



Scott Turansky, Senior Pastor
October 6, 2019

NEHEMIAH 2:10

Series: Life Lessons from Nehemiah

[PRAYER] Father, we ask that you would settle our hearts but also make them receptive to you. Lord, we're actually excited, anticipating what you might do with us today, share in our hearts. We know that your Holy Spirit works actively in our lives and on Sunday mornings we often experience that because we're together. So we're asking, Lord, that the Holy Spirit would fall fresh on us today. I know sometimes that means convicting us of sin. Sometimes that means just confirming that we're children of God. Sometimes it means guiding us into all truth or enlightening your word. So we're asking now that you would touch us in a special way. Use your Spirit to teach us as we look at your word today. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

We're looking at the book of Nehemiah verse by verse. So we're going through this book and studying it. Today we're going to come to verse 10 of chapter 2. Nehemiah is this ordinary guy who was trying to do something. He was just trying to do something for the Lord, get something done. He saw a need, the walls are broken down, the gates are damaged. We're going to work on fixing this. He's got an idea. He wants to do something. He wants to move forward. I think it's a lot like us. I mean you got to be trying to do things in the course of your day. Maybe you're not building walls or putting gates back up, but there's things you're trying to accomplish just in the course of your day. I think we can learn from Nehemiah because so many things happen in his life that are so much like ours.

Today what we're going to see is that Nehemiah has some opposition. I just want to talk about this opposition that we experience because it can happen in a lot of different ways. Sometimes you're just trying to mind your own business and someone's giving you a hard time. Sometimes you're trying to get something done and there are some people in the way blocking your path to get something done. I mean opposition takes place regularly. Sometimes it's within our own hearts that gets us riled up. Sometimes it's outside. We're going to talk about the outside opposition today that we often experience, but we'll allude to some of that internal opposition that's potentially there for each of us as well.

So before we get into our passage today, I want to read a verse from the New Testament that you know. I want to read this verse because I want you to get the idea. There's an idea that Peter's trying to communicate, so this is the verse I want us to stand and read publicly. Stand with me please. I want to read this verse from 1 Peter because I think this verse is going to set the stage for the opposition that we're going to see in Nehemiah 2:10.

1 Peter 4:12 says this: *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.*

You may be seated.

I appreciate this verse because there's this element of surprise I think that takes us off guard. If we knew a problem was coming, if we knew we were walking into a difficult situation, we can prepare ourselves for it. But often what happens is you walk in the room and the kids are fighting and so you're surprised and so you're angry about it. Or your brother is mistreating you so you're surprised by that. Or there's a mechanical problem that you're surprised by. Or at work something takes place and it's the surprise element that often throws us and we're not ready for it.

Now in this passage, 1 Peter 4, Peter is talking to believers who are being persecuted and he's telling them don't be surprised that you're going to get persecuted. That's what he's talking about. But the idea of being surprised by trials and opposition is very real for all of us and we need to be ready for that.

I think we can be ready if we have our belief system correct. If your beliefs are in line with what God has for us, I think that sometimes we get surprised and we believe things that are odd. We believe things like "I'm doing the right thing. Therefore I shouldn't have any challenges." I know you wouldn't want to actually say that. But when challenges come, you're going, "What? I can't believe this!" Right? Or we believe that when we're obeying the Lord that good things should be happening in our lives. And of course they are, but then we have these challenges. "God, what's the deal here?" Sometimes opposition, challenges come into our lives even though we're doing good things. We're trying to accomplish something. If you're trying to accomplish something, which all of us are doing in the course of the day – we're trying to get things done and move forward – and as we're trying to accomplish things and get things done, opposition gets in the way. When this opposition takes place then sometimes we're surprised by it.

What I want to do today is I'm hoping I can equip you a little bit so that tomorrow when you go out and suddenly you have this opposition or this challenge or this problem or this conflict, you're not surprised. You can be ready for it and stay spiritually centered. If we can stay spiritually centered then we can move forward, even in the midst of challenges, difficulties, and so on. It will be okay. We can respond better to them. If we're not spiritually centered, then what happens? We end up reacting and we start moving ourselves into what we call carnal state. Carnal is like fleshly, out of the spiritual realm. So we start moving in the wrong direction.

I just want to look at one verse from the book of Nehemiah 2:10. This introduces us to two bad guys. I don't know if I should call them bad guys or not. They are kind of bad, but they are the challenge that Nehemiah is going to experience. It's just one verse. You can read more about them and we will study more about them in chapter 4 and chapter 6. But I want to introduce you to them. So as I'm studying more about who are these guys? Who's Sanballat and Tobiah? As I start studying them, I'm coming away with enough application I'm saying we're just going to do one verse. Because there are different kinds of opposition that are represented by these guys and I want to spend some time talking about the different kind of opposition that we have.

The first thing I'd like to do is talk about Sanballat. Now Sanballat... well both of them, Sanballat and Tobiah, had little kingdoms. I don't know whether to call them kingdoms or governing areas or city-states. Different words we can use. But they were rulers of small areas in the big Persian Empire and those small areas were nearby Jerusalem where Nehemiah was going. So when they heard that Nehemiah was coming, they had some challenges with that.

It says – *When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this (that is that Nehemiah and his crew were coming in to do some rebuilding), they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.*

You know I want to suggest that there are different kinds of opposition that we experience and in this case the opposition that we see is territorial. Sometimes people are pretty territorial about our situation. They want to protect what they have. They want to protect their ideas. The ideal example, it seems to me, is you go in and you got a new job. You go in with your new job and there are people that already exist there in this location. You're coming in as the new guy on the team or something and you're trying to bring about some change or do your influence and just do the right thing. You're not trying to hurt anybody. And there are some people who say, "We've never done it that way before," and some people get very territorial and selfish. They want to protect what they have. It's something that happens in childhood. Right? "Those are my toys." One little boy who's four years old says, "I was in this family first, so all these toys are mine," he says to his little brother.

I think that sometimes we become territorial because there's a reality about our world and our lives, and that is that sin corrupts our world. Not just all those other people out there, it even corrupts our own hearts. So we all have a sin nature, which is a propensity or tendency to sin or be selfish. That's what a sin nature is. It's this propensity to be selfish. A tendency. Only by the Holy Spirit's power can we bypass or confront that gravity of sin and do what's right and do the right thing. So when we face all this opposition and we see some people who are territorial, we recognize that this pressure that takes place is a challenge.

This internal stuff that people deal with often makes them selfish, so when that selfishness takes place we can get riled up, can't we? We can start to get upset because other people have their turf. They have their ideas and we're rattling their cage in one respect or another. But you know I think that all of us have a little bit of the Sanballat in us where we all have a tendency or can have a temptation to be selfish. We need to ask the question, what is it that we can do to protect ourselves? How can we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us?

So sometimes the opposition is territorial or, in this case, it seems to be the result of jealousy. You know you can imagine Nehemiah's coming in with all this cavalry, that is all the horses and so on, and Sanballat and Tobiah are looking up. This isn't like an enemy invasion. This is like a delegation. Like the President comes with all the flags and the cars coming. This is a delegation coming into town. I can imagine them saying to themselves, "Well we never got this kind of special treatment. Who is this guy? If he's going to set up this Jerusalem and rebuild Jerusalem, there's going to be a threat to our lives right around here." So I'm sure they were concerned about those things and trying to protect themselves from it. I think that's in part why we see the opposition in their lives.

Sanballat was north of Jerusalem. So this is a modern-day map of the Middle East, this Israel area. So you can see Jerusalem in the center there, Bethlehem south of that, and Jericho a little bit north. Those are cities that you are familiar with. The West Bank is up there. It's the diagonal lines across. The West Bank, which is in question as to who is going to occupy...well it's occupied by Israel, but who owns it. Then you have the Gaza Strip down here. These are all places in the news that you can read about. The Mediterranean Sea on this side. This is the 1967 ceasefire line. So it's a modern-day picture of Israel.

But up at the top you can see where Sanballat the Horonite had his little kingdom area where he ruled. And he was feeling threatened by Jerusalem. Now when people feel threatened, sometimes they act out of revenge when you didn't even do anything. So they're bringing out this revenge and trying to get back for some reason.

A parent called me from somewhere out of this area in the United States and talked to me this week about their seven year old who was being disciplined because for some reason dad had said, "No, you can't do that," and this boy was very upset. So he was sent to take a break and settle down. When he came back he was settled down, but he says to his mom, "I'm going to get even with dad." So now mom finds out that what he had done was he had gone out and derailed dad's bike chain on his bike in revenge. So she's saying, "What do I do about this?" I said, "It's very serious what has happened. Because what he's done is he's reserved a little place inside of his heart where he's planning evil."

Whenever we plan evil against somebody else, we're allowing a little bit of that Sanballat into our lives, which is dangerous when we plan evil. It's called malice when you plan evil. I'm just looking at my own life trying to think of an example of this. You know when someone cuts me off in traffic, I engage in malice sometimes. I wonder what's going to happen when we get to the next red light or something like that. That's planning evil in our hearts. I don't believe in karma, so I want to take life in my own hands and do whatever. That's malice.

So I gave the mom some ideas about how she could deal with this with consequences and other things. But one of the things I said is, "You want to go and you want to teach him about Ephesians 4, which uses the word malice. Because he's in danger here." So I'm going to share this verse with you because I think we have to protect ourselves from the Sanballat in our own hearts that often becomes jealous and wants to engage in malice. That's what's happening in the passage as we continue on.

Paul is trying to help us see that we are different people. We are not like everyone else. Yes, there are broken people in the world that are engaging in malice, but we don't want to do that. So Paul tells the Ephesians this. He says – *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

Now we have six words for anger. If that's not enough, here are six different words. *Get rid of all bitterness* (that's accumulated anger), *rage* (that's anger out of control). *Anger* is this

emotional response to something that's wrong. *Brawling* is fighting when you're angry. *Slander* is saying something mean about someone (even if it's true) in order to hurt them. *And every form of malice*. Malice is planning evil. I'm going to get this person back. I'm going to look for ways to get them. That's what can happen in our own hearts if we're not careful. And Sanballat is looking for ways to do this. We'll see that more in the story.

But verse 32 says this: *Instead*, do these things. There's so much packed in here for our edification. *Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Ah. You know, we're different. We're different than other people. Yes, there's a brokenness about all of us that sin has corrupted our world and there's some people who have allowed sin to make them into an ugly person. But the danger for this seven year old and the danger for my own heart is that if I leave room for planning evil in my heart, it starts to grow and make me an ugly person. It's very important to not allow malice to be there. That's what the passage is talking about here.

I think that sometimes when we're young we learn about some of these things. I like the book *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. Do you remember that? I don't know if you heard of that book, but it's kind of a cute idea. Here are the top ten things I learned in kindergarten idea. Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat. Flush. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you.

You know when I looked at that list again I thought that is so interesting. That sometimes in childhood when we are young we learn some important things in our lives, but we tend to forget them as we get older. I think that's one of the reasons the Holy Spirit is so powerful because He reminds us of things in our lives that we need to do in order to keep that graciousness that God wants so that we can be kind and compassionate and so on.

So Sanballat. Be careful of the Sanballat in your own heart, but also you want to be careful of the Sanballats that are out there because, yes, we're going to face them. We're going to face people that are malicious. They plan evil in their heart. That's what malice is. It's malicious. We're going to find people that are just sinful in their response. And we have to respond to them. Right? We have to know we're going to either ignore them or we're going to confront them or we're going to get help or we're going to do something. But we do it differently as Christians. We are different kinds of people. Sanballat. People who are territorial.

Let's go back to our verse again. In Nehemiah 2:10 it gives us the name of the other guy. It's *Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this*. Now Tobiah is a different guy. If you do the history, if you kind of look at who's Tobiah, then you see him mentioned elsewhere in scripture, which gives us a lot of insight into who this guy is and then maybe why he has an opposition challenge, why he's being oppositional to Nehemiah.

If we go to the book of Ezra... This is the same map, but now it's just highlighting Ammon, Jordan is on the east side of the Jordan River there. Tobiah is the head of that little kingdom on the side. But if we go to Ezra it says these words about him. Ezra is a contemporary of Nehemiah. We're studying Nehemiah as was written about the same time and recounting similar events that are going on. So we have a genealogy and a record and an interesting comment in this genealogy.

It says this. Everybody's lineage was very important. *The following came up from the towns of Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon and Immer, but they could not show that their families were descended from Israel.* They came up, they wanted to be priests, but God's plan for the priesthood was very tight, very holy. You had to be a certain lineage to be part of the priesthood. Notice the colon after verse 59. It tells you who these people are that came up that didn't have the paperwork. Verse 60 says – *The descendants of Delaiah, Tobiah and Nekoda 652 of them.* They didn't have the paperwork. So they weren't allowed to serve.

Verse 62. I jumped ahead a verse there. Verse 62 says this: *These searched for their family records, but they could not find them and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean.*

You can imagine Tobiah. He's got a Hebrew name, yet he's heading up this place in Jordan, is kind of the head of that city-state there. You have to wonder about his perception of the Jewish people that rejected him. That he felt like he had a right to something. He had a right to be a priest, but they were not allowing him to do that. So he comes to this whole thing with some baggage. Which I think is an important application for us. Because there's some times in our lives when the opposition that comes to us doesn't have anything to do with us. It all has to do with the other person and the problem that they have. They're opposing us, they're angry with us, they're yelling at us, they're causing conflict for us. It doesn't really have anything to do with us. It has to do with all their past experiences that they had. So they are after us. They're taking it out on us.

The application, of course, is we can't take things personally like that. We have to realize that sometimes people in this broken world are broken and, because of their brokenness, lash out at other people and we're just in the way. It isn't even our problem. Sometimes we say, "I didn't do anything," because we weren't involved in this, but we're getting attacked in some way. And sometimes the opposition that we experience doesn't have anything to do with us. It has to do with the other person's baggage, their issues, the challenges that we have. Yet sometimes we feel surprised and we get upset and we take it personally. When we take it personally, we're more likely to move out of that spiritual place that God has for us and we're more likely to be carnal and do the wrong thing.

So that's a second kind of opposition that I think we see here in this passage is the Tobiah kind of opposition. Which means that in our own hearts we need to be careful of that Tobiah. That we are tempted sometimes to take things personally, to get upset about something, somebody else's doing, and we start to react. That's why it's so important to keep the slate clean in our own hearts. That we're regularly coming before God.

You know sometimes people have a propensity for anger that is their tendency to get angry is bigger than the situation warrants. And why is that? It's because they've got all of this other baggage they're carrying around and this person hurt me back then and this person hurt me in another place, so I've got all this hurt that I'm carrying around. So then when someone hurts me that has the same color hair or something, then I lash out at them and I'm upset with them, and I've taken it personally. It's dangerous.

That's why Paul is reminding us in Ephesians or Peter is reminding us in 1 Peter 4 don't be surprised. You don't have to be surprised. There are broken people in this world. It's not your fault. They've just got to expect that broken people are going to hurt other people. Yes, we have to take action. We're going to ignore or we're going to confront or we're going to get help. We have to do things many times, but we don't have to take it personally. Because sometimes it isn't about us. That is the second kind of opposition that I think we often see.

Let's go back to our passage again. In verse 10 it mentions these guys – *Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of Israel.*

Now if we recognize that Israel is God's chosen people and we look back in all of history, we see that there is another kind of opposition continually on the forefront and that is spiritual opposition. Satan wants to destroy Christ, crucify Him, thinking He's going to be dead. Satan wants to eradicate the Jewish people. There's always opposition and sometimes that opposition that we experience in our lives is spiritual. It's a spiritual opposition just because you're a Jew. Or in most of our cases just because we're Christians. You need to know that there are some people that are going to react to you just because you take a stand for righteousness. You make a statement about godliness and so they start confronting you.

This week I was talking to one of the publishers at Cokesbury. Cokesbury is a publisher for the United Methodist church and he's in the business of creating the VBS curriculum. And he says we have to be so careful because people get so offended. He said we created this great object lesson where we stacked moving boxes nine feet tall so it would be the same height as Goliath and we threw bean bags at him. That was the activity that they would do for the children's program. Well some people were offended by that because it was like bullying and Goliath was just different and we're not being sensitive to people's differences. I'm going whoa, we've really moved a lot from the story of David and Goliath when we're having to engage in that kind of activity. Do you see sometimes there's opposition that's just spiritual in nature?

Last week I was at the D6 Conference. D6 stands for Deuteronomy 6. It represents the passing of faith onto the next generation. A man knew I was going to be there and wanted to meet with me in advance. His name is David Robbins. He's one of the executives with Voice of the Martyrs. The reason he wanted to meet with me was because they're trying to develop at Voice of the Martyrs a new curriculum for children and youth to advance their mission and he wanted some advice from me and the National Center for Biblical Parenting. So we met and talked about it.

Now we'll hear more about the Voice of the Martyrs in the coming weeks. But Voice of the Martyrs is an organization that has five goals. I'm not going to tell you about the four of them,

but the fifth one I want you to know about because it's powerful. It's about the persecuted church today all over the world. If we heard more stories about the persecuted church it would help us. So goal number five of Voice of the Martyrs is to equip the western church (that's you and me) with the greater ability to be bold and courageous in our faith because we hear the stories of those who are being persecute and killed for their faith.

David Robbins was telling me that he spent a significant amount of time in Egypt where he saw persecuted churches, persecuted Christians who had lost their jobs, lost their families, lost their lives. He says he comes to America and he says, "Man, Christians in America are so weak." And I agree. We're afraid that somebody's not going to like us on Facebook if we say something about the Lord. And that's persecution. That's how we define persecution in our lives, if somebody doesn't like us on Facebook.

He gave me this curriculum and I'd like to give this to somebody. I'm going to leave it up here. If you'd like it, you can take it. This is a curriculum about the persecuted church. But I want to read you a quote from Glenn Penner's book. On the back it says this: "The Bible (especially the New Testament) was written by persecuted believers to persecuted believers. This context cannot be ignored without it having profoundly negative implications for how we read and apply the Bible and how we follow Christ individually and corporately. A cross-centered gospel requires cross-carrying messengers."

Sometimes we get so easily offended because someone doesn't do it the way we like. Sometimes in our own hearts we get territorial about what's going on. Sometimes we get a spiritual challenge in our own heart that causes us to cause problems in our own families, workplaces, and so on. And then of course there are other people who do that and they are creating opposition for Nehemiah.

I'll leave this up here. Feel free to take it. It would be nice if you brought it back after you're done with it in a month or a year or whatever and I'll give it to someone else. But the idea here there's sometimes spiritual opposition that exists in our lives. There's this unseen world where there's a wrestling between God and those who oppose God. And then it comes down into the daily interactions of our lives and we see things going on around us that are hard.

Students on the college campus today have a hard time because if you even say you're a Christian, you become an enemy often. You become attacked for your faith. You're laughed at. You're considered to be someone who has a lower IQ because you're a Christian. I mean it's very difficult today. There's a spiritual opposition that exists there.

So what I'm trying to do today is just have you be warned. So I want to go back to that passage of scripture that we already looked at in 1 Peter 4 and I just want to read this to you for your edification. The first verse is the one that I read at the very beginning, but I just want to read the whole thing. I want you to see it as a way of motivating you this week to be spiritually centered and not allow opposition to move you off center. That God has called you for a special purpose. Let's read the verses. You'll see this some more.

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household (that means we judge the Sanballat and Tobiah that's in our own hearts); and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to (two things) their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

I think we take this into our homes. If your brother is being mean to you, your job is to do the right thing and trust God for the rest. If you're at work and someone's being mean to you, you get opposition, you want to trust God and do the right thing. That's what he's saying. I just think there's so much power. That's why I couldn't go past verse 10. There's a lot represented there in the opposition. We'll see it developed over the book of Nehemiah.

But I want to encourage you, be prepared this week. Don't be surprised. You're going to experience opposition this week. Are you ready? Get ready today. Allow God to do some work in your heart so you're right where He wants you to be. And tomorrow when the opposition comes, be ready. Don't be knocked off center.

Let's stand together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the privilege of being called Christians, but sometimes we are afraid of what people might think or afraid of pressure around us and we don't allow you to be the center of our lives. So Lord, we ask that you'd forgive us. We ask that you'd give us the ability to trust you more as we rely on your Spirit in our lives so we can remain centered in our hearts and not be knocked off balance. Lord, thank you for your word. Use it today with all of its power and the power of the Spirit to change us. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.