

How to Build a Church?

Nehemiah 4

Prepare

18.07.2004

As the soldiers bashed the nails into Jesus, his enemies ridiculed and laughed. As the cross was hauled up, and his body weight tugged on the painful wounds in his feet and hands, they spat on him, and mocked more. Even the crucified criminal next to him shouted abuse. It seemed that this was the end. It looked as if his enemies had won. This broken man, now bleeding in agony on the cross, was so feeble now. Even a 9 year old schoolboy could beat him single-handed in a scuffle.

His followers had deserted him. His enemies had triumphed. It was a black day for the world. Now it appeared his followers would scatter and never be a major force. His church would never be strong. He came to build the church, but it was in ruins.

It must have felt something like that for the many Jews building the wall of Jerusalem 470 years earlier, under the direction of Nehemiah. They had started well, and each family in Jerusalem had their own portion of the wall to complete. Enthusiasm was high, the wall was growing, but things went wrong.

It began when their enemies came back. They were angry that the wall had started to be repaired, so they called them names and said nasty things.

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? What they are building--if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!

Their heckling niggled them. But Nehemiah had the answer... he prayed.

God answered his prayer by invigorating, refreshing and comforting his people. They returned to work with great gusto, until the wall was half completed.

When the enemies heard the wall was half finished, they became very angry. It was time to

bring back the biff! Let's get physical!

They plotted the attack, to kill many and stop the wall.

When Nehemiah heard news of this, he did not panic, lose sleep or fret. He prayed. And then, as he was not only a man of prayer, but also a man of plans, he prepared for the attacks. He stationed a guard day and night to warn them if their enemies were coming, so people could stop building and fight.

However, the Jews got scared, and the building slowed down. Their work was like the run rate in a one-day cricket match. The easier the opposition, the quicker the runs flow. But a sharp attack slows it down.

However, Nehemiah was a great captain. He wanted the quickest building rate possible, even under the sharpest attack. So he prayed, planned and prepared for the attack, encouraging the Jews to give their best.

But the Jews whinged. *The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there's so much rubble that we can't rebuild the wall.* They had also heard that a major attack was coming. So Nehemiah planned for the next stage.

Half the people were to clear the rubble or build. Each one of them had to strap a sword to their side, just in case it was needed.

The other half on their shift would stand guard, with a sword or spear, making sure that the enemy would be responded to, if they attacked.

These guards could help with the work, but they were never to let go of their weapon.

Yet that was not enough preparation. Each family had been assigned certain areas of the wall to look after. But what if the enemy attacked one section? How could that family be supported and helped? Nehemiah ensured that if one part of the wall was attacked, then a horn would be blown, and in effect a sliding defense could occur, *i.e.* people could rush to the hot spot to beat back the attack.

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Prepared in this way, they worked constantly and the walls grew taller.

How then was Jesus prepared for the attack from his enemies? He had no horn to blow, no friends left around him, and he had to face the worst enemy alone.

He faced our greatest enemy head on. No angels were to intervene, even though they could have. There was no need for the Archangel Michael this time. And even though Jesus died, he won. It was through his death that our greatest enemy was defeated. Jesus died for us. And he rose again from the dead to prove he had defeated Satan and death.

But we still face the defeated enemy. We know from the Bible that the final outcome will always be our victory, because of Jesus' death. Nehemiah knew that God would give him the victory too. But we still need to be prepared for attacks from our defeated enemy, as we build the church, the family of God.

Satan may not attack us directly with massive spiritual warfare.

The attacks may be much more subtle. In John 15:18-20 Jesus said that if people hated him and hurt him, then they will hate and hurt us.

Some people will insult us, just because we follow Jesus and want to help him build his church. Others may get more physical. We may even face the grumbling from others within God's family, who say that the work is too hard, and they are too tired.

We are to be prepared for the subtle attacks. But our fight is not with swords, guns, terrorism, or other human weapon. We are to use the weapons which God gives us, which include prayer and the message of Jesus.

God is working in us, strengthening us and giving us his armour and weapons. And we are to support each other, especially those in the heat of the battle.

Ephesians 6:10-18 tells us more of the armour

and weapons He gives us.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints."

To build God's family, we need to pray, plan and prepare.