

From Fear to Finish

Nehemiah 6-7 - NCBC, August 14, 2016

Main Point: **Trust God to overcome your fears and finish His work.**

- **Trust God with your priorities** (6:1-9)
- **Trust God with your safety** (6:10-14)
- **Trust God with your reputation** (6:17-19)
- **Trust God to finish His work** (6:15-16; 7:1-73)

Application: **Fear God and stay faithful.**

Opening Announcements:

Life Groups / Ladies Bible Study / Prayer for school starting back up

<<Whom shall I fear?>>



Thank you worship team. Hold on to the promises of God church. God is faithful. And that means it is impossible for God to be unfaithful. God can *not* be *not* faithful. Whom then shall we fear? Our God will keep His promises.

This is why our church gatherings are so Word-Centered. Our lives rest upon the promises of our great God. So joyfully now open your Bible to **Nehemiah chapter 6** and prepare for the reading of God's Word.



If you do not have a Bible with you today, our ushers are coming now to give you a Bible. Please catch their attention as they pass by and it would be our joy to give you a Bible. You are welcome to take this Bible home as our gift to you, or just simply return it after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room.

I'm eager to get back to our study in Ezra-Nehemiah this morning. I'm so thankful for some weeks of personal refreshment and for how God so well fed our hearts through the faithful servants who opened God's Word for

us these last weeks. So let's quickly review where we find ourselves as we pick up our study of Ezra-Nehemiah from chapters 6-7 of Nehemiah's diaries.

Ezra + Nehemiah			
GOD RESTORES			
Ez. 1-6	Ez. 7-10	Neh. 1-7	Neh. 8-13
Restoring the Temple	Restoring the People	Restoring the Wall	Restoring Worship
Zerubbabel	Ezra	Nehemiah & Ezra	
Haggai & Zechariah	-	Malachi	
First Return 538 BC	Second Return 457 BC	Third Return 444 BC	

We are now in the middle of the third major division of this book. Remember how Nehemiah got here. Nehemiah 1 – he prepared himself for God's restoration with prayer. Nehemiah 2 – he trusted God's power more than his own for restoration. Nehemiah 3 – he delegated the work to all of God's people.

And then in chapters 4-6 – the opposition from enemies comes with a vengeance. Loved ones – the greater your progress for Christ and His Gospel in this world – the more bitter will be your opposition.

In chapter 4 – God's people suffer ridicule and then open threats of violence. In chapter 5, the opposition comes from within Nehemiah's own ranks as greed sows discord between God's people.

Now today in chapter 6, the opposition turns personal against Nehemiah himself. God's enemies hate restoring

grace, and will stop at nothing to halt the progress of God's kingdom work.

But God is able to overcome such fear-oriented opposition. No matter how strong your fear is this morning...know this church. God restores broken lives. Rescuing grace is His specialty. He will help us finish our mission.



Please stand with me in honor of God's Word as I read from **Nehemiah chapter 6**. Our text is found on page **401** of the Bibles we've handed out.

Starting in **verse 1 of Nehemiah 6**, reading from the English Standard translation:

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 in the gates), ² Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come and let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono." But they intended to do me harm. ³ 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?" ⁴ And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner. ⁵ In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. ⁶ In it was written, "It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel; that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports you wish to become their king. ⁷ 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." ⁸ 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." ⁹ 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.

**Thus reads God's word. You may be seated.
Let's Pray.**

Franklin D. Roosevelt once said that "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear."¹

I believe our recent elder/pastor retreat can illustrate this well for us this morning. Several of us decided to go swimming at one point, and there was a 10' high dock where you could jump into the water.

¹ <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/172689-courage-is-not-the-absence-of-fear-but-rather-the>



Now I realize 10' doesn't sound very high...but when you're standing there looking down at a lake that is 51' deep and full of 36" muskies... your eyeballs are actually about 16' feet above the water. And if you're not an Olympic diver – it's enough to take your breath away.



So why did all of us swimming elders eventually muster up the courage to jump off of it?

Peer pressure, of course!! Why else would someone like me who has a fear of falling ever put myself in such a quandary?

Brave courage is not the absence of fear...but rather the assessment that something else is more important than fear.

I overcame my fear because of love – love for the men and perhaps ...love for the praise of men in this situation.

And we can observe this same lesson today from Nehemiah 6-7.



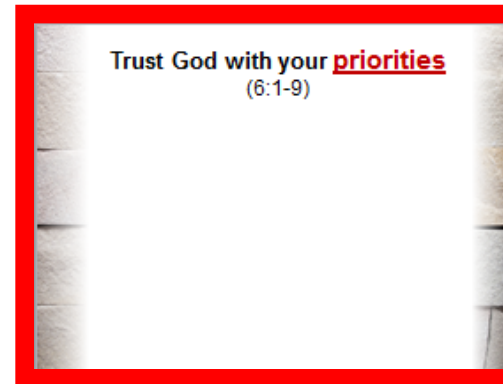
When it comes to finishing the ministry that God has entrusted to each of His children – we – like Nehemiah – can **Trust God to overcome our fears and finish His work.**

Certainly the fears associated with building God's kingdom can be far more paralyzing than the fear of falling off a 10' dock. Spiritual leadership always requires courage... for Gospel progress must overcome the deceptive lies of fear.

So how do you respond when you are persecuted or hated for Christ's sake? What about when people spread lies about you?

Fear would like to muzzle our witness and paralyze our ministry right? But if you are in Christ, then you can trust God to overcome your fears and finish the earthly work that He has given you to do.

First you must learn from Nehemiah and,



Trust God with your priorities (6:1-9)

Chapter 6 begins, and the project of rebuilding the city walls is just about complete. Verse 1 says that the walls were finished and all they had to do yet was to set up the doors in the gates. Almost finished...but not quite.

And at that moment the enemy attacked with a more crafty and deceptive approach.

Hey Nehemiah – you know it seems we got off on the wrong foot together. Obviously you've got your wall now...so why don't you meet us about a day's journey from Jerusalem – it will be a neutral location that way – and we can just sit and chat and work on our relationship.

Now this is intriguing isn't it? Of course there are times when it's a good thing to sit down and talk out differences with those who are opposed against us... but Nehemiah saw through Sanballat's deception. Verse 2 he says clearly,

But they intended to do me harm.

This was nothing more than a scheme to assassinate Nehemiah. And if the project stopped before the gates were installed – the city was still vulnerable to God's enemies.

But notice Nehemiah's response in verse 3,

"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?"

Nehemiah trusted God with his priorities. The whole reason he was in Jerusalem was to rebuild the wall. He didn't allow any secondary objectives distract him from his primary ministry calling. He had a single-minded concentration upon the work God had called him to do.

Dear Christian – what great work is God calling you to intentionally prioritize above all other pursuits? Today we're not engaged in building a wall around Jerusalem, so what's our great mission today?

Matthew 6 teaches us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.² 1 Corinthians teaches us to do all things for the glory of God.³ So I believe every Christian is to be employed in this great work of living for the glory and praise of Jesus Christ! This is the great work entrusted to God's children.



Live for God's glory above all!

But let's get more specific. Let me suggest two specific ways we can live for God's glory every day:

A life prioritizing the praise of God will share God's Word with others and pray for God's Spirit to bear supernatural fruit in the hearts of those we are speaking to.

² Matthew 6:33

³ 1 Corinthians 10:31

Trust God with your **priorities**

(6:1-9)

- Live for God's glory above all.
 - Sharing God's Word to people
 - Praying God's Spirit bear fruit

God's workers prioritize sharing God's word to people and praying God's Spirit would bear fruit. God's glory will not be increased through our lives apart from our faithful dependence and witness of His Holy Spirit.

God's workers understand that we are just sowing the seed, but God's Spirit is the One who opens the hearts to receive the implanted Word and bring forth fruit. So we must have a single minded concentration on speaking the Gospel to others while they pray for God's Spirit to do a supernatural work of salvation and sanctification in hearts. This is their primary purpose – and just like Nehemiah in verse 4 – they persistently refuse to get distracted.

So parents – don't get distracted by social media and the news. You live for God's glory when you're intentionally proclaiming Christ to your children as you pray for God's Spirit to bring forth fruit. Grandparents – don't get distracted by retirement to the point that you stop sharing and praying for your loved ones. Singles – use this gift that God has given you to live for God's glory above all. Trust God with your priorities.

Now in verse 5, we see Sanballat resorts to playing political hardball. From his home in Samaria he sends a letter containing false accusations, rumors, and lies to Nehemiah. And notice – it was an open or unsealed letter – which meant that by the time Nehemiah would have received it, the letter would have already been read dozens of times and the gossip would have done its damage.

Have you ever been bullied like this? Bullies try to make up for their own insecurities by making you feel “less than” ...and lies are a favorite weapon for bullies.

In fact, the more public your leadership position, the more exposure you will have to slander.

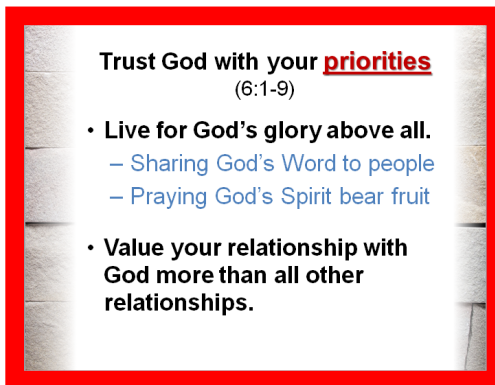
So how does Nehemiah respond to the fear of word getting back to King Artaxerxes? Should he leave Jerusalem right away and get back to Persia asap to make sure the King is assured of his loyalty? No...that would only play into his enemies hands and stop the work God had called him to complete.

So in Verse 8 – Nehemiah sends his own letter back – probably unsealed as well:

“No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.” Verse 9 – 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.

Nehemiah immediately denies the rumor, prays to the God who knows and judges all, and gets back to work. A clear conscience doesn't have to waste time in self-defense.

Don't miss this...Nehemiah's relationship with God was more important than his relationship with people. And so it should be for us church.



If we are to finish the work of proclaiming and praying that God has entrusted to us – **we must value our personal relationship with God more than any other relationship**. Is this priority reflected by your use of time, talent, and treasure? 1 John 4:18 says that perfect love overcomes fear... so the only way you can truly overcome the giant of fear in your life is with a superior love – a love for the One who died and rose again to welcome and accepted us as His eternal beloved. Hallelujah – what a Savior!

Now in verse 10 we find another ploy of God's enemies against Nehemiah, where we learn today that we must not only trust God with our priorities, but we must



Trust God with our **safety** (6:10-14)

Living as a Christ-follower requires risks. And all Christ-followers must come to the point where they realize that our earthly life here and now is not our most important possession!



Never put your own safety ahead of God's mission.

Verse 10,

Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, 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.”

Don't miss how subtle and wicked this plot is. Shemaiah was recognized by the Jews as being one of God's prophets. And he speaks to Nehemiah in a poetic couplet to emphasize the fact that he is speaking to Nehemiah on behalf of God. He gives Nehemiah a death threat. This is serious! To continue doing God's mission will put his own life at risk.

But in Verse 11 Nehemiah replies... *“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.”* 12 *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.* 13 *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.* 14 *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.*

Now Nehemiah wasn't bragging in verse 11. Here's the point. Nehemiah was not a priest. He was a civil leader – and it would be profane blasphemy for someone in his position to enter into the interior room of the temple as proposed by Shemaiah. That's how Nehemiah knew in verse 12 that God had not sent him – for God's will never contradicts His word.



You should never break God's law to preserve your own life. For what life then would you be left to live? It is far better to die for Christ at the hands of sinful men than to live compromised and affirmed by those who hate Christ.

And so again in verse 14, Nehemiah prays – trusting in God's ability to bring about justice against his enemies at just the right time.

But there's another lesson we must learn from verse 13 before we move on. Do you see in verse 13 where Nehemiah records how God's enemies had hired the false prophet to make him afraid so that he would sin...so they could give him a bad name?

If you are going to relentlessly stay on mission and overcome the Enemy's fear-oriented tactics as a Christ-follower, then you must,



Trust God with your reputation (6:17-19)

You see Nehemiah's enemies wanted to ruin his reputation. In verses 17-19, Tobiah used his marital and marketplace clout among the upper crust Jews to try to intimidate Nehemiah and convince him that he was being too narrow-minded and too careful. But church – don't confuse the difference between your character and your reputation.

Your character is who you really are – your reputation is just who others think you are. Nehemiah understood clearly which one was more important. Even though Tobiah and others were doing everything they could to ruin his reputation – Nehemiah continued to watch over his own life – refusing to justify sin – and remaining committed to honoring Christ with his life and lips. In other words, Nehemiah believed that,



If you take care of your character, God will take care of your reputation.

This world rejects all concepts of God, and firmly believes that a person's reputation is his most important asset. But church – living for your reputation necessarily enslaves you to the foreheads of other people.

Trust God with what others really think about you. And work hard to grow and preserve a Christ-like character that values humility more than influence and love more than talent.

If you are going to overcome the fears that come when you engage in making disciples for the glory of God, then you must



Live by conviction rather than fear. Do not allow peer pressure from Tobiahs conform you to the mold of this world – but rather, be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you might know what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.⁴

Maybe you work in a business or shop where your integrity frequently encounters sinful pressure. Well many businesses make decisions based on the ROI – the Return on Investment, right? This morning Nehemiah's example is teaching us to make decisions based on ROC – Return on Character. Stop chasing people's admiration. You don't have to explain everything so that everyone will like you. Just pray that God's Word would dwell in you richly, and that you would walk in His Spirit – and that God would help you to live for His glory above everything else – so that even those who hate your God would have nothing evil to say about who you really are.⁵

⁴ Romans 12:2

⁵ Titus 2:7

There is little that has more power to destroy a person's character than fear's irrational lies. Loved ones – God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and love, and self-control.⁶ Because of Jesus Christ and His Spirit in this world we can,



Trust God to finish His work (6:15-16; 7:1-73)

Go back and read verses 15-16 with me:

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days.



⁶ 2 Timothy 1:7

That has to be one of the most superb understatements in all of the Old Testament! Approximately 2 miles of military grade walls rebuilt by a band of disheveled exiles in less than 2 months!

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.

Dear Disciple-maker – glory in verse 16 as you underline it in your Bible! God always wins in the end. There is a reversal of confidence in the future for all of God's enemies today. The work you are engaged in will be finally finished by the resurrection power of God's Spirit in the hearts and souls of His elect. It's not by might, and it's not by our power, but it's by God's Spirit that we build the kingdom today – as we proclaim the Gospel and pray together – trusting God to bring His Name glory as the redeemed are justified, sanctified, and finally glorified in His presence on that great and final day of history!



You can **trust God to overcome your fears and finish the work He's called you to do.** The battle will continue to rage here below until God calls us home. But rest assured... God's already won the war. And failure is not an option for a faithful God.

Isn't it interesting that verses 17-19 come after verses 15-16 in Nehemiah's diary? Even after profound displays of God's help in our lives... opposition still finds a way to try to discourage and distract us.

So chapter 7 recounts how Nehemiah stays on task – once the walls and gates are completed for the city of God, he then turns his attention to repopulating God's city with God's people. In verses 1-4, he carefully appoints the city's leadership by their character – making his brother Hanani the city's mayor, and Hananiah the chief of police – “*for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many.*”

Nehemiah understands that leadership appointments always invite divisive temptations. It is important that he appoints coleaders who will be loyal and Christ-like even when subtle opportunities for discord are encountered.

So Nehemiah carefully delegates and gives careful direction, and then the rest of chapter 7 recounts a very similar record of the exiles as Ezra chapter 2. In Ezra 2 the focus was on determining who was truly part of God's chosen people. But here Nehemiah reviews the same list to see who was available to repopulate and revitalize the city of God.

By the end of chapter 7, *all Israel lived in their towns*. The city had been fortified and established, and all the Jews were able to return to their families in the surrounding towns.

So today, let us learn from Nehemiah and Hananiah to



~~Fear God and stay faithful.~~

Don't get distracted. Live for God's glory above all else as you commit to knowing God's Word and sharing it with others in compassionate and loving ways. Humbly prioritize prayer – demonstrating your strong confidence that only God is able to change people's hearts by His Gospel rescue.

Be willing to suffer for Christ when necessarily – and pursue the heavenly "well-done" in Christ more than the applause of fickle crowds here below.

Yes Satan is a prowling lion – and his roar can be intimidating at times – but because of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ – Satan is on a chain. Stand your ground Christian! Stand for the righteousness that

comes from God by faith in Jesus Christ alone. According to Colossians 2:15, Jesus has already disarmed Satan and triumphed over him. Greater is God's Spirit who is in us, than he who is in this world (1 John 4:4).



May God give us His grace to persevere in the great work of living for His glory and praise – no matter how afraid we may be at times.

Let's pray.

<<Before the Throne of God Above>>

Benediction

*²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.
Hebrews 13:20-21*