

THE DEVIL'S STRATEGY

Luke 4:1-13, Nehemiah 6

June 4, 2023

The truth is that everyday we are in a battle, a cosmic battle for our hearts and minds. We have an enemy who's alive, present, and active in our lives. He'll do whatever he can to foil the sovereign destiny and purpose God has chosen and laid out in front of us. And here's the crucial thing: each time, he'll use lies to do it, and we can trace most of the problems we face to a lie that we have come to believe. Beneath every struggle we have with negative thoughts, fear, temptations, and discouragement is a lie that we have embraced as truth from a wide variety of sources from our past experiences, from parents, from friends and even from Christians and pastors. If we let them, lies can take root over time and become strongholds that can silence us and paralyze us, causing us to be ineffective in carrying out God's calling on our lives. So we need to be aware of the devil's strategy and schemes. Apostle Paul speaks about these strongholds in his second letter to the Corinthians, *"For though we live in the world we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought"* (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). Our task as believers is to identify those strongholds and then tear them down brick-by-brick in our war to defeat the devil!

Jesus effectively dealt with the devil's lies when He was tempted in the wilderness; however, I want us to look at a character from the Old Testament, Nehemiah, as our example on how to wage war against our accuser, the devil. Nehemiah held the important position of cupbearer to the king of Persia in the mid-fifth century B.C., around 446 B.C. The events recorded for us in the book of Nehemiah takes place about 140 years after the Jews were taken into captivity to Babylon, and 70 years after the Jews were allowed by Cyrus King of Persia to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple that was completely destroyed in 586 B.C. This book opens with Nehemiah getting this troubling report from some Jews who had returned from Judah in the land of Israel, *"Those who survived the exile are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire"* (Nehemiah 1:3). The Temple had been rebuilt by the returning Jewish captives, but the walls and gates are still in ruin. Back in that time a city that has its walls and gates broken down are

entirely vulnerable to attack, and there's no restrictions or limits from anyone coming and going. The Jews had tried to repair the city walls and gates for the last 70 years and had failed and this brings great sorrow and grief to Nehemiah, and he takes action to do something about it.

Nehemiah approaches King Artaxerxes with this request, *“If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favour in his sight, let him send me to the city in Jerusalem where my ancestors are buried so that I can rebuild it”* (Nehemiah 2:3). And the king grants his request and as soon as Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem, he comes under opposition from the enemies of Israel, *“When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites”* (Nehemiah 2:10). We need to understand that this is not only physical opposition against God's chosen people, but also Spiritual opposition – Satan knows that the promised Messiah will come from the tribe of Judah, and his agenda since Genesis 3 has been to destroy and annihilate the Jewish race. However, despite this opposition, Nehemiah was able to motivate the Jews to band together to rebuild the broken down walls and reset the gates and they were making great progress in closing the gaps, until their enemies plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble. As a result, the Jews had to use half of their workforce to do the work, while the other half defended the workers with spears, shields, bows and armour. Despite the opposition, with God's help, the Jews were able to close all of the gaps in the wall, but still had to set the doors in the gates, and that's when the enemy changed tactics and started using distraction, intimidation, and manipulation against Nehemiah, and the devil still uses the same strategy against us!

Nehemiah 4 & 6 shows us how the enemy works to discourage us, and fear is the devil's number one strategy. *“DO NOT FEAR”* is found throughout the Scriptures because those words are needed instructions for our daily walk, as the devil's strategy is to use fear to distract, intimidate and manipulate us from the great work God has for us to do. The point of this message: **Never give into fear because fear always leads into self-preservation and sin, taking us out of the battle!** **Luke 4** demonstrates how the devils' tactics and strategy didn't work against Jesus in the wilderness; Jesus didn't get sidetracked and was able to accomplish the task God had for Him, in dying on the cross as the sinless Messiah. And we will discover that the devil's tactics and strategy didn't work against Nehemiah either; Nehemiah was able to rebuild the broken down walls of Jerusalem and secure the

city in an amazing short time, 52 days, while Israel failed to do so for the last 70 years since they returned to Jerusalem!

Nehemiah was successful because he was not tempted to give into fear – he knew that He served a God that was bigger than any problem, situation, or challenge that the devil would throw his way. He didn't believe the lie that the opposition he faced was bigger than the God he served. He didn't fear mankind, he only feared God. He didn't fear approaching King Artaxerxes with his request to allow him to travel to Jerusalem, and he didn't fear the opposition from Israel's enemies trying to deter him from the work he was doing. Fear is our number one enemy! The lie that whatever you're facing is bigger than God is like a ball and chain you drag around with you wherever you go. Paul encouraged his understudy Timothy with these words, ***“For God did not give you a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind”*** (2 Timothy 1:7). In the same way, God has called every believer to be brave and bold to carry out the calling He has placed upon their lives in serving Him and serving others. So, follow Nehemiah's example and never let fear hold you hostage in carrying out God's calling on your life!

The Apostle John also gives us this encouragement, ***“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world”*** (1 John 4:4). Know your identity and who lives within you! As long as we believe that the threat before us is greater than the Spirit residing within us, we will never step out in faith. But once we realize that God is in us and for us, and goes with us, and no one can come against us, and that nothing is more powerful than God's presence with us – we will step out in faith and deal with our fears. Everything we do in this life, we will do either out of fear or out of love! We must follow Jesus' example when He was tempted, replacing the devil's lies with truth from God's Word, which will keep us from falling for the devil's tricks. Jesus confronted everyone of the devil's lies with the living, breathing, truth from the Word of God.

Nehemiah 6:1-4 – Nehemiah gets a letter from the political enemy of Israel, wanting to have a meeting. The devil wants him to stop his work and have a conversation with him. The devil wants to have a voice, have input in what Nehemiah is doing, and Nehemiah gives this excellent answer in **verse 3** against his accuser, ***“I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you.”*** Nehemiah understand his divine calling – it's God's work, not his work, and he won't be sidetracked from

carrying out God's perfect will in be restoring the wall and setting the gates. So, the first lesson here is to never have a conversation with the devil! Don't get sidetracked from the work God has for you to do – know your calling and don't get distracted!

The first humans, Adam and Eve failed this first lesson miserably – Eve made two fatal mistakes here in the account from **Genesis 3:1-7**, *“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’” “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.”* Eve's first mistake was to get into a conversation with the serpent. Engaging in this conversation gave the enemy the foothold he needed to lure her into his trap. The second mistake is that Eve believed and trusted the serpent when he said, *“God is holding out on you.”* So, the lesson here is don't talk to him, don't trust him, and when you're unsure, test everything with God's truth – do what Jesus did when He was tempted in the wilderness – use the sword of God's Word as your weapon!

Verse 4 tells us that four times they sent the same message, hoping to wear Nehemiah down, hoping that he would eventually give in because of their persistence, but he kept giving them the same answer. We can't give in because we get tired of the enemies' persistence. We stay on track with the same message, *“We are doing the Lord's work,”* not allowing ourselves to be weakened over time, regardless how persistent the enemy may be. Stay strong in the Lord by being aware of Satan's lies. Paul reminds us of the confidence we have as believers when we are grounded in the truth of God's Word – **2 Corinthians 2:11**, *“In order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.”* Being grounded in God's Word will help us to recognize the Devil's schemes!

However, Nehemiah's enemies are not going to give up easily and neither does the devil – **verses 5-7** tells us the next strategy is to send the same message out again, but this time in an unsealed letter – they put it out on social media (Facebook) for all to read their lies, trying to destroy Nehemiah's reputation through intimidation and manipulation. All of these false motives that the enemy uses to cause Nehemiah to turn inward and start to question his motives. But, once again their lies won't stick because Nehemiah's motives are pure and holy as he rebuts their lies in **verses 8-9** and prays for strength. Manipulation is often used in sales, and by some parents to get their children to do what they want them to do, and sometimes even by husbands and wives to get their way. Like Nehemiah, whenever we are fully committed and engaged in the work of the Lord, we are resilient to the lies that comes against us to cause us to question our motives in serving the Lord. We need to understand that every believer is a builder in the Kingdom of God. We are doing God's work, moving His Kingdom forward despite the opposition that comes against us!

We find the devil's final strategy in **verses 10-13** – a secret informer has now been hired and sent to meet with Nehemiah because they can't get him to meet with them. Now they appeal to Nehemiah's faith in God – they pull out their religious card as a last resort. Satan will use our faith against us, by pulling out his religious card, because for us as believers, fear always will move us into self-preservation, causing us to run to God wanting to get closer to God, while God wants us to use our authority and the spiritual weapons He has given to wage war against the devil. Nehemiah, God will protect you in His Temple, run and hide in the Temple, depend upon God, put your faith in Him to protect you, are you not a faithful follower of God! However, Nehemiah calls their bluff and gives them a brilliant response in **verse 11** because he realizes that God did not send this false prophet. So, we need to distinguish between the voice of God and the voice of Satan especially whenever he is appearing to us as an angel of light. The same trick was offered to Jesus when the devil took Him to the pinnacle of the Temple, telling Jesus to throw Himself off, ***“If you are the Son of God...throw yourself down from here. For it is written: ‘He will command His angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone”*** (Luke 4:9-11). Jesus: didn't God promise to keep you safe, if you're the Son of God, go ahead and prove it. Satan wanted Jesus to sin, and he wants us to sin!

Because Nehemiah didn't fall for the devil's strategy – a miracle took place, the wall was completed in record time, and when all of Israel's enemies heard about it, they realized God was in the re-building of the walls and the gates surrounding Jerusalem and the Temple – **verses 15-16**. The point is that we are to never stop doing God's work – always keep moving forward regardless of whatever the devil may throw against you to distract you, intimidate you, and manipulate you to stop doing the Lord's will. Whenever you are building anything for God and His kingdom, the devil will always come against you. So, be a Nehemiah! Always be prepared with the sword of the Spirit! Know the devil's schemes! Jesus was taken by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to obtain victory for us over Satan and his strategy to take us out of the game. We are not defeated; instead, Satan has been defeated. The only power Satan has over you is what you give him. The lesson here is don't talk to him, don't trust him, and when you're unsure, test everything with the truth of God's Word!

The point of this message: *“Never give into fear because fear always leads to self-preservation and sin!”*