

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 28 April 2024

Sermon Title : Facing Oppositions

Speaker : Rev Peter Koh

Text : Nehemiah 6

INTRODUCTION

This week we read about the opposition Nehemiah faced while re-building the wall of Jerusalem. Prior to Nehemiah, Zerubbabel the governor of Judah led the first group of Jews out of exile from Babylon back into Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple of God around 536BC. Ezra led the second group of returnees to Jerusalem in around 458BC, in order to carry out spiritual and religious reform, and for God's people to find their identity. Nehemiah now leads the third group of returnees back in around 455BC to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, but in the process of doing so, faced much opposition. The opposition they faced primarily came from Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem who saw the return of the Jews as a threat to their control of Jerusalem. The influx of Jews meant there were more competitors in economic sharing, and this diminished their influence and power. As a result of the threats and hostilities faced, those rebuilding the wall even had to do so with a spear in one hand.

We too face oppositions in life, be it in school, the marketplace or even in church, much like what Nehemiah faced with Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem. This may be because people do not want us to do well in life as they are afraid of how it will affect them. This leads us to two fundamental questions: 1st - How do we identify the strategies being used by our opposers? 2nd - How can we handle opposition?

4 strategies of the opposition

1) Distraction (vv.1-4)

In Nehemiah's case, Sanballat and Geshem first tried to distract him. They sent him a total of 4 letters, asking him to "meet them at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono" (v.2). For historical perspective, Ono was 60km away from Jerusalem, this was a long distance to cover and would require Nehemiah to leave his workers for a prolonged period.

- Distraction makes us forget what we are here for and takes us away from our purpose.
- Distraction calls us to compromise and cooperate with worldly unbelievers.
- ❖ Nehemiah's response for all 4 letters – He has no time for distraction. (v.3)

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Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

2) Discouragement (vv.5-9)

After their letters failed to distract Nehemiah, Sanballat sent a fifth messenger with an open letter that falsely accused Nehemiah of plotting a rebellion and attempting to seize power as king. He further threatened to report Nehemiah to their king based on these purported rumours. (vv.6-7)

- Slander and false accusations made can degrade us and challenge our identity.
- It causes discouragement, distraught and disunity.

John Wesley, in his sermon 'The Cure for Evil Speaking' warns us that when we gossip or slander someone in their absence, we break the commandment "Do not kill". For by speaking of them in such a manner, we kill their integrity and reputation.

- ❖ Nehemiah's response – He cannot afford to be discouraged (v.9)

3) Deception (vv.10-14)

When Nehemiah did not cave under their threats, Tobiah and Sanballat hired a prophet Shemaiah to prophesy that there were people coming to kill Nehemiah and that he should hide in the Temple of God. (v.10) In order to scare Nehemiah, they resorted to borrowing "spiritual authority" to deceive him into believing that their words were God's words.

- Be careful of false prophets who borrow the name of God to manipulate or control us into doing what they want and not what God wants through deception.
- Deception can cause us to do what is wrong out of fear.
- ❖ Nehemiah's response – He will not sin against God by hiding in the Temple which only priests are allowed to enter. Discernment is required to handle deception (v.12)

4) Dread (vv.15-19)

Despite the worst attempts of Tobiah, Sanballat and Geshem, Nehemiah and his workers still managed to complete the construction of the wall in 52 days. However, even with the wall done, Tobiah persisted in intimidating Nehemiah by tapping on his connections with nobility in Judah to get reports on Nehemiah and continued to send letters to instil dread.

- Be wary that even when the task at hand is completed, we may still face challenges and that we should not buckle under the weight of dread and fear.
- ❖ Nehemiah's response – The work had been accomplished with the help of God (v.16)

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Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

How to handle the opposition

i) God's Purpose (v.3) – "...doing a great work"

In response to the letters calling him away, Nehemiah stated that he was doing a great work and questioned why he should have to stop to meet them. Furthermore, it was also noted that if this meeting were truly important, Sanballat and his gang should have come down to Jerusalem to meet Nehemiah themselves, rather than sending letters and waiting for him to go to them. Despite their numerous letters, Nehemiah ultimately remained steadfast in God's purpose and did not allow himself nor his workers to be distracted.

ii) God's Power (v.9) – "God strengthen my hands"

In response to the open letter that escalated to a threat, Nehemiah asked God to strengthen his hands to continue His work. Nehemiah was also secure in knowing that these were false accusations that were brought onto him, declaring that he did no such things, and these reports were invented by his accusers. In the face of discouragement, Nehemiah did not agree for the sake of harmony but relied on the gifts of the Spirit to continue serving and ministering in accordance with God's Will.

iii) God's Protection (v.12) – "God had not sent him,"

In response to the prophet Shemaiah's proclamation that Nehemiah should hide in the Temple of God from his soon-to-be attackers, Nehemiah discerned that God had not sent Shemaiah. Nehemiah's intimate relationship with God and his understanding of the Word allowed him to weigh and judge if what Shemaiah said was really from God. In doing so, Nehemiah avoided being deceived by those borrowing God's spiritual authority and did not end up being manipulated into doing their bidding out of fear.

iv) God's Providence (v.16) – "with the help of our God"

In spite of the continued letters of intimidation from the influential Tobiah, Nehemiah continued to give glory to God and acknowledged that the completion of the wall in 52 days was the result of divine providence. He did not fear nor dread the many letters and reports sent to and from Tobiah, for he was assured that God would always be there to provide help, and it was evident, even to his enemies, that God was on his side.

As demonstrated by Nehemiah, if we have a good relationship with God and a firm foundation in His Word, we would understand the following:

- a. His calling for us.
- b. The help He has given us.
- c. He loves us so much that He would not allow us to be bullied into doing others' bidding.
- d. His divine providence and protection.

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Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

CONCLUSION

As Nehemiah refused to compromise and give in to the demands of the enemies; it reminds us of Jesus as He hung on the cross – His compromise would have led to our death!

Nehemiah was able to say the wall was finished... in 52 days (v.15)

Jesus was able to say, "It is finished!"... but He did it in 3 days (John 19:30)

Let us remember that the main assignment given to us which we must focus on, is that of the ministry of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:18) So, let us go and make disciples intentionally, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit by looking to Jesus, who walked the talk despite facing much opposition; who died on the cross for our sins and rebuilt the Temple of God in 3 days. May we always be reminded that He has done so much for us, that we will do the work of Christ wherever we may go.

A. Review Sermon Application

Purpose: Reflect on how you have been embodying God's truth.

- 1a. How successful have you been in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do for the last FaithWalk!?
- 1b. What were some challenges you faced and what would you like to celebrate?

- 2a. Ask for volunteers to read out the following 4 sections: Nehemiah 6:1-4, 5-9, 10-14 and 15-19. Pause after each section had been read and have one volunteer share how the following has impacted him/her:
 - (i) the strategy used by Nehemiah's opposers
 - (ii) Nehemiah's response (e.g. what he said/did, from whom he ask for help)
- 2b. Zoom in on vv.3, 9, 12 and 16. Reflect on what motivated Nehemiah to respond in the way he did.
 - (i) Why do you think Nehemiah could respond in this way?
 - (ii) What does this tell you about Nehemiah's relationship with God?

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Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

- 3a. Recount an incident where you experienced opposition from another party in home/school/workplace/church to prevent you from carrying out the task God assigned to you. Which of the four strategies did your opposer(s) employ?
- 3b. How did that affect you?
- 3c. Having learnt how Nehemiah handled opposition, if you were to encounter a similar situation as shared in 3a, what would you do differently?
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- 4a. How is your relationship with God in this current season?
- 4b. If you are now faced with opposition in relation to God's purpose for you, are you:
- i. secure in your identity in Christ?
 - ii. assured of His power, protection and providence?
- 4c. What is one thing you can do to be more secure in your identity in Christ and assured of His power, protection and providence in your life?
- 4d. How can your group members encourage or help you to achieve 4c. above, in the following week(s) till your next meeting?

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Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

C. Testimonies, Prayers and Action

Purpose: Give glory to God, seek Him and embody His Word.

5. Share your testimony on a time where you faced opposition in living as a faithful disciple of Christ but God's power, protection and providence enabled you to overcome the opposition and fulfill His purpose.

OR

Give thanks to Jesus for not compromising and giving in to the demands of the enemy even in the face of strong opposition so we may have life in Him.

6. Take time to pray for each other to have mouldable hearts, teachable minds and willing hands to undertake the necessary steps learnt from Nehemiah, to make disciples intentionally of ourselves and others, in accordance with God's will, even if it means facing strong oppositions.

Take time to also pray for guidance from the Holy Spirit to be upon our church, for wisdom and discernment in elucidating what is truly coming from God, so that we will remain on His path for us.

Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. Praise – Elevation worship <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=raFnjGVkHe8>
2. Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus – Sovereign Grace Music
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHHPbBfinXs>
3. Cornerstone – Hillsong <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8YFIKh1fK4>

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