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NEHEMIAH 4:16-23

Series: Life Lessons from Nehemiah

Today we're going to look at Nehemiah 4. As we do, as I study the word each week and prepare a sermon, I do something that I want to encourage you to do. That is you read the word and as you read it you're asking the Lord, how does this apply to me? What can I do in my own life as a result of this passage in the scriptures? So I like to kind of put myself in the story, which we're going to do now as we look at the last part of Nehemiah 4. Every week I try to put myself in the story. What's going on there, how is this story unfolding, what's taking place, and then what principles can I take out of there to put into my story? As God is working in my life, how can I take those principles and live my daily life the way I am? And then when I get up on Sunday morning to share, I'm looking to answer three questions. At least I ask myself these questions as I'm preparing. What does God want you to feel? What does He want you to do? And what does He want you to think? Because if we know how God wants us to feel and what to think and what to do, then it makes it very practical for us as we go forward.

As I read this passage this week, I was particularly touched emotionally. In other words, I felt the pain of what was going on in the passage. That the people, as you're going to see, are under pressure. They're under significant pressure in their lives. I feel like we find ourselves in a lot of pressure in our lives, but their pressure was a unique kind of pressure where they're being attacked. So this whole idea of being attacked and this sense of urgency that they have just struck me. I want you to see that.

So I'm going to read the verses. Would you stand with me as I read these verses from Nehemiah 4:16-23. Put yourself in the passage. As you know, they're building the wall in Jerusalem there. And here's what Nehemiah says at this point.

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 who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other (wow, that must have been challenging work), and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.

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. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!"

So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. 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.” 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.

It’s just impressive to me to see that verse 21 says that *we continued the work*. So even under pressure we continued to do what we needed to do. Certainly there's a message there for people today, even here, that we continue the work even under pressure. That we do what God has for us.

You may be seated.

As I thought about the pressure, the attack that’s going on with these people, you can see what they’re doing is mobilizing themselves for protection. Mobilizing themselves for protection. You see, I think we need to realize there’s an enemy that wants to attack us and is attacking us. Sometimes it’s the devil attacking us, but sometimes it’s just the world system, our world culture, our culture that has a bent to it that’s moving in a direction that’s dangerous. And we live in that. We’re trying to do our work while being influenced by the culture. We’re really being attacked spiritually. Sometimes we don’t even realize that attack is taking place. We’re trying to do our work, we’re trying to get things done, but the attack is very present. It’s dangerous.

When I talk to adolescents (that’s people between the ages of 10-25), I talk to them about the importance of recognizing the task they have during that period of time (between 10 and 25). You are on a mission. Because many young people today don’t see it as a mission. They see it as a playground. Life is a playground. My goal in life is to have fun. What I’m trying to do is help young people understand more about what it means to take advantage of adolescents in order to prepare for adulthood, to not get sucked in. Because what happens...and this is what I say to young people. There’s a broad road. A really broad road. And that road is broad because lots of people are on it. But it’s really dangerous because the broad road leads to destruction. (This is Jesus’ words.) It leads to destruction.

The reason for that is, and this is what happens, young people, most of the people you know right now are going to end up in some kind of a mine field of their life. They might think it’s fun to experiment with drugs or alcohol or with smoking or with premarital sex. They might think that’s a really good idea, but what happens is it damages them in their heart, in some way damages their body, and they end up with this mine field that ends up damaging them further on in their lives. It’s really dangerous.

But Jesus says there's a narrow road. It’s narrow because very few people are on it and it leads to life. Most of the people you know are so influenced by the broad road that they end up hitting these land mines in life and they cripple them. God’s grace is able to help us work through the challenges, but I would suggest it is better to avoid the danger and the land mines and recognize that there is an enemy out there that wants to destroy us, that wants to attack us. God has given us a lot of protection that we can embrace in our lives.

I started pondering this idea of protection then this week. What does protection look like for the Christian? What can we do to protect ourselves? So I started writing all these things down. I had a bunch of things, so I created a diagram, gave it to my artist. I said, "Put this together for me."

In the green circle represents things like spiritual disciplines that we engage in. Things like prayer and fellowship and Bible and serving the Lord and fasting. Those become those exercises that we do, spiritual exercises that are disciplines that actually protect us because they keep us in bounds. Then I thought well there's all these other practices that we do that protect us in our lives. Things like being thankful in your life, which protects you from being critical in a marriage relationship. It's very easy to be critical of your spouse, so having an attitude of thanksgiving for the things your spouse does do can help you to avoid the enemy of criticism that can damage your marriage relationship.

Admiration is another one. If you can think of in a marriage relationship admiring your spouse because your spouse can do things better than you. If you can't think of that, then you've got a problem. It's a pride problem and I just want you to know your spouse can do some things better than you can. And you can admire your spouse. You know what that does? It provides for us humility and helps us guard against the dangers of pride.

We can go right through these. Forgiveness obviously deals with the lingering anger in our hearts. that we learn how to love, we learn how to live simply. We give, we rest. I know some of you, especially the OCD people, are wondering why the question mark is there. It's an incomplete circle. The reason I put it there is because there's things I haven't even thought of. Since the diagram was created I realized worship is a way that God brings us into His presence and it is a protection for us. Obedience is another one of those things that God has allowed for us. When we're obeying Him, that's protection.

There's an enemy out there that wants to destroy you. Jesus said it this way: *The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy; I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full.* The Ten Commandments talk about enjoying long life on the earth. God wants us to experience joy. He wants us to be able to get the most out of life. He wants us to experience abundant life. He wants us to be effective, productive. He wants us to be whole. Satan wants to destroy that and he looks for ways that he can do that.

Protection is a very important concept that we must understand. Because if we're just going along and saying, "Oh I'm just going to go along with whatever is happening," you are in danger and bad things can happen to you. It's serious business here. Because the thief wants to steal your joy, he wants to kill your relationship, he wants to destroy you as a person in your life. The devil wants to make you ineffective. Because if he can cause you to be ineffective, and especially cause you to have problems in your life, you become a hurt person. What happens? You start hurting other people. Then you hurt God's church. Then you actually become a partner with Satan in his desire to destroy. We must have a system, we must have ways of protection that we embrace.

I'm just impressed with Nehemiah in what he's doing here to set up these systems for preparation and protection for the people. You see, God can heal us. If you messed up... I know

some of us look back in our lives and we have regrets that we did it a particular way. When you have regret about doing it a particular way and you have mistakes and you look back on those, you go, "Oh man," and Satan then wants to use that to weaken you further and say you're no good.

Charles Spurgeon says it this way: "I know what the devil will say to you. He will say to you, 'You are a sinner!' Tell him you know you are, but that for all that you are justified. He will tell you of the greatness of your sin. Tell him of the greatness of Christ's righteousness. He will tell you of all your mishaps and your backslidings, of your offences and your wanderings. Tell him, and tell your own conscience, that you know all that, but that Jesus Christ came to save sinners, and that, although your sin be great, Christ is quite able to put it all away."

We must have the protection set in our hearts. We have to know how to protect ourselves because Satan wants to destroy us, he wants to damage us. So we go back to the first part of this passage. I just underlined all of the verbs just because there's so much action going on in this passage. I would encourage you to take action in your own heart, in your own life.

Notice the men did the work. They focused on the work. They didn't focus on attacking the enemy. Notice it's defensive armor that they're setting up, not attacking. They don't make it their job to be attacking the enemy. Their job is to do the work that God has given them to do, but they're equipped with spears and so on. The officers posted themselves. They're building the wall, but they're also carrying materials. They did their work. They held a weapon in one hand. They wore the sword. They worked. They sounded the trumpet. The trumpeter stayed with me. I mean there's all this action that's taking place.

The problem, though, with all the doing and action and activity that we often look at, is that we can in some ways become so focused on the activity and the action and the doing that we do that we miss out on the believing that we must have as well. If we focus too much on the application without the depth, the belief, then we end up in a place where we almost become humanist. I need to do this myself. I need to protect myself and so on. That's why at the very center of my circle I put the blood of Christ.

It is because of the blood of Jesus Christ that we have protection. It is because of the blood of Jesus Christ that we have the ability or the power or any of these things. In fact I spent a number of my time, a lot of my time this week just looking at the blood of Christ, studying that. What is the blood of Christ, how is it mentioned in the scripture?

As I'm studying that, it was my week to give blood. So I went down to the blood council and I'm giving blood. I sat down in the waiting room and this lady comes in and she sits next to me. She's friendly, so we start talking. Her name is Kimberly. I asked her her name at the end so I could tell you this story. I told her, "I'm going to tell my people on Sunday the story about you, Kimberly." Because she told me that when she was eighteen years old, many years ago, she was in an accident. It was a very serious accident and the doctors gave her a 5% chance of living. That's hardly anything. Five percent chance of living? So many people donated blood for her. Because they gave their blood, she was able to live. I'm going wait a minute, I just studied all about the blood of Christ and now all these things. So I just looked at her in shock. I said, "Wow,

I can't believe you're saying that. I just got to tell you, I'm a pastor of a church. Every week I teach and prepare my teaching and often in the course of my week God brings some kind of a story or illustration to help me illustrate that. And this is so interesting. Because you know Jesus Christ died on the cross and He gave us His blood." She just wanted to give back now. That's her idea. She just wants to give back. I said, "Look, that's what God did for us. He gave us the blood of Christ He gave for us so that we could live and then we're motivated then to give back. This is so great."

One of these days one of these people are actually going to come to church, but they do sometimes listen to the audio later or something if I see them again. Like Chef Angel. I told you about Chef Angel at the gym. Remember I told you the story about her. I told her when I went back to the gym, "In my sermon last Sunday I told a story about you." You did? Can I hear it? "Yeah, it's online." So she went and listened to it online and we've been dialoguing about it together.

The blood of Christ is significant and I want to show you how. Let's just go through the scriptures for a moment. Allow these passages about the blood of Christ to affect you. The blood of Christ. Redemption. Redemption is the idea of buying back. God did not use money to buy us. He bought us with the blood of Christ. That's what it says. *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ.* That was the payment. The blood of Christ. Redemption. Fellowship with God.

But now in Christ Jesus you once were far away have been brought near (by what?) by the blood of Christ.

If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all our sin.

Our forgiveness comes because of the blood of Jesus. In our culture we're kept from blood. We don't see blood, they throw up when they see blood, the pass out when they see blood. The blood of Christ is a really valuable thing for us to focus on.

Number four, they triumphed over.... This is out of Revelation where there's this battle going on and they triumphed over the devil (or Satan) in this war by the blood of the Lamb. That's the power of God comes through the blood. The blood... This is the story in Exodus that you know of where the death angel is going to pass over all the people of Egypt and all the people of Israel. The death angel is going to pass over and the oldest son is going to die. Not just of the people, but of the cattle, the animals. The oldest one is going to die. But those who put the blood on the doorpost and the lintel of their house, they would be saved. *The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.* It's the blood of Christ that really protects you and me in our lives. When we post that in the lintels and the door frames of our hearts and we say, "God, I want you to be the Lord of my life. You died for me. I want to accept that in my own heart. I want to trust you as my Lord and Savior." It's that protection that we rely on in our lives.

It does much more than that though. Not only do we get saved, but He cleanses our consciences. Now you need this, especially if you think about the regrets or you feel you're unworthy or you think about the mistakes you've made that bother you and continue to bother you. *How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences.*

One more. We have confidence to come with boldness into the throne room of God because of the blood of Christ. *Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus...* We can come into His presence because of the blood. That's pretty big. So it's not just something you do, this protection. You need to rely on, you need to believe in, you need to think about the blood of Christ because it's the power of Jesus. We don't protect ourselves. It's God is the one who protects us and we trust Him, we put our faith in Him, and the blood that He sacrificed for us.

So if we go back to the passage looking at verse 19-20, notice what it says. I just find this to be further implication of this idea of the blood of Christ. He says – *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."*

I just want to suggest that we in our lives don't all live in that same neighborhood. We're separated in different places. But he says there's going to be a rallying cry and when we rally together then we're going to support each other in the midst of this. So they support each other in this protection. We do that as a church as well. If you're hurting somewhere in your life and the part of your wall that you're working on, you're being threatened and challenges are great and you're feeling overwhelmed, you need to blow the trumpet so the people could come and support you and encourage you in your walk with the Lord.

Verse 20 – *Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Why? Our God will fight for us!* He says all these things about the things he's going to do to set up these things, but who's doing the fighting? Our God is going to fight for us. He's going to do the work. He's the one who protects us. God has already won the war. We know the last chapter of the book. We can read the last chapter and see that we have won the war. But there's a whole process of battles that go in between. Sometimes we lose a battle here and there, but that doesn't mean we've lost the war. We're going forward and trusting the Lord in our lives in everything that we do.

You know I think about these things and I'm so glad I'm a Christian. If we just focus on all these things that we do, we can become humanists. Humanists are people who don't believe in God, Humanists just believe that man is the ultimate power. They believe that they're god actually for themselves. They wouldn't say that, but they make the decisions, they empower themselves, they pull themselves up, and if they're going to fly high, it's because they're going to think big things. It's all humanism that takes place. I'm glad I'm a Christian.

This week I was talking to a man who's a humanist. I know him well and he tells me he's a humanist. He doesn't want to become a Christian. He had a problem because there's another man that had offended him. So he decided to give an ultimatum. He said, "I'm going to not speak to you again unless you apologize." So this other guy says to him, "Okay. If I've hurt your feelings,

I'm sorry." Now that's a really weak apology. That's not how you make an apology. So this guy says that's not good enough, you have to take ownership for your problem and you need to do that.

And then this is what he says to me: "I'm interested to know what you think about that." So I have a platform. So I said to him, "I would suggest that we are all broken people. I'm broken. You're broken. And this other guy is broken. You took a rather risky move by giving an ultimatum. That's a risky relational move. But you took that and it seemed to have produced something in him and he did respond to you. Obviously imperfectly he responded to you, but he's a broken guy. So he tried to respond to you in the midst of that. Now I would suggest that you are broken and he's broken and you receive that from him and you go on in life."

As I talked to him for a little bit, he said something like this: "Wow, you're really eloquent. I can see why you're good at what you do." I'm thinking in my mind, this isn't me. I'm just explaining this is what God says that we do. He's not a Christian. So I'm just explaining God to him and how we function as Christians. So he was going to go away and think about it. He's says okay great. That was fine with me. I had said what I wanted to say. And he's out doing whatever.

But he sent me a text later. This text said: "I decided I'm not going to release him because he did the wrong thing and I need to hold this over him so he can change." In essence what he's saying is this: If I don't teach him this lesson, who's going to do it? As a Christian, I say I've got an answer to that. I'm just a piece of what God is doing in people's lives and I don't have to be God in their lives to teach them a lesson. So here's a man who's a humanist now and he believes that he has to teach this guy a lesson. It's his responsibility to not let this go by because he's hurting me and whatever. What happens then is this man who's going to hold onto this offense now is going to damage him. It's going to harm him. Because he was not created to hold onto the justice, the personal justice of life. He's created to turn that over to God.

You see, I believe in God. I know that God can protect me. I know that God is somebody I can offload these things to and that He's the one I can trust in my life. A humanist doesn't do that. A humanist doesn't believe in God. He just believes in himself that he's the most important thing or the people that he knows that together they're making decisions and those decisions are the best as he can go. I'm grateful that I'm a Christian that I don't have to hold onto personal offenses. I can release them and I can experience freedom in my heart. I can be protected from bitterness and resentment because God is there and I can allow him to do that deeper work in my heart.

I would just suggest that God wants to do something in each of our lives. He has a mission for us in our hearts. A mission. What is the mission that God has for you? Well the mission He has for you is the same mission He has for me and that is to be the person that is growing in Christ so that we can be a light to the world. That is what the mission is. You are on a mission. God has given you a mission to grow in Christ so you can be a light to the world. Yet that mission can get squashed by the enemy in so many different ways.

God has set up all kinds of ways for protection to take place in our lives. God wants us to move forward. He wants us to enjoy the Christian life, but He also wants us to fulfill the mission, this

calling that He's given us because there's a lot of hurting people out there in the world that need Jesus. They're getting hung up, they're getting stuck, and they're beginning to see that in their lives. They're saying I need something outside of myself. I cannot do this myself. I need something else. Jesus Christ is the answer. We have that message that we can share with others. Amen? Amen.

Let's stand and pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, I thank you that you have chosen to allow us to serve you. We know, Lord, you can do without us, but you allow us to be the ones who share a message with others, to come into contact with other people. We know there are hurting people all around. We want to ask you to work through our hearts and lives to grow us, to be the people you want us to be. Lord, we want to serve you more and we know the enemy wants to destroy us, harm us. So Lord, we ask for your protection. We ask for the blood of Jesus to protect us in our lives. Do a deep work in our hearts so we can walk the walk that you've called us to. Give us an understanding of what faith looks like in practical terms so that this week as we trust you we can allow you to fight the fight for us and you can continue to do the work you've called us to do. Lord, thank you for Nehemiah and his example and the recordings that you have in your word about him. We receive that. We appreciate that. Father, now we just ask for your Holy Spirit to fall on this place. Lord, we welcome you to be in this place with us and we ask that you would convict us in our own hearts. Demonstrate your power. Demonstrate that you're real. Demonstrate who you are in our lives. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.