from Genesis 3 right to the end.

It begins, remember, with the announcement of hostilities. God puts enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. And the Bible story ends, of course, as the vision in Revelation portrays very vividly, with the ultimate crushing of the serpent, that dragon or ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, as he is cast forever into the lake of fire.

And what John's vision there is picturing, of course, is the triumph of our Lord Jesus Christ in his life and death and resurrection and his ascension to reign forever. Remember, on the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus said, Now, now is the judgment of this world.

[5 : 25] Now will the ruler of this world be cast out. But, of course, as Daniel saw in his vision hundreds of years before, when he foresaw the return of the exiles under Ezra and Nehemiah and others, Daniel saw that at last, until the kingdom was built, until the Christ would come finally, that kingdom would be rebuilt, but amid much turmoil and struggle.

Daniel 9, verse 26, To the end there will be war. And likewise, Jesus himself warned his followers, didn't he, of great battles, great tribulations.

These are the birth pangs of the new creation, through which the gospel will, to the very end of the age, reach the ends of the earth, as the builders for the kingdom of God proclaim that gospel to every tribe and tongue and nation.

But in times of war. That's why, of course, Christ's apostle Paul is always warning the church that we're in a great battle. Our battle is not principally against just mere flesh and blood, but against the dark powers over this present darkness.

which still rage against all Christ's people, because the devil knows his time is short. And that's why Paul says, we need the whole armor of God himself, if we're going to stand against the schemes of the devil.

[6 : 55] And he also says to the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 2, that we are not to be outwitted by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his designs. And of course, one reason that we're not ignorant of his designs is because we have the whole Old Testament scriptures, and indeed, especially these chapters about the post-exilic rebuilding of God's earthly kingdom, these battling builders of the kingdom of God.

They have so much to teach us about the devil's schemes. And Paul tells us plainly in Romans chapter 15 that these scriptures are written for our instruction, so that, he says, through endurance and through the encouragement of these scriptures, we might have hope, and that we might be standing fast and not floored by the devil's schemes, the schemes that still are trying to wreak havoc on Christ's work in the world today.

Because to do that, we need to recognize our enemy's tactics. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Now, we've been seeing that in these studies already.

In chapter 4, we saw the opposition from the world around against God's people. In chapter 5, we saw the sin within God's church wreaking havoc and nearly bringing disaster to the work.

But here we have in chapter 6, again, another great focus of Satan. And that is to destroy and to discredit and to deceive and to demoralize Christian leaders.

[8 : 28] That's always a key strategy of the devil. For the simple reason that it is so very effective in multiplying the destructive forces at work in the church of Christ.

I was speaking to a senior minister just recently and we were discussing a mutual acquaintance. And somebody who was once a keen, committed Christian but has turned completely against the faith.

And it all began when he was a student. And when the pastor in the large student church that he was worshipping and apostatized left his wife and family and went off into a relationship with another man.

And he was one of many, many terrible casualties of that event. If you want to stop an army, you go for the general.

And so this chapter has a lot to say very particularly to Christian leaders. Not only church leaders, of course, but also leaders in any kind of Christian work. Christian unions, youth ministries, group leaders within a church, leaders of all kinds.

[9 : 37] Not least spiritual leaders in families. Particularly fathers. If you want to destroy a family's spiritual health, go for the father's faith and his commitment.

Actually, if you want to destroy a family's health in general, in a secular sense, go for the father. That's the calamity that we're facing in our society today, isn't it? So many are so damaged because there is no father in the home, especially young boys.

And that's why the attacks on masculinity in our culture today are so very dangerous, so sinister. But how much more important, in eternal terms, is the spiritual leadership of fathers, of men in general, in the church and in the home?

We need to be aware of that. So this chapter is vital for every single one of us. All of us will either have some responsibility, particularly to lead others in some way, or at least to support and to encourage and to pray for those who do, as well as, of course, to lead ourselves in the path of godliness.

So we're all leaders. And we all have to recognize the enemy's tactics and see how he pursues his strategy to damage, to destroy kingdom building in every age by undermining and by attacking godly Christian leadership.

[11 : 00] especially, and notice verse 1 of chapter 6, especially at critical junctures in the life of God's people. Last Sunday evening, Paul in Joshua chapter 7 was reminding us of that, a critical point in Israel's life when Achan's sin nearly put the whole conquest of Canaan in jeopardy.

And it's just the same here. Here's a critical juncture. The walls are finally up, but the gates are not quite yet in place. And as Derek Kidner, the scholar, says it was a time when they were on the brink of completion, but when all could still be lost or soon won.

And last Sunday night, Paul reminded us, didn't he, about our own life here as a church, that we are in critical days. We began this year with one venue, one place to gather and to serve. God willing, we'll end the year with three and with four different meetings taking place.

Wouldn't the devil love to outwit us at this very time to get at me and all of our other leaders and all of us who are seeking to build for this everlasting kingdom?

Yes, he would, but we are not ignorant of his designs. Because in fact, very clearly, we see at least four of them right here in this chapter. Seduction and slander and self-preoccupation and syncretism.

[12 : 27] Look at verses one to four, first of all. The enemy's strategy here is to flatter God's servant with seduction. The clear aim is to distract or even to destroy through seductive dialogue.

Verse two, come, let us meet together. Let's all get together. It's time we did that. But you see, God gives his true servants conviction in the face of what would derail us.

So we're determined to see true priorities in real kingdom work and dedicated to stick resolutely to building only, only that which will last for eternity.

Now this attack came to Nehemiah using ammunition that was something that arose from his very success in his work.

he had succeeded in building the walls, verse one. It was a Herculean task. In other words, he had proved himself an effective and a fruitful servant of God. But you see, that is a dangerous position to be in because you can be so easily flattered.

[13 : 34] What they were saying was, Nehemiah, we can see that you are obviously going to be a major figure after all. Let's forget about all our previous difficulties. We'd like to invite you to the big league now.

We'd like you to come and join us. Take your place among us, the real movers and shakers in this area. And surely we can work together. Now friends, that has been a very effective strategy of the devil all through the ages.

Because especially when someone is doing good work and is producing real fruit, well inevitably that's when they're going to be open to these kind of seductive voices. Because we're all human, aren't we?

We all love to be flattered. We love to be recognized. We love to be appreciated. Even if it's only grudging appreciation. In fact, sometimes grudging appreciation is doubly satisfying, isn't it?

We jolly well proved you wrong. We like that. And success and faithfulness in the Christian life and in church life can be dangerous because it makes us vulnerable.

[14 : 39] And you see, for Nehemiah here, at best, it would have been a distraction from this critical work at a crucial time and the gates still had to be set. Or at worst, of course, it might even have been an attempt to assassinate him, to remove him.

You can imagine the headline in the New Jerusalem Post, body found after tragic crash on the road to Ono in an obituary for Nehemiah. But either way, vital kingdom work was going to come to a standstill.

That's what Nehemiah says in verse 3. And you see, this sort of thing happens so often in gospel work today. Maybe there's slow but steady, real progress building up a church fellowship going on.

Not dramatic, but real progress, real conversions, real encouragements. And people notice. And so, a call comes to a pastor, perhaps, from some denominational bigwig.

Oh, we've seen what you're doing. We want you to come and join our committee for this great new thing. Or maybe it's the evangelical establishment that's important to them. And they're asked, oh, come and join in with our great new movement.

[15 : 49] We want you to have a big role in this next great thing that God's doing. And that leader is so easily seduced and flattered into diverting their time and energy and their interest into something that seems much more exciting, seems much more fulfilling, seems much more immediate than the hard, ongoing slog of building the Church of Jesus Christ for the long term.

Now, I've seen that happen so many times. It's one of the reasons why in the crises that many of us have faced recently in the Church in Scotland, it's one of the reasons why so few congregations have been proven to be really solidly built and given a bulwark against falsehood and error and therefore been found wanting in the day of real trial because the truth is that the energies of their leaders have actually been much more taken up elsewhere.

Of course, it's not just pastors, it's not just church leaders who are vulnerable in that way, all sorts of Christians, all of us, often get very frustrated, don't we? We don't like the slow, long-term nature of church building, of real disciple making.

We want more, we want it more quickly, we want it more excitingly, we want more high-profile things. And it's so easy to spiral off and put all your energies into other things, special events, exciting initiatives, great conferences, things that seem to give a more immediate sense of gratification and fulfillment.

While the ongoing work of the local church just gets bypassed or even ignored. But Nehemiah says, no, I won't do that, verse 2.

[17 : 34] He says, it's clearly harmful to the cause of God and to the people of God for him to be diverted. He has a real God-given conviction about what the kind of real and lasting work that God wants him to do.

Verse 3, do you see? This is my great work, this is all-consuming. Nothing is bigger or more important than the kingdom of God being built. However slow, however hard, however unspectacular it is.

It's the walls of Zion's city that will last for eternity. And it's gathering people safely into those walls of protection in God's kingdom that is the task which cannot ever be subordinated to anything else.

Not ever. Why should that work stop while I get diverted into something else? Friends, there is nothing more important today in this world than the building and the building up of the church of Jesus Christ.

Of every single outcrop of that church wherever it may be. The church of Christ is the bride of Christ. It is the love of Christ. And we must never be seduced into thinking that anything could ever be more important to God than our part in building that church today.

[18 : 54] Nehemiah was a man with real convictions about what the true task of God's mission really is. And so although the pressure was relentless four times, you see, they sent letters to him.

He would not be distracted to anything else. And we need to be resolute just like that in our convictions about the real task of the church's mission today.

because pressures are real. Pressures are very seductive to divert and put our energies into anything but the overriding call to Christ's church which is to build that church for eternity.

To go and to make disciples of all nations teaching them the obedience of faith through teaching them the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

that is real mission. But as someone said recently in a book on mission, in today's cultural climate where the accolades come quickly to those with humanitarian strategies and the opprobrium falls fast on those with evangelistic concerns, it is even more imperative that we keep the main thing the main thing.

[20 : 14] we need to recognize the enemy's tactics and we need to pray for ourselves and for leaders and especially for those leaders that God is using and has used greatly that they should not be seduced by flattery into other things which will at best be a distraction but at worst prove disastrous for the real work of building the kingdom of Christ.

Nehemiah was not derailed and no must we be. But of course the enemy doesn't give up easily and so the fifth approach in verse 5 changes tack completely and in verses 5 to 9 we see a ploy to frighten God's servant with slander and the aim is to demoralize him through slanderous defamation but God gives his true servants courage in the face of reviling so that we stand firm and he gives us wisdom for just the right words and strength to go on with the real work even when we may feel very afraid indeed.

How devious the devil is. Here's an attack on Nehemiah at the very point where he's just proved himself faithful to God and he's accused of doing it all that he has done not for God but actually for himself and for his own self-promotion.

It comes from embittered enemies who are feeling very slighted. Oh he won't be one of us he won't be part of our club so we will isolate him completely we'll destroy him we'll make a fool of him we'll discredit him that's such a common human reaction isn't it?

Injured pride is a very powerful thing I suspect we're going to find out a lot of that in these coming days in our dealings with the European Union. Are you really sure of your motives Nehemiah?

[22:10] That's what they said. Is this great work that you called is it really for the sake of God and his kingdom or actually isn't it just you building your own empire?

That's what everyone's saying verse 6 it's repeated everywhere Geshem too and he knows it must be so you just want to be king in your own castle that's the real truth isn't that too rather sadly not uncommon in the church today?

It's very sad but it's very true that that kind of gossip mongering and innuendo does often arise when there is real growth and real advance in the gospel in Christ's church and it comes out of envy it comes out of jealousy the attitude that says oh well we're not involved they're not one of us so we must call it in question we must rubbish it we must sneer at it and have snide comments going around about it I came across a very nasty instance of that recently when somebody passed on to Rupert an email that they'd got from somebody else I don't know why they passed it on but it was full of rather nasty snide comments just as he was about to go to this new church in Edinburgh oh is that the latest manifestation of the Trond diocese it said oh they're just empire builders didn't seem like a very encouraging Christian comment for Rupert as he was about to start his ministry and we've got to guard ourselves haven't we against that kind of thing against that kind of niggerly attitude that kind of censorious attitude when we talk about others because we say that sort of thing it says a lot more about us and our tainted hearts than it says about those that we're aiming our barbs at be careful but we will face that kind of thing always as will every church that is determined to go on battling to build the kingdom of Christ through the gospel what did Jesus say woe to you when all men speak well of you blessed are you when you are slandered falsely for my sake but that's hard isn't it it's not nice how do you think

Nehemiah felt when this open letter was being read all over the place like the news of the world with a great picture of him under a headline exposed the man who would be king not nice to be in the papers like that and it's very hard not to lose your stomach for the work when your loyalty when your motives are being questioned publicly that kind of slanderous defamation is very very demoralizing we know that and the temptation to just back off and give up is sometimes overwhelming what am I doing here why don't I just go back to Susa where the king knows fine well I'm his loyal servant where I'm appreciated where I'm respected where I'm known and esteemed I want to get right away from this snake pit of constant criticism constant opposition I'm sure that's how Nehemiah felt isn't it as I'm sure it's been in the mind of many Christian leaders over the years who find themselves under attack and up against it maybe in a new ministry in a new church perhaps in a new mission field or maybe in student leadership or maybe in some area of ministry in the church where it's growing but it's tough and it's hard in this opposition but God gives his servants courage to stand firm in the face of slander and reviling that's what the Lord

Jesus promised to us do you remember Luke chapter 12 verse 12 don't be anxious about how you'll defend yourself or what you'll say in situations like that of accusation and hostility for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you must say indeed he says again in Luke 21 I will give you a mouth and wisdom which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict and God gave Nehemiah wisdom and courage to find just those right words didn't he here verse 8 flat denial nothing you're saying is being done it's all your own invention and he gave him strength to get on with the real work because and notice verse 9 alongside his bold public proclamation was his humble private prayer strengthen my hands strengthen my hands he knew he wasn't building his empire but God's kingdom but he also knew that only God's help could help him do that only God's power can ever do that only God could ever enable his task and unless God vindicated himself and showed that it was his work then Nehemiah can't defend himself but God does vindicate his true servants when they throw everything on him when just like Paul they know that they are jars of clay and that is so that everyone will see that the power belongs not to us but to God and that's what happened here look down to verse 16 when the wall was finished and not stopped all the enemies feared and fell greatly in their own esteem for they perceived that the work had been accomplished with the help of our God

[27 : 48] God always vindicates his real work and his true servants so friends don't be frightened by slander don't be demoralized when you're defamed for Jesus sake it's the sign of real genuine Christian service it's the sign that real and lasting work is being done and the devil is raging so Jesus says rejoice and be glad for great is your reward in heaven this is just the way they treated the prophets of old but it is God who is working not us and so there's no room for pride and pride is always a real danger for us and that's what we see I think in the next few verses we're in verses 10 to 14 another attack comes as the enemy seeks to focus God's servant on self-preoccupation this prophet

Shemaiah wants to discredit and disgrace God's servant through his spiritual deception but God gives his true servants clarity in the face of what might deceive us by pious and spiritual sounding words of knowledge when our hearts are truly set on his kingdom on his name on his word not on our own reputation he will give us clarity and perception to make us stand now again this attack comes in the area of victory that Nehemiah has just won he is stuck to his guns he has not been deflected from leadership despite all the slander and so now the enemy comes and says ah yes you're right God is with you God has vindicated you can see it now and you were right not to be distracted Nehemiah because obviously you are absolutely indispensable here you are the vital man they can't possibly do without you everything hinges upon you personally and you need to realize that you need to realize just how important you are and live accordingly no more risk taking you must protect yourself you must give yourself all kinds of special attention because you're

God's man and moreover I have a very special and particular word of knowledge from God to you all about this that was what Shammai the prophet was doing in verse 10 we don't know why he was confined to his home but what it meant was that when Nehemiah went to see him his visit would certainly be noted and people would assume that he's going to seek special guidance from this prophetic oracle perhaps he doesn't know what to do this man's going to tell him and Shammai's warning sounded so plausible verse 10 you're too important to lose Nehemiah and so you need to go now with me and take refuge in the temple I know I've had a word from the Lord from the Spirit especially for you and it is easy to be deceived into self preoccupation especially when you and I live in a world full of narcissism when questions about me and my life are at the absolute center of everything and it seeps into our thinking in the church all the time so when you open your

Bible to do your daily Bible reading the first thought in your head is what is God saying to me today about my life what is God doing today in my life and for me all around us you see the church today has become so inward looking so self oriented so full of therapy Christianity rather than what we find in the scriptures which is an outward looking God centered gospel oriented service Christianity reality but that's the church in the west today and friends we are all affected by it that's why people are much much more concerned with knowing God's guidance for their lives rather than being concerned with godliness that God wants in our lives that's why we're far more preoccupied with ourselves and our own prosperity than with the saving purposes of God and his kingdom's advance and its prosperity isn't that true well I find it in my own heart and you see when that is where your focus is you are easy easy pray for all kinds of spiritual sounding guidance words specially for you from the spirit of

God which are nothing of the kind but Nehemiah wasn't like that to use Jesus words he was seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and that's why he had God given clarity to see right through this temptation and refuse to be taken in by it verse 12 I saw that God had not sent him the enemy had sent him this is not a word of knowledge from God it's a word of lies from Satan he's very bold isn't he would you have that boldness somebody comes along to you after a very high powered meeting at a Christian convention and said I've had a word from the spirit just for you would you have the boldness to rebuff them and say no you haven't that's the devil speaking wouldn't be very popular but Nehemiah knew that this was snaring him into sin that it would discredit him and that it would disgrace all the work that he was doing because he was being asked to do two things first he was being asked to put his personal well-being before God's purpose and call and he couldn't do that and he was being asked to put himself above God's revealed law because it was not lawful for him to go into the temple not being a priest but you see our enemy the devil is so subtle he wants to lure you and me into both of those things all the time and it's a very special temptation in Christian service especially when you are doing effective work and fruitful work work that's blessed by God it's very easy to begin to think that you are indispensable and from there it's a very short step to thinking that we can dictate the play to God not God dictate things to us and it's very easy to fall prey to people who will massage that kind of thought with all sorts of spiritual sycophancy and it's easy to be seduced into actions that in fact clearly fly in the face of

[34 : 46] God's revealed word about the way he really does do his work and about the way we are called to conduct ourselves and how we are to live and what we are to obey we can start to think that we are somehow exceptions that we've got some sort of special status because God is using us so wonderfully and somehow the normal rules don't apply to us why do you think it is that Christian leaders will sometimes deceive themselves into sexual affairs for example well I've heard people say I believe there was a special case believe that God gave me this other relationship to help me because of all the pressures I was under all that I had to put up with God gave it no he didn't it's why some churches can deceive themselves into thinking they're special that oh God is doing a new thing here and they can begin to believe all kinds of people who massage that idea to them that oh you're a special place

God is doing a special blessing here and those churches then can begin to move away progressively from what is clear and scriptural and orthodox and right in terms of what is believed and how they behave until ultimately they lose their orthodox moorings altogether it happens all the time but no says Nehemiah and no we must say that can never be no servant is ever indispensable no servant is greater than their master God's purposes are far far greater than any of us no one ever is indispensable in God's work and sparing yourself can never be worth sacrificing God's name and honor for even if Shemaiah's word to Nehemiah was true remember in Acts chapter 21 a real word of God comes from the prophet Agabus to Paul and says Paul when you go to Jerusalem it's chains and prison that awaits you and all the people said you mustn't go don't go and Paul said stop stop breaking my heart

I know that but I'm ready not only for prison but for death for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ but we've got to be realistic it's so easy to become self-preoccupied Christians Christians and churches tempted not to stand tempted not to make sacrifices because because oh our ministry is so vital or your particular influence is so important in that organization don't risk losing it over this one issue or your building is so strategic nothing's worth the cost of losing that surely don't do it and on and on and on but no says Nehemiah we have to think big about God and his purposes his kingdom his honor but small and very soberly about ourselves content to fill a very small place if God is glorified we need to do what is right and it is scripture that tells us unequivocally what is right not any spiritual and pious sounding words that undermine

God's clear word in scripture and we're to simply trust God and if it seems that we lose out big time then so be it that's Nehemiah's attitude and that's the kind of attitude Paul's speaking about when he says it's no longer I but Christ no self preoccupation I am crucified I am nothing it's Christ and his kingdom that is everything now that's the only attitude isn't it that will protect us from the devil's lure to self preoccupation and instead will lead to the real work of Jesus Christ being done just as this great chorus of discouragement here in verse 14 could not prevent the work of Christ being done in Nehemiah's day so verse 15 says the wall was finished in 52 days an astonishing feat but it was being done by the power of an astonishing

God and everyone knew it says verse 16 this was God's work but even in that great victory the warfare was not over verses 17 to 19 finally record yet another ongoing onslaught of the evil one as he seeks to just wear out God's servant Nehemiah and aim to fatigue God's servant with the syncretism of God's people with the divided hearts of a people who wanted to be on side with God but trading at the same time with the enemy and he just wanted to make God's servant despair over the sustained disloyalty of God's people but friends God gives his true servants constancy in the face of ongoing constant disappointments to enable them to persevere amid the mess of all these disappointments that will as Jesus says be the truth about real mission right to the very end of the age there will be tears weeds sown among the people of

[40 : 21] God among the children of the kingdom right until the close of the age said Jesus in Matthew 13 but don't give up go on sowing the seed and trusting the Lord of the harvest because he promises that although yes we do so often with tears of pain we shall at the last reap with great songs of joy there's no doubt and this is a sad sad thing but there is no doubt that the biggest disappointments the greatest pain in all Christian ministry and service arises from disappointment within the professing people of God and look at verse 17 it was from the very people who should have been most at one with Nehemiah sharing his leaderships it was the nobles it was the leaders of the people that brought such disappointment hobnobbing with outright enemies like Tobiah Tobiah was a man who had a Jewish name a pious sounding name

God is good but he was the worst kind of religious fraud all smarmy and evangelical on the outside but inside a scornful enemy of the gospel at heart and all these vested interests verse 18 all these oaths we're told that what that means is trade deals my goodness aren't trade deals supposedly the most important thing in the world and facilitated by all these marriage connections and nepotism things that should never have been in the first place isn't it shocking that some of these men who worked side by side with Nehemiah in chapter 3 building the walls are now causing this great disappointment but it just shows how deeply the devil can penetrate the life of the people of God and it's so realistic it's not at all uncommon in many churches today that it's family and nepotism and financial clout and worldly standards these things that so often decide who has authority in the church not the spiritual qualities that ought to be paramount according to the Bible and how often it is that just like this it is pillars of the church so called who break their pastor's heart who do most to damage to bring despair in the life of the church but that's kingdom work

God gives great victories but until the end there will be war get used to it friends and so poor Nehemiah has to listen to some of his leading men look at verse 19 waxing eloquent about the virtues of Tobiah a man who was hell bent on destroying the very work he was doing and all the time the very man sending him letters to intimidate him to make him afraid did you notice that refrain all the way through the chapter verse 19 it was to frighten us verse 9 rather verse 13 that I should be afraid verse 14 to make me afraid here again verse 19 to make me afraid relentless ongoing discouragement especially from the divided loyalties and the sheer disloyalty within the professing church that's what Paul the apostle found all through his ministry why do you think we have all these letters in the new testament it was the disloyalty and the disappointment especially among leaders that were the apostle Paul's main problem enough to drive you to despair isn't it but he never ever gave up not Paul not

Nehemiah he went on and on and on building for God while battling with the enemy the enemy without and within how did these men do it how did they persevere well like every servant who endures to the end they recognized the enemy's tactics and they were not outwitted by Satan and they looked to the God whom they loved and they trusted remember the end of chapter five where Nehemiah described his attitude over the whole twelve years of his leadership what was it that drove his life and work two things chapter five verse 15 reverence and love for the God of heaven I did so because of the fear of God and verse 18 his love and compassion for the people of God not to demand from them but to give to them and to give himself for them the servant just like the great servant the servant king the Lord

Jesus himself and friends these are the characteristics aren't they of every true servant of God those that God can use and those that God will use to build his everlasting kingdom those that Satan cannot bring to ruin as someone has written they weep and pray in secret and defy earth and hell in public they tremble when faced with danger but die in their tracks rather than turn back they're like a shepherd defending his sheep or a mother protecting her young they sacrifice without grumbling they give without calculating they suffer without groaning to those in their charge they say we live if you do well brothers and sisters if this mind is in us which is ours in Christ Jesus then as the apostle says the God of peace will soon crush

[46 : 19] Satan under your feet Satan will fall though he roar like a lion and under our feet that snake will be slain let's pray oh heavenly father how we thank you that your word equips us gives us light to bring us clarity and courage and conviction that we should stand in the face of every onslaught because of our fear and love for you oh God our father and because of our love and compassion for your people your sheep our brothers and sisters in Christ help us Lord to see and so to resist all attacks of the evil one help us to help one another that together we might stand and having done all things to stand firm in the faith once for all delivered to the saints and to stand at the last day having been found faithful and not wanting keep us all the days of our lives as servants and soldiers battling builders for the kingdom of our

Lord Jesus Christ in whose name we pray Amen to happen to and they are in whose love