

Sermon Series: “Hand Me Another Brick”—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—5/15/2005

Title: “Operation Intimidation”

Text: Nehemiah 6

Intro.: Ills.: Start Small

Theme: Spiritual survival in a rough and tumble world of intimidation begins with understanding that we are overwhelming conquerors in our God and Savior who has already won the victory and gives that victory to us.

Understanding that the battle is bigger than this moment and has its roots in eternity

- Revelation 12 paints the cosmic picture of the battle between God’s kingdom and Satan’s
 1. Satan did not win against God’s plan to send Jesus into the world to redeem it back from sin (**Print Rev. 12:4-5**)
 2. Satan kicked out of heaven and can no longer accuse us because for Jesus, the Lamb’s sake (**Print Rev. 12: 7-12**)
 3. Satan wars against the church and individual believers but will not win in the end (**Print Rev. 12: 13, 17**)
- Nehemiah pitted against plotting foes, instigated by Satan, not to block a rebuilt wall but a salvation plan
 1. Unreasonable and intense local opposition indicated a deeper root cause **Print Nehemiah 6: 1-2**
 2. Nehemiah kept his eye on the focus of his task (**Print Nehemiah 6: 3**)
- For us the end goal is much more significant than our momentary issue
 1. Not being surprised by the intensity of opposition/persecution (individually/as a church)
 - a. *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Eph 6: 12-13*
 2. Remembering that we have Jesus, “the Champion” on our side (*Your are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. 1 John 4: 4*)

Recognize the characteristic roar of Satan’s strawman “bully” and his playground tactics

- He will ***persistently pester***
 1. **Print and read Nehemiah 6: 4-5** – not once or twice but five times and with a public open letter meant to embarrass
 2. **Ills.: Fiery Furnace hope (Daniel 3: 16-17)**
- He will use the “***everyone one says/believes***” approach
 1. **Print and read Nehemiah 6: 6-7** – Nehemiah being tempted to believe that he was the only one favoring rebuilding
 2. Serving with an eye to ***An Audience of One***
- He will use ***political means*** to harass and intimidate
 1. **Print and read Nehemiah 6:10,13, 17-19**
 2. **Ills.: Politically Correct Language**
 3. *Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened." 1 Peter 3: 13-14*

Trusting in the promise and provision of an already-victorious God

- Trust in the strength God will provide to go about your “***business for the Lord***”
 1. **“But I prayed, “Now strengthen my hands.” Neh. 6: 9**
 2. *‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the LORD Almighty. Zech. 4:6*
- Trust in God’s solution to your antagonists
 1. Live in and trust in truth and not in the repeated lie
 - a. **Print and read 6: 8** – Nehemiah had so lived the truth in his personal conduct and leadership, he could call the lie
 - b. *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 1 John 1: 7*

2. Jealously guard your Christian conduct so that there may be no cause for offense to the name of Christ
 - a. **Print and read 6: 13-14** – Nehemiah sidestepped a personal as well as a public fall
 - b. Sins are forgivable but often the resulting natural consequences are unliveable – so think before act and speak
3. Be about moving the kingdom of God ahead through and in our lives
 - a. **Print and read 6: 15-16** – let the confirmation and blessing of God be enough to affirm your life
 - b. *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matt 6: 33*

Start Small

Ask yourself what you would have done if you had inherited New York City five or ten years ago. Crime was out of control and more than half of the citizens admitted in a survey that they would move out if they could afford to. The city was a depressing place, and it must have been a somewhat daunting job to be elected mayor. Where do you start? Mayor Rudolph Giuliani started by going after the little things. "I am a firm believer in the theory that 'minor' crimes and 'quality of life' offenses are all part of the larger picture," he explains. Among the first elements to go were the "Squeegee Men," drug-addicted and shady-looking riffraff who personified New York's rough edge. Armed with a soiled rag and a dirty bottle of watered-down Windex, these men would bully and badger motorists for money. Giuliani said, "We're not going to put up with this anymore," and he brought this intimidation to an end. He then declared war on graffiti, subway panhandlers, loitering, broken windows, and petty vandalism--minor offenses that would have gone unnoticed in days past while the police force was overwhelmed with homicides and violent crime. But Giuliani had a hunch: if you send out a signal that you won't tolerate these minor offenses, people will get the idea that the major offenses will be treated even more seriously. "One graffiti defacement or one loud radio may not seem like much of a problem, but criminals thrive in chaotic environments," Giuliani explained. "Small problems can be the first step to big trouble. Neighborhoods scarred by graffiti or blasted day and night by boom-box radios will become besieged, vulnerable, and ultimately dangerous places. If police departments surrender on the small issues--using the excuse that they are too busy dealing with 'serious' crime--they soon will find themselves surrendering to the latter as well." It worked. Giuliani has been successful in reducing crime beyond all expectations. Between 1993 and 1996, the murder rate came down almost 50 percent. Robberies plummeted by 42 percent while auto thefts dropped by 46 percent. The streets of New York City became safe in a way that was unimaginable just a few years earlier. Oftentimes as parents we get "stuck" or lost in the big challenges of life. What can I do to really get through to my kids? we wonder, but the truth is if you take care of the little things, the big things will fall into place. In a family, in a business, in a school--yes, even in big cities--it's all the same: the importance of the little things outweighs their size. **Citation: John Ashcroft. From *The Files of Leadership***

Fiery Furnace Hope

Daniel 3:16-18

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Politically Correct Language

Here are a few selections from a list of banned words and stereotypes compiled by a historian, from bias guidelines issued by major educational publishers and state agencies. The guidelines are used by writers, editors, and illustrators when preparing textbooks and tests for K-12 students.

Adam and Eve (replace with "Eve and Adam," to demonstrate that males do not take priority over females)

Blind leading the blind (banned as handicapism)

Devil (banned)

Dogma (banned as ethnocentric; replace with "doctrine" or "belief")

God (banned)

Hell (banned; replace with "heck" or "darn")

Lame (banned as offensive; replace with "walks with a cane")

Pagan (banned as ethnocentric when referring to religion; replace with "nonbeliever")

Satan (banned)

Citation: Diane Ravitch, "The Language Police," *The Atlantic Monthly* (March 2003), pp. 82-83; submitted by Marshall Shelley, Wheaton, Illinois

Neh. 6:1-19

1When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it--though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates--²Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: "Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono." But they were scheming to harm me;³ so I sent messengers to them with this reply: "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?"⁴Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.

⁵Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter⁶ in which was written:

"It is reported among the nations--and Geshem says it is true--that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king⁷ and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: 'There is a king in Judah!' Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us confer together."

⁸I sent him this reply: "Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head."⁹They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed."

But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands."

¹⁰One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, "Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you--by night they are coming to kill you."¹¹But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Or should one like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!"¹²I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.¹³He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me.¹⁴Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been

trying to intimidate me.

¹⁵So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God. ¹⁷Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them. ¹⁸For many in Judah were under oath to him, since he was son-in-law to Shecaniah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. ¹⁹Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me. (NIV)

Rev. 12:4-5

The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.

Rev. 12:7-12

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you; He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

Rev. 12: 13, 17

When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child ...Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring--those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.