

Sermon Series: “Hand Me Another Brick”—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—4/24/2005

Title: “Discouragement in the building process: Its cause and cure”

Text: Nehemiah 4

Intro: *Ills. Unexpected Stinky Mess*

Theme: Sometimes when life throws us unanticipated curves which overwhelm us to the point of discouragement in the God-given tasks, we can remember that God’s promise for Jesus’ sake is to never leave or forsake us.

Causes of Discouragement (Print and read vs. 1-12)

- Loss of other’s support
 1. vs. 1 “*greatly angry*”—verbal rage often enslaves us to inactivity
 - a. **Ills.: Invisible Chains**
 2. vs. 2-3 “*ridiculed*”—Samaritans, terrified by work of God before them, resort to slander and lies repeated to convince
 - a. **Illus.: “Stick and stones . . .”—sometimes we rather take a physical beating than a emotional/mental beating**
 3. vs. 8 “*plotted together*”—conspiracy gives the impression that “many people say” when often only one
 - a. **Ills.: Many people say. . . be careful of the tyranny of the “one”**
 4. vs. 11 “*kill them*”—threat of physical violence whether real or threatened often paralyzes us
 - a. *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Mat 10: 28*
 5. vs. 12 “*Jews who lived near them . . .*”
 - a. Often when friendly support evaporates we allow self-doubt to trump divinely given energy for the task
- Loss of strength (vs. 10a — *strength of the laborers giving out*)
 1. Original word “***stumbling, tottering, staggering under the load.***”
 2. Often, we are so intent on the task that we don’t take time to tank up with God’s Word and *exhaustion* sets in
- Loss of vision (vs. 10b—*there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild*)
 1. **Ills.: Glass half-full or half-empty**
 2. Home, relationships, church--focus on what isn’t right (a constant in broken world) rather than good--hamstring self
 3. *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. Phil 4: 8*
- Loss of confidence (vs. 6-12)
 1. The people “had a mind to work” vs. 6 but lost it when they put their confidence/lack of it in self not in God
 2. *So that we confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me?" Heb. 13:6*
- Loss of security (vs. 11)
 1. Threatened from without and suspicious of those standing beside them, self-preservation to rule head/heart
 2. What self preservation may be keeping you/us from doing what God wants us to do
 3. *What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Mark 8: 36k*

Cure for Discouragement (Print and read vs. 13-23)

- Pray (**Print verses 4 and 9**)
 1. Before all other resources fail—pray, while resources are failing—pray, when all other resources have failed—pray
 2. Nehemiah not timid about what he is asking against opposition (4) and for what he needed (9)
- Unify around God’s spiritual resources
 1. ***Your family***—Nehemiah realized that families were splintered by work (vs. 13)
 2. ***Your church family***—Nehemiah and leaders recognized need for people to come together to celebrate (vs. 19-20)

3. *Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Heb10:24,25*
- Direct your attention to Lord (vs. 14a)
 1. **Ills.: Life or Death Urgency**
 - Maintain balance (verse 15-18)
 1. Sometimes we play so hard we hardly pray; sometimes we work so hard we lose our joy
 2. The people learned to work and defend and sleep and refresh and praise and be serious and so got on with the work
 - Be occupied with ministry of service to others (vs. 21-22)
 1. Navel-gazing only brings insecurity and selfishness; but other-centeredness brings a view for what God can/is doing
 2. Focus upward and outward to combat bog of discouragement and live in the victorious life Christ has won for you

Unexpected Stinky Mess

Once a mother of eight children came home to find her youngest five huddled intently in the middle of the floor. She walked over to see what the center of attraction was and discovered they were playing with five baby skunks. Panic-stricken, she shouted, "Run, children, run!" And runt the children did—each clutching one terrified skunk!" Can you imagine five kids with skunks, all running in different directions? And the farther each child ran, the louder the mother probably shouted, causing all five to panic and squeeze their skunk. . .and skunks don't like to be squeezed! All of us have had a problem blow up in our face and end up as a stinking mess. Those situations can knock the wind right out of our confidence and leave us feeling flat and discouraged. And there is nothing quite like dealing with the problem of discouragement when you're in the position taking the heat. *John Haggai, How to Win over Worry (Eugene, Oreg.: Havest House Publishers, 1987), p. 184.*

Invisible Chains

In his book *Teaching the Elephant to Dance*, James Belasco describes how trainers shackle young elephants with heavy chains to deeply embedded stakes. In that way the elephant learns to stay in its place. Older, powerful elephants never try to leave—even though they have the strength to pull the stake and walk away. Their conditioning has limited their movements. With only a small metal bracelet around their foot attached to nothing, they stand in place. The stakes are actually gone! Like powerful elephants, many people and organizations are bound by earlier conditioned restraints. The statement "We have always done it this way" is as limiting to an organization's progress as the unattached chain around an elephant's foot. Yet when the circus tent catches on fire and the elephant sees the flames and smells the smoke, it forgets its old conditioning and runs for its life. *Citation: Adapted from Hans Finzel, Change Is Like a Slinky: 30 strategies for promoting and surviving change in your organization (Northfield, 2004); submitted by Marshall Shelley*

Life or Death Urgency

Sitting on the hard wooden bleachers at Fort Benning while attending the United States Army Airborne School, we prepared for our first parachute jump. Soon we would soar hundreds of feet above the red Georgia clay and hear the jump-master bark out the orders, "Stand up! Hook up! Check equipment! Stand in the door! Go! Go! Go!" Understandably, the instructors had our undivided attention. The Airborne sergeant's voice rang out confidently as he explained what to do in case of a parachute malfunction. "If your main parachute should fail to deploy, don't panic—pull the handle of your auxiliary parachute. Should your auxiliary parachute fail to fill with air, don't panic—pull it in toward your body and then vigorously throw it away from yourself. Should your auxiliary chute again fail to deploy, don't panic—vigorously repeat this process." He paused dramatically, looking intently into our eyes. Then with a slight

mischievous grin he slowly stated, "Should this also fail, don't panic. You'll have the rest of your life to get your parachute to deploy." **Citation: Tim Wilson, pastor of Indian Hills Christian Fellowship, Indian Hills, Colorado, from a sermon titled, "Urgency"**

Nehemiah. 4:1-23

¹When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, ²and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble--burned as they are?" ³Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building--if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!"

⁴Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. ⁵Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders. ⁶So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.

⁷But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. ⁸They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.

⁹But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.

¹⁰Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall." ¹¹Also our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work." ¹²Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."

¹³Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows. ¹⁴After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

¹⁵When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work. ¹⁶From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah ¹⁷who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, ¹⁸and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.

¹⁹Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. ²⁰Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!" ²¹So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. ²²At that time I also said to the people, "Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day." ²³Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water.