WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH
Nehemiah 4.1-15

(God Has A Plan For You Series)

1 When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, 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!” 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. 5 Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders. 6 So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart. 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. 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.” 12 Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, “Wherever you turn, they will attack us.” 13 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. 14 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.” 15 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.

Intro
Ques- Have you ever been in a situation where the going gets tough in your life?
• Now, Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king- a prominent position

But his comrades back home were in dire straits
• They were about to lose the temple- and also their homes
• Things got so out of hand
• And now they were facing a crisis

It’s always a good idea to get help when tough times come
• For some, it might means the difference between getting through it and not at all
• Depending on what kind of issue it is

Illus- Summer School

I remember for me one of the big ones was having to stay after school
• I remember how some kids had to stay behind
• Or they had to go to summer school

I never went to summer school, but I remember some kids who did

In life, the issues are usually bigger than that, but summer school for a kid gives you a taste for what’s to come
• Tough times are a part of life
• They mold you
• They confront and challenge you

But as Robert Schuller used to say, Tough Times Never Last But Tough People Do
Now, I would not say I am a particularly tough person, but I can say with complete confidence that—because I am a Christian—I do have a secret weapon other people don’t.

**PHIL 4:13** I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

It is something to rely on when tough times come upon you…

**1. For When Tough Times Come- The Holy Spirit Is Right There Alongside You Too**

It is no accident that these men called Nehemiah
- He was a man who had political influence
- He was the right man for the job at hand
- But more importantly, he was God’s man—and he was badly needed

**Illus- The Calling of Nehemiah**

When the men went to Susa to find Nehemiah, they had come to a crisis
- People were fighting each other
- Blaming each other
- People were trying to hide in their homes
- Some were leaving
- Groups could not agree on any course of action
- Unqualified leaders were taking leadership positions
- Nothing was getting done

And worst of all, worship was in crisis
- And they were no longer hearing God’s voice

**2. The Calling Of Nehemiah Was Wise Because His Only Motive Was To Please God**

That was his priority
- And reading this book you see interspersed throughout his prayers
- He is always praying for God’s will
- Not his own—but that God would be pleased

**Ques-** Can you think of a wiser thing to pray for?

Tough times come, and when they do—they depth of one’s spiritual life is quickly found out
- In those moments, there is no time for luxury
- No time for complacency

And we know them by theory symptoms…
- The money runs out
- Or the friends are gone
- Our health begins to fail
- Or like here in Nehemiah, the community or culture changes

**Ques-** So when the going gets tough—What do you do?
- Better yet, what is it God expects you to do?

**I. WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH- DON’T QUIT- RATHER, LOOK TO YOUR FAITH (vs. 10-13)**
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.” 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.” Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, “Wherever you turn, they will attack us.” 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.

Note that their first thought was negative…

“…The strength of the laborers is giving out…”

1. Tough Times Always Come- But You Can’t Fail If You Don’t Quit

**Illus- Weight Training**

When I was younger I used to be really strong

- Now I have gray hair
- My eyesight is not so good
- I have arthritis
- And I am not as strong as I used to be

But back in the day when I was lifting weights

- And playing football
- And baseball
- And soccer
- And track & field
- I used to train with weights

I had to build my strength to a competitive level

Spiritually speaking- we can do the same

**Ques-** What does Paul say,

PHIL 4.13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Fortune always favors those who act- or as we would say- God favors the bold

- So we build spiritual muscles
- We build righteousness
- We build prayer power

**Ques-** But if all we do is piggyback on others spiritual power- what does that say about us?

- If all we do is enjoy another’s fruit- then we can’t say we are producing as Jesus says to do
- If all we do is make politically correct choices- rather than spiritually correct choices- then who is to blame when we end up in a position like Nehemiah and the Jews?

2. And That Is Why During Tough Times- We See The Depth Of Our Faith

Adversity is always a test

- It teaches faith
- And also teaches perseverance

**Illus-** Swimming Lessons

Growing up in Florida it is customary for most kids to get swimming lessons
Even still, it always amazed me how some kids—and adults too—do not know how to swim.

In my neighborhood, lots of families have swimming pools in their backyard:
- It was one of the ways we kids had fun
- At least until we could drive and go to the beach ourselves

Now, I know why some won’t go to the beach:
- But if you live in Florida—or anywhere else for that matter—you ought to know how to swim

And what you do is get in the shallow end of the pool:
- Learn the strokes
- Until finally one day they throw you into the deep end of the pool

That’s what you find out if you’ve got what it takes to really swim.

Faith is like that too:
- When you come to the end of your resources, that is when you find out what you are made of
- And not before
- And that is why we are constantly strengthening and deepening our faith

II. WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH—REMEMBER THE LORD (vs. 14)

14 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.”

Nehemiah is reminding them of this simple truth…

1. Whatever God Calls You To—He Will See You Through

But we have to realize what the goal really is—those who miss it don’t have the mind of Christ:
- So what happens to them is they ride high when life is good
- And suffer despair when they don’t get what they want

Illus—6 Flags

Ques—Maybe you have been to 6 Flags or Disneyworld, or maybe the state fair?
- Do you like to ride the roller coasters?
- If you say No, then you know they are exciting and terrifying at the same time

Look up some of the amusement park rides in Japan some time if you really want to get scared!
- They have some new ones that will impress you

Tough time are like that too:
- It is like you are strapped in for a ride
- And you can’t get off
- You come off the ride a different person
- You have had an experience you will not forget

God’s plan for you is like that too, and you will not leave this world until do what he wants you to:
- But you also have a part in it
It can be easy- or hard for you depending on how much you fight it

**Illus- Fishing**

If you have ever been fishing, you know the fish bites the lure and then the fight is on
- Our job is to reel him in
- His job is to get off the hook

And sometimes, he does just that

**Ques-** But if we want to eat, do we want that?
- Some people are like the fish
- They get caught on the lures of others

And some people are like the fisherman, who keep on keeping on, knowing that a sustaining and active faith will get them their dinner

**2. When We Remember The Lord, We Are Like The Fisherman- We Are Called To A Task That Must Be Completed God’s Way**

**Illus- Cutting The Grass**

Suppose I want the grass over at the parsonage to be cut
- I know how beautiful and appealing the property would be when it looks nice
- I know what a good example the parsonage property would reflect to the community

But suppose I just looked at the grass, and I said *The Grass Needs To Be Cut*
- And I complain about the grass
- Or that I worry about the reflection uncut grass means to a community who judges the church by what they see

**Ques-** Does my complaining actually cut the grass?

Nehemiah knew that the Israelites were in tough times- but he also knew their tough times were self-imposed

**Ques-** So what does Nehemiah do?
- He redirects their motivation
- He showed them how much was at risk
- He showed them they could get attacked by neighboring enemies
- And then he showed them they would lose their temple

**Illus- Hurricanes**

Up in Windsor - there are Baptist Men up there still rebuilding homes from the last hurricane

**Ques-** We all know about them- don’t we?
- Power is knocked out
- Homes are destroyed
- People have no place to go
- Looting increases

A hurricane is not self-imposed- but everyone knows they create a crisis
That is no time to be complacent
That is the time for action

But then there are those who are moved by God to do something about it
- Baptist Men moved in
- Fed the people
- Clothed them
- Gave them hope again

Ques- So why would so many Southern Baptists do this?
- Could it be because they are like Neheinah too?
- They remember the Lord?

Ques- So why is it those few do- but others- you can’t even get them to a worship service?
- How is it the only thing some do is nod their head r tip their hat to God- but never really live for him?
- How can they justify their faith?

Well, the truth is they don’t- and the time comes when it is evident for all to see

III. WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH- KEEP THE END IN VIEW (vs. 15)

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.

Ques- Have you ever stopped to consider what the story of your life is all about?
- What will people say about you when your days are through?

Nehemiah kept the end in view- and he was not distracted- even by those inside the walls of Jerusalem
- He came with an objective, godly view
- And he saw it through
- And that’s what saved the people- Nehemiah, a man of God- who came with a job to do

Conclusion
Tough times never last- they are a test- and yours are not the first, nor will they be the last
- But whatever God calls you to, he will see you through
- Tough times never last- but those who serve God always do

End of Sermon Prayer

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Disclaimer: I wish to express my gratitude to all the saints before me who are traveling the Narrow Way. Their love and generosity is reflected in my own humble efforts to prepare sermons for the body of Christ. Grace and Peace.