

SM 053120

*Don't Get Distracted from the Great Work of the Great Commission?*

Sunday Morning Message

Text – Nehemiah 6

Congregational Reading – Nehemiah 6:1 - 3

Introduction

The context of this passage of Scripture involves the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem after the return of the people of God from Babylonian captivity.

- In 586 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Jerusalem and the entire southern kingdom of Judah, and he took the majority of the people captive into Babylon.
- In 539 BC, King Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon and immediately decreed that the Jews could go back to their native land of Israel if they chose to.
- A remnant of about 50,000 people return to Jerusalem and immediately begin rebuilding the Temple, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar.
- They get distracted by enemies of God's people and God's will and stop the construction. They then focus primarily on rebuilding their own lives.
- In 520 BC, nearly twenty years after returning to the land, Haggai and Zechariah get them stirred up to get back to work on the temple, and by 515 BC the temple is finished.
- Nehemiah does not come on the scene of Jerusalem until 444 BC, seventy years after the temple was finished. He was living in Persia, and he was working for King Artaxerxes as a "cupbearer" or butler of sorts. He runs into some people from Jerusalem and inquires about what is going on there:

*"And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire." (Nehemiah 1:3)*

- When he finds out that Jerusalem is still in a mess, he prays to God and confesses that he and his people have sinned and he agrees with God that what happened to Jerusalem was the fault of God's people. He then asks permission from the king to go and help get the city of Jerusalem rebuilt.
- Nehemiah's mission was to rebuild the walls and gates of the city of Jerusalem so that it could be protected from its enemies.

## Read chapter 6

In our passage today we see Nehemiah busy doing what the Lord had called him to do: rebuilding the wall of the city of Jerusalem. He had a job to do, and he was intent on completing it. Now there were also people in the area that were intent on stopping Nehemiah from fulfilling the will of God, but Nehemiah did not let them distract him from completing his work. I love what Nehemiah said: "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" The work Nehemiah was doing was certainly great, because it was God that had asked him to do it.

I have a great work to do for the Lord as well, and so do you. God has something for all of us who are His children to do. We all have different gifts and abilities, and we all are uniquely equipped to do different things within this church body, but our main task corporately is to fulfil the Great Commission. We find the Lord's mandate to preach His gospel in many places, but we will briefly look at it from the perspective of the Book of Matthew:

*"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."*

(Matthew 28:18-20)

We must not get distracted from completing the work that God has given us to do, especially in these end days; the work of fulfilling the Great Commission. I have observed through the years that distractions can come from a variety of sources:

### **Distractions Can Come from the Devil**

Our enemy is Satan and all of the devils that followed him in rebellion against God:

*"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."*

(Ephesians 6:12)

Our enemy can also be the people that the devil has deceived and uses to work against God's will. The devil has ministers who pretend to be the ministers of God:

*"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works."* (2 Corinthians 11:13-15)

The devil also sows in tares among the wheat. These are people that pretend to be the people of God, but really they are being used to fulfil Satan's purpose:

*"Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn." (Matthew 13:24-30)*

The wicked one is famous for distracting people away from the will of God. This was the case in Nehemiah's day with Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshom from our text. They were wicked men who did not have Nehemiah's best interests in mind. They were working against the will of God, but notice how they tried to disguise themselves as God's servants and as Nehemiah's friends. As God's children we need to learn to be discerning about the true motivations of the people around us as they attempt to pull us away from the primary tasks that God has given us.

### **Distractions Can Also Come from the Deceived**

Another type of distraction comes from good people who often invite us to do "good things"; but even these good things become evil if they take us away from the best things. I am slowly learning how to graciously turn down many "good" invitations from caring people. I simply do not have enough time and energy to do all of the things that I might like to do, especially as they pull me away from the primary areas of my responsibility. As a pastor, I get invited to many birthday's, picnics, graduations, dinners, weddings, conferences, barbecues, etc. I love to be with God's people, but I simply cannot go to them all.

Sometimes, well-meaning people will try to bog you down with good causes that simply distract us from our main commission.

Illustrations – A lot of preachers are getting fired up about our religious liberty here in America, which is certainly worth fighting for and preserving, but can't even let that worthy cause distract us from fighting the main battle – the Great Commission.

## **Distractions Can Come from Fleshly Desires**

We are often distracted by worldly lusts and fleshly desires. We all have the things that we desire in life; some of them are not necessarily sinful things, but they are weights that distract us from our main purpose.

Moses determined that he would not let the pleasures associated with being the son of Pharaoh keep him from fulfilling God's will for his life:

*"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible."*

(Hebrews 11:24-27)

## **Distractions Can Also Come as Godly Diversions**

A Fourth distraction is the distraction God brings your way. There are times that God will interrupt the daily routine in life in order for you to learn something, or maybe in order for you to accomplish something special for Him. Again, we must be very careful to discern whether these distractions are indeed from God.

Illustrate - Several years ago, because of the tight budget at the church I had to go back to a secular job for a few months, which required me to work overnight 6 nights per week. This job was certainly a hindrance that kept me from doing all that I might have wanted to do in the ministry; but I am convinced that God had lead me down that path, at least temporarily. My primary ministry is my family, and God had provided this job as a means for my family to be taken care of while still allowing me to serve as the pastor. However, because of this constraint on my time, I was very limited to what I could do. My life consisted basically of working, sleeping, prayer, Bible reading, studying and preparing for messages, and a little soul winning. That is all that I could do during those months. I had to learn to say no to many other things so that I could do those main things. My focus was still on serving God, but I had to take some time away from some of the activities typically involved in that service in order to help the church financially, and in order to put food on my family's table. God taught me much in the short time that I had been working the outside job, and He even used me to be a light to a very dark workplace. I thank the Lord that my time at the supermarket was short, and that He has turned our church's financial situation around, but I am convinced that God allowed that period in my life for a reason.

## Conclusion

The bottom line is this: don't allow distractions to pull you away from the primary things that God wants you to do, unless, of course, it is God who is doing the distracting.

We have been distracted from ministry as usual for the last few two and a half months. We have not been able to meet as a church family; we have not been able to have our children's programs, or run the bus and van. We have been bogged down dealing with this pandemic. We have tried to continue doing some of the needful things, but have we been distracted from doing the main thing – the Great Commission? Have we been faithfully preaching the gospel during this time.

This unprecedented period of time that we are living in could very well produce the fertile soil necessary to reap a great harvest for the Lord if we stay focused. We need to figure out ways to communicate Christ's message of salvation. Let's not get bogged down with fighting each other, or even get too consumed fighting for the right to continue doing church exactly as we have been doing it in the past. Let's, however keep fighting to get people saved.

Paul made a statement in the Corinthian church regarding marriage. He was giving principles regarding marriage and divorce, but he said something to people considering marriage in the last days when *"the time is short:"*

*"And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction." (1 Corinthians 7:35)*

What he meant was that in the last days, when time was running out, people should not let themselves get bogged down with things that will distract them from the main thing.