

**Victory of the Lamb – Forward: No Matter What – Nehemiah 4 – Trust God Take Action Remember
September 26, 2021 - Pastor Bill Limmer**

Expectations. We all have expectations in every sphere of life. For example we have expectations when we get married. When Jacky and I got married she had certain expectations. One of the expectations was that I was going to be handy around the house. She came by this expectation innocently enough. Her dad was DIY guy. My dad was a DIY guy. So she just assumed expected that being a guy I was going to be a DIY guy. But I am more of YDIY (You Do It Yourself) kind of guy. Here is an example from the day in the life in the Limmer household: A couple of years ago on Jacky's Christmas list was a drill. We didn't own one and it certainly wasn't going to be on my list.

For those of you who are Christians what are your expectations of the Christian life? For those of you who aren't Christian what are your expectations of what a Christian life is supposed to be like? A lot of people think because they are Christian or when they become Christian's life will be a piece of cake. We expect things to go off without a hitch. Especially as we talked about in week one when we believe that God is leading us to reach more people than ever before with the gospel and especially when last week Pastor Ben shared that we all have a God given place and purpose in life and we are to get to work. And so often the expectation is that since we are following God and doing the work of God everything is going to run smoothly with little or no resistance. But that is a Disney fairy tale and not real life.

Let's check it out and see what real life is really like for Nehemiah and for us when we are following God on mission as today to reach today's people with Christ's victory as we continue our series **Forward: No Matter What**.

What can we expect when we have a God-sized vision to reach more people than ever before?

The context from chapters 1-3 is that the people are carrying out the God sized vision to rebuild the city wall and each had their own section of the wall to rebuild. Nehemiah 4:1-3 **Sanballat was very angry when he learned that we were rebuilding the wall. He flew into a rage and mocked the Jews, ² saying in front of his friends and the Samaritan army officers, "What does this bunch of poor, feeble Jews think they're doing? Do they think they can build the wall in a single day by just offering a few sacrifices?^[b] Do they actually think they can make something of stones from a rubbish heap—and charred ones at that?"³ Tobiah the Ammonite, who was standing beside him, remarked, "That stone wall would collapse if even a fox walked along the top of it!"** Here is something that many people don't expect, even though the people of God are doing the work of God that are facing opposition. Two very influential leaders in the region who are not believers in the true God, get angry at them, mock them, laugh at them. Do you think you can build a wall out of rubble? Idiots. The wall you are building is so weak that even if a nimble fox jumped on top of it, it would fall. What you are doing pointless, useless, and a waste of time.

And it gets worse. Nehemiah 4:7-9 ⁷^[d]**But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites heard that the work was going ahead and that the gaps in the wall of Jerusalem were being repaired, they were furious. ⁸ They all made plans to come and fight against Jerusalem and throw us into confusion . . . ¹² The Jews who lived near the enemy came and told us again and again, "They will come from all directions and attack us! The**

laughing and mocking turned into fury. And now a plan was set to go to war against God's people even though all they were doing was doing God's work. The people are on edge. This is pretty intense. As we will find out they do have swords and spears but to say that have a military would really be stretching it. And even if they had a military, who looks forward to have their lives legitimately at risk. This is not a tension free environment. This is a tension full environment.

Today in our post Christian culture it sounds something like this: You Christians are insane. You have a relationship with an invisible friend. You talk/pray to someone you can't see. You trust in 2k yr old promises. You put water on a person with a phrase and think that changes a person's eternal destiny. You serve up a stale wafer and a quarter shot of wine and think that makes a difference. This sounds like a fairytale. This is intellectual suicide.

1 Corinthians 1:22,23 It is foolish to the Jews, who ask for signs from heaven. And it is foolish to the Greeks, who seek human wisdom. ²³ So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it's all nonsense.

What can we expect when we have a God-sized vision to reach more people than ever before?

1) Opposition from the outside.

So what are we to do when we face opposition? Nehemiah 4:4-5 **Then I prayed, "Hear us, our God, for we are being mocked. May their scoffing fall back on their own heads, and may they themselves become captives in a foreign land! ⁵ Do not ignore their guilt. Do not blot out their sins, for they have provoked you to anger here in front of^{cl} the builders. . .** Nehemiah hands his enemies over to God in prayer. God our enemies are really your enemies. You deal with them. Vengeance is yours. You take care of these people. We are going to trust you to do the right thing. You have given us work to do on the wall.

How do we handle opposition: When we face opposition when we are carrying out God mission we are to **TRUST GOD**. Pray to God. While our prayer will likely look different than Nehemiah's because we live in a different time of history. For example our prayer maybe something like this. Lord god these people hate us and you but you love them and us. Change their hearts like you did with the Apostle Paul and keep us faithful to you. God we need your help and protection. The battle is yours God.

But it doesn't end there with prayer. Nehemiah continues on with his encouragement: **"Don't be afraid of the enemy! Remember the Lord, who is great and glorious, fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes!" ¹⁵ When our enemies heard that we knew of their plans and that God had frustrated them, we all returned to our work on the wall. ¹⁶ But from then on, only half my men worked while the other half stood guard with spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. The leaders stationed themselves behind the people of Judah ¹⁷ who were building the wall. The laborers carried on their work with one hand supporting their load and one hand holding a weapon. ¹⁸ All the builders had a sword belted to their side. The trumpeter stayed with me to sound the alarm. ¹⁹ Then I explained to the nobles and officials and all the people, "The work is very spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. ²⁰ When you hear the blast of the trumpet, rush to wherever it is sounding.**

The people prayed to God and then took action. They continued to work together side by side. And it was hard work. It was messy. It was tiring. It was day after day. And not only did they continue to work while they worked they had armed guards right beside them. And not only did they have armed guards right beside them while they worked. They were also armed. They had a strategy if they were attacked. They are doing what God wanted them to do but that doesn't mean it was easy.

Like the people of Nehemiah's day, when we face opposition we pray to God and **TAKE ACTION**. We will continue to reach out digitally and work in and for our community in the name of and for the sake of Jesus Christ. Trusting in the Lord doesn't mean there is no room for us to work. God has in fact created good works for us to do in advance. We are to work. We are to carry on strategically in wisdom and in faith. We are to keep reaching today's people with Christ's victory.

As we become known more and more as a group of people who are committed to sharing the gospel in our community and our global community. It is not always going to be easy. Some people will mock us, do everything they can to intimidate us, make us appear foolish, and in all of this we will continue to follow Christ by loving God and loving others even if they hate us. Because here is the thing: this is really a spiritual battle. Ephesians 6 **Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.** ^[d] **12 For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.** ^[e] **13 Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.** ^[f] **14 Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness.** ^[g] **15 For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared.** ^[h] **16 In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.** ^[i] **17 Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.** ^[j] **18 Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.**

**When facing opposition:
Trust in God (Pray)
Take Action (Keep reaching)**

There is a logical conundrum here: If God is protecting you, you don't have to post a guard. Or post a guard so God can protect you. The answer is "No" to both. No matter how bad things get, God is completely in control and what you do matters.

Having to trust God with an outcome we can't control is an important part of a faith shaping experience for believers. Like Nehemiah we must both trust God and take action according to his will. The spiritual world is a challenging and difficult place. We must work hard and fight hard in the areas God has given us responsibility. But we also must maintain a deep sense that God is at work. God is fighting the battle for his kingdom.

And Nehemiah 4:20 **Then our God will fight for us!"**

When we first began this series, I shared with you what the name of Nehemiah means. And I asked you to keep it in your back pocket. Let's pull it out again. Nehemiah means "God comforts." Here is the comfort not only will God fight for us, God has fought for us. Jesus is the greater Nehemiah. Nehemiah was willing to step down from his position in the palace with all of its benefits. Jesus stepped down from his position in heaven with all its glory. Nehemiah was mocked and ridiculed by his enemies. And Nehemiah risked his life to do the hard and messy work of building up the wall around Jerusalem. Jesus was mocked, ridiculed, abandoned not only by the people he came to save but also by his heavenly Father. Jesus didn't just risk his life. He gave up his life to restore and redeem people who were living empty lives far away from God.

This is how Jesus fought for us and won the victory for us. Colossians 2:13-15 gives us a summary of what Jesus has done for us: **You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. ¹⁴ He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ In this way, he disarmed^[d] the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross.**

Our faith rests in the truth that God has fought for us. Out of faith in that kind of God we know he will give us the strength to carry on our battles.

What can we expect when we have a God sized vision to reach more people than ever before?

- 1. Opposition**
 - a. Trust God**
 - b. Work hard**
- 2. God Fights for us**

And since God fights for us so we can move **Forward: No Matter What.**