

SERMON TEXT: **NEHEMIAH 4 -5**

COMPANION TEXT: **ROMANS 12:14-21; 1 PETER 5:8-11**

### **Opening Question**

- When is it easiest to love people who hurt you?
- When is it especially hard?

### **Purpose of This Week's Study**

To build steadfastness and courage in our small group communities as we face challenges from within and without.

### **INTRODUCTION TO THIS WEEK'S STUDY**

This week's sermon focused on the opposition Nehemiah faced in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and on how he responded to that opposition both with prayer to God and practical changes to his approach, which involved building with one hand and holding a weapon in the other. Like Nehemiah, both trust and readiness should be essential tools for us as Christians.

In this study, we'll be looking at two New Testament passages that move the church toward both practical readiness and hope.

As we work on building strength to face our challenges, we will see that our approach, like Nehemiah's, should be rooted in both action and in trust.

### **Scripture Reading**

## NEHEMIAH 4

V	NIV	MSG
1	When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews,	When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall he exploded in anger, vilifying the Jews. In the company of his Samaritan cronies and military he let loose: “What are these miserable Jews doing? Do they think they can get everything back to normal overnight? Make building stones out of make-believe?”
2	and 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?”	
3	Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, “What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!”	At his side, Tobiah the Ammonite jumped in and said, “That’s right! What do they think they’re building? Why, if a fox climbed that wall, it would fall to pieces under his weight.”
4	Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity	Nehemiah prayed, “Oh listen to us, dear God. We’re so despised: Boomerang their ridicule on their heads; have their enemies cart them off as war trophies to a land of no return; don’t forgive their iniquity, don’t wipe away their sin—they’ve insulted the builders!”
5	Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of [b] the builders	
6	So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.	We kept at it, repairing and rebuilding the wall. The whole wall was soon joined together and halfway to its intended height because the people had a heart for the work.
7	But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the people of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry.	When Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the repairs of the walls of Jerusalem were going so well—that the breaks in the wall were being fixed—they were absolutely furious. They put their heads together and decided to fight against Jerusalem and create as much trouble as they could. We countered with prayer to our God and set a round-the-clock guard against them.
8	They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it	
9	But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.	
10	Meanwhile, 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.”	
11	Also 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.”	And all this time our enemies were saying, “They won’t know what hit them. Before they know it we’ll be at their throats, killing them right and left. That will put a stop to the work!” The Jews who were their neighbors kept reporting, “They have us surrounded; they’re
12	Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, “Wherever you turn, they will attack us.”	

		going to attack!" If we heard it once, we heard it ten times.
<b>13</b>	Therefore 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.	So I stationed armed guards at the most vulnerable places of the wall and assigned people by families with their swords, lances, and bows. After looking things over I stood up and spoke to the nobles, officials, and everyone else: "Don't be afraid of them. Put your minds on the Master, great and awesome, and then fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."
<b>14</b>	After 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 families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."	
<b>15</b>	When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work.	Our enemies learned that we knew all about their plan and that God had frustrated it. And we went back to the wall and went to work. From then on half of my young men worked while the other half stood guard with lances, shields, bows, and mail armor. Military officers served as backup for everyone in Judah who was at work rebuilding the wall. The common laborers held a tool in one hand and a spear in the other. Each of the builders had a sword strapped to his side as he worked. I kept the trumpeter at my side to sound the alert.
<b>16</b>	From 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	
<b>17</b>	who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other,	
<b>18</b>	and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.	
<b>19</b>	Then 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.	
<b>20</b>	Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!"	Then I spoke to the nobles and officials and everyone else: "There's a lot of work going on and we are spread out all along the wall, separated from each other. When you hear the trumpet call, join us there; our God will fight for us."
<b>21</b>	So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out.	And so we kept working, from first light until the stars came out, half of us holding lances.
<b>22</b>	At 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 as workers by day."	I also instructed the people, "Each person and his helper is to stay inside Jerusalem—guards by night and workmen by day."
<b>23</b>	Neither 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.[c]	We all slept in our clothes—I, my brothers, my workmen, and the guards backing me up. And each one kept his spear in his hand, even when getting water.

## NEHEMIAH 5

V	NIV	MSG
1	Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews.	A great protest was mounted by the people, including the wives, against their fellow Jews.
2	Some were saying, “We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain.”	Some said, “We have big families, and we need food just to survive.”
3	Others were saying, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine.”	Others said, “We’re having to mortgage our fields and vineyards and homes to get enough grain to keep from starving.”
4	Still others were saying, “We have had to borrow money to pay the king’s tax on our fields and vineyards.	And others said, “We’re having to borrow money to pay the royal tax on our fields and vineyards. Look: We’re the same flesh and blood as our brothers here; our children are just as good as theirs. Yet here we are having to sell our children off as slaves—some of our daughters have already been sold—and we can’t do anything about it because our fields and vineyards are owned by somebody else.”
5	Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others.”	
6	When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry.	I got really angry when I heard their protest and complaints. After thinking it over, I called the nobles and officials on the carpet. I said, “Each one of you is gouging his brother.”
7	I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, “You are charging your own people interest!” So I called together a large meeting to deal with them	Then I called a big meeting to deal with them. I told them, “We did everything we could to buy back our Jewish brothers who had to sell themselves as slaves to foreigners. And now you’re selling these same brothers back into debt slavery! Does that mean that we have to buy them back again?”
8	and said: “As far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!” They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.	They said nothing. What could they say?
9	So I continued, “What you are doing is not right. Shouldn’t you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?”	“What you’re doing is wrong. Is there no fear of God left in you? Don’t you care what the nations around here, our enemies, think of you?”
10	I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest!	“I and my brothers and the people working for me have also loaned them money. But this gouging them with interest has to stop. Give them back their foreclosed fields, vineyards, olive groves, and homes right now. And forgive your claims on their money, grain, new wine, and olive oil.”
11	Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them—one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil.”	

V	NIV	MSG
12	<p>“We will give it back,” they said. “And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.”</p> <p>Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised.</p>	<p>They said, “We’ll give it all back. We won’t make any more demands on them. We’ll do everything you say.”</p> <p>Then I called the priests together and made them promise to keep their word. Then I emptied my pockets, turning them inside out, and said, “So may God empty the pockets and house of everyone who doesn’t keep this promise—turned inside out and emptied.”</p> <p>Everyone gave a wholehearted “Yes, we’ll do it!” and praised God. And the people did what they promised.</p> <p>“Remember in My Favor, O My God”</p>
13	<p>I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, “In this way may God shake out of their house and possessions anyone who does not keep this promise. So may such a person be shaken out and emptied!”</p> <p>At this the whole assembly said, “Amen,” and praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised.</p>	<p>From the time King Artaxerxes appointed me as their governor in the land of Judah—from the twentieth to the thirty-second year of his reign, twelve years—neither I nor my brothers used the governor’s food allowance. Governors who had preceded me had oppressed the people by taxing them forty shekels of silver (about a pound) a day for food and wine while their underlings bullied the people unmercifully. But out of fear of God I did none of that. I had work to do; I worked on this wall. All my men were on the job to do the work. We didn’t have time to line our own pockets.</p>
14	<p>Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor.</p>	<p>But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels[a] of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that.</p>
15	<p>But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels[a] of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that.</p>	<p>Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we[b] did not acquire any land.</p>
16	<p>Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we[b] did not acquire any land.</p>	<p>Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations.</p>
17	<p>Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations.</p>	<p>I fed 150 Jews and officials at my table in addition to those who showed up from the surrounding nations. One ox, six choice sheep, and some chickens were prepared for me daily, and every ten days a large supply of wine was delivered. Even so, I didn’t use the food allowance provided for the governor—the people had it hard enough as it was.</p>
18	<p>Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.</p>	<p>Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people.</p>
19	<p>Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people.</p>	<p>Remember in my favor, O my God, Everything I’ve done for these people.</p>

**ROMANS 12:14-21**

<b>V</b>	<b>NIV</b>	<b>MSG</b>
<b>14</b>	Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.	Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody.
<b>15</b>	Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn	
<b>16</b>	Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.	
<b>17</b>	Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.	Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it."
<b>18</b>	If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.	
<b>19</b>	Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," [Deut. 32:35] says the Lord.	
<b>20</b>	On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." [Prov. 25:21,22]	
<b>21</b>	Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.	Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.

**1 PETER 5:8-11**

<b>V</b>	<b>NIV</b>	<b>MSG</b>
<b>8</b>	Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour	Keep a cool head. Stay alert. The Devil is poised to pounce, and would like nothing better than to catch you napping. Keep your guard up. You're not the only ones plunged into these hard times. It's the same with Christians all over the world. So keep a firm grip on the faith. The suffering won't last forever. It won't be long before this generous God who has great plans for us in Christ—eternal and glorious plans they are!—will have you put together and on your feet for good. He gets the last word; yes, he does.
<b>9</b>	Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.	
<b>10</b>	And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.	
<b>11</b>	To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.	

### For Reflection & Discussion

- Who are the complaints in **Nehemiah 5:1-5**?
  - What similarities to our day do you see?
  - Oppression & abuse is inflicted in those with little power.
  - Look at **2 Chronicles 14:11**  
*Then Asa called to the Lord his God and said, "Lord, there is no one like you to help the powerless against the mighty. Help us, Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we have come against this vast army. Lord, you are our God; do not let mere mortals prevail against you."*  
 and **Romans 5:6-8**  
*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*  
 What do these verses tell us about what God does for the powerless?
- What does Nehemiah demand that the guilty stop doing?
- What is the importance or significance of the symbolic act in **5:13**?
- In **5:14-21** Nehemiah lays down his right for the sake of the people & the rebuilding.
  - How does this make you feel?
  - Are there things that we cling to because we think or believe we are entitled to them?
  - Are there some things that we need to set aside for the sake of the rebuilding?
- How does Nehemiah handle the conflict that comes his way during the rebuilding?
  - External conflict – i.e. from outside those who are doing the rebuilding
  - Internal conflict – i.e. from those who are doing the work
- What stands out to you in **Nehemiah 4-5** as especially helpful?  
Especially difficult?
- In the passage from **Romans**, Paul provides a series of simple and unambiguous instructions that are nonetheless profoundly difficult to carry out.
  - What is your initial reaction to these instructions?
  - If they weren't part of Scripture, would you consider them good advice?
  - How easy do you find it for you to do what Paul is asking here?
- Paul's instructions focus on how we are to relate to one another and to people outside the church.
  - How might you benefit from following Paul's instructions in **verses 14 through 16**?
  - How would the people in your life benefit?
  - Why do you think Paul tells us to rejoice with those who rejoice, and mourn with those who mourn?
  - How are his instructions related to each other?  
 (You might, for example, mention that mourning and rejoicing anchors us to the experiences of those around us, strengthens community, and helps us to follow Paul's next instruction: living in harmony with one another.)

- Paul focuses on avoiding evil in **verses 17 through 21**.
  - Why is it so important not to repay evil with evil (you may want to look at **verse 21**)?
  - Why do you think kindness and generosity is likened to heaping burning coals on your enemy here?
  - What are practical ways we can avoid being overcome by evil, and instead overcome evil with good?
- What is a way or ways you have noticed your adversary, the devil, seeking to devour you or those around you in the present season?
  - In what ways have you noticed your adversary, the devil at work in the world more broadly in recent times?
- What are some practical ways of being alert and of sober mind, as Peter instructs?
  - Why is alertness important?
  - What, according to Peter, strengthens our ability to resist and stand firm in our faith?
  - How do you feel about your own hope and faith after reading this passage?

### For Prayer Ministry

Begin this week's prayer time by sitting quietly before God together, opening the time with the prayer below. Then spend two full minutes waiting quietly and listening:

*Lord, fill our hearts as we wait on you in this time.  
 Comfort us with your peace and fill us with your wisdom and clarity.  
 Your strength is made perfect in our weakness;  
 please reveal to us where we need your strength the most as we resist evil in the world,  
 and in our own lives.*

After a time of waiting, share what God has revealed to you during your time of waiting on him, including any fears or misgivings you may have about overcoming evil with good and standing firm in your faith.

Close by taking some time praying over one another and speaking blessing over one another.

### For Further Reflection & Action Outside of Group

Start each day this week by reading **1 Peter 5:8-11** aloud;  
 conclude each day by reading **Romans 12:14-21** aloud.

- Talk with God about your successes each day, as well as about where you feel you could have done better.
- Thank him and praise him for the times during your day when you sensed Him moving.