

Nehemiah Series Slide

Independence Day is on Saturday- so lets start with a quote from an American president.

Teddy Roosevelt- president from 1901- 1909

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

There is little use for the being whose tepid soul knows nothing of great and generous emotion, of the high pride, the stern belief, the lofty enthusiasm, of those who quell the storm and ride the thunder."- Theodore Roosevelt

Teddy Roosevelt is saying- There are people who take risks, lead even while afraid- in order to bring about the good...even though they may fail...and then there are the critics of those people.

Psalm 1 calls them scoffers that sit next to the road and cynically mock and criticize people who are giving effort to do the right thing- which is often the hard thing.

Notice that last description of the person in the arena- They Quell the Storm & Ride the Thunder.

We'll get to what that means soon enough- but thats a beautiful and poetic duality isn't it?

Here's another one about critics & scoffers- by French writer Victor Hugo- guy who wrote the novel- adapted into the popular musical- Les Miserables.

"You have enemies? Why, it is the story of every man who has done a great deed or created a new idea. It is the cloud which thunders around everything that shines. Fame must have enemies, as light must have gnats. Do not bother yourself about it Keep your mind serene as you keep your life clear."- Victor Hugo

Then- there is this very short punchy summary of these ideas.

"The only way to avoid haters is to do nothing, say nothing, and be nothing."- Elbert Hubbard

Now- Elbert Hubbard- was a late 19th early 20th century anarchist philosopher who started The Arts and Crafts movement in New York in 1910. He was the editor of magazine that mainly featured Satire and Whimsy- which sound like the names of 2 clowns.

I only submit to you this quote as a summary of Teddy Roosevelt and Victor Hugo's quote...not as an example of a life you should necessarily follow- however- you must absolutely now be curious about what this man of Satire, Whimsy and Arts and Crafts looked like. I was too.

Pic of Elbert Hubbard

Now- I need you to remember this look- Its going to come up again. And by the way- This is ELBERT HUBBARD- Not L. Ron Hubbard- the guy who started Scientology Celebrity Cult

Title Slide- "Quell the Storm & Ride the Thunder: How to Attempt Great Things for God in the Face of Opposition"- Nehemiah 4 & 6

Most of us- when we picture doing something great- we just picture the success. We rarely think about the opposition In fact- if we could have our wish- we would probably want everything we put our hands on to turn to gold. Everything to work out with no friction, no difficulty. No failure. No resistance.

But the only way to avoid failure...the only way to avoid haters- as our boy Elbert says- is to do nothing, say nothing, and be nothing.

Which is precisely where the people of Judah found themselves in the book of Nehemiah. They were supposed to rebuild and restore Jerusalem after a hundred years or so of exile in Babylon and then Persia. Instead- they went back...got discouraged...and got lazy.

And now Jerusalem- the home of the temple of God... looked more like a neglected trailer park with a bunch of weeds coming up around old cars up on concrete blocks in the yard....and there were opponents that liked it this way because they profited from it.

Listen-

Opposition is always a part of doing something that matters. Resistance and sabotage are always present where there is good leadership. Like Victor Hugo said- critics and cynical naysayers are the cloud that thunders around everything that's bright.

And that's why if you are going to do something that matters in the Kingdom of God- you have to learn how to Quell the storm and ride the thunder.

Today- we're looking at Chapter 4 & 6 of Nehemiah- because they contain a ton of Opposition and Sabotage- and they also show you Nehemiah-

...who in these chapters throws a saddle on the dark cloud of his cynical critics....and rides that Thunder all the way to the completion of the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Elbert Pic

Yee-haw!

But I feel like we need to update this pic a bit. And I can't think of anybody on our staff that would look better in this hat to represent Nehemiah for us than one of our City College residents- and worship leader- our own Tucker Wilson.

Tucker/Elbert Mashup Pic

Yippee Kai Yay, Brother Tucker.

Lets start by reading a chunk of Chapter 4- and then we'll get started in understanding the text and I'll bring in more of chapter 4 and 6 as we go.

Nehemiah 4:1-14

When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious. He mocked the Jews

2 before his colleagues and the powerful men of Samaria and said, "What are these pathetic Jews doing? Can they restore it by themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they ever finish it? Can they bring these burnt stones back to life from the mounds of rubble? " 3 Then Tobiah the Ammonite, who was beside him, said, "Indeed, even if a fox climbed up what they are building, he would break down their stone wall! "

4 Listen, our God, for we are despised. Make their insults return on their own heads and let them be taken as plunder to a land of captivity. 5 Do not cover their guilt or let their sin be erased from your sight, because they have angered the builders.

6 So we rebuilt the wall until the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had the will to keep working.

7 When Sanballat, Tobiah, and the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites heard that the repair to the walls of Jerusalem was progressing and that the gaps were being closed, they became furious. 8 They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and throw it into confusion. 9 So we prayed to our God and stationed a guard because of them day and night.

10 In Judah, it was said:

**The strength of the laborer fails,
since there is so much rubble.
We will never be able
to rebuild the wall.**

11 And our enemies said, "They won't realize it until we're among them and can kill them and stop the work." 12 When the Jews who lived nearby arrived, they

said to us time and again, “Everywhere you turn, they attack us.” 13 So I stationed people behind the lowest sections of the wall, at the vulnerable areas. I stationed them by families with their swords, spears, and bows. 14 After I made an inspection, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the great and awe-inspiring Lord, and fight for your countrymen, your sons and daughters, your wives and homes.”

Transition: First- I’m going to show you the nature of the critic- those that oppose the work of God- then i’m We’ll see how Nehemiah handles this opposition.

1) Where God is at work, there is always manipulative opposition.

First- recognize that there is no easy route in following the Lord’s calling on our lives.

When Jesus first began his ministry- he was immediately driven into the wilderness for 40 days and nights without food or water where he was tempted by Satan. And- those temptations were not threats. They were all extremely manipulative- including the devil himself quoting Scripture to try and convince Jesus that to disobey his Father was actually obeying his father.

And- to often to our shame- we talk about determining the will of God for our lives by finding “open doors”- which by that we typically mean a way that God has smoothed out a path for us- a path of least resistance. “If God didn’t want me to do this,”...we reason... “Why would he have made the path to this choice so easy?”...

Well- take a look at what the Apostle Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians...

1 Cor 16:8-9

But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 because a wide door for effective ministry has opened for me — yet many oppose me.

The WIDE OPEN DOOR- includes LOTS of OPPOSITION.

Ok- so before we take a look at Nehemiah’s manipulative critics- let me show you something that I’ve learned from an author named Edwin Friedman.

Intro Edwin Friedman Failure of Nerve.

INSTRUCTION: The following will stack on one slide one at a time under the Title

5 Characteristics of a Chronically Anxious People

1- Reactivity

There is no self-regulation of emotional reaction- everything becomes instinctual. A loss of playfulness. No joy. No ability to smile and enjoy one another.

"Do not take life too seriously. You will never get out of it alive."- Elbert Hubbard

Tucker pic

2- Herding

Everyone stoops to the most pathological and toxic voices. The maddest and loudest get the attention. Hello Social Media!

3- Blame Shifting

Placing blame instead of responsibility and ownership. Finger pointing instead of confession. This is really evident in the fall of Humanity in Gen 3- Man blames woman. Woman blames Serpent.

4- Quick-Fix Mentality

Anything that will make this easy...get us out of this situation quickly with the least amount of friction. Remember the Israelites in the wilderness. When they face adversity- they blame Moses and then what's the quick fix- Just let us go back to Egypt. instead of persevering and trusting God through the wilderness to the promised land.

5- Poorly Differentiated Leadership

Explain Differentiation.
Failure of Nerve- gives in

A whole system can be changed by a Non-Anxious presence. Someone who can Quell the Storm and Ride the Thunder. Someone who can keep their mind serene and life clear.

Ok Now, lets go through and see some of these tactics and how they play out.

4:1-3

When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious. He mocked the Jews

2 before his colleagues and the powerful men of Samaria and said, "What are these pathetic Jews doing? Can they restore it by themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they ever finish it? Can they bring these burnt stones back to life from the mounds of rubble? " 3 Then Tobiah the Ammonite, who was beside him, said, "Indeed, even if a fox climbed up what they are building, he would break down their stone wall! "

You can see them mocking, and herding- Get together a group of people and make another group look and sound like fools that no one should help or associate with. GET THE LOUDEST VOICE.

The hope is that he gets the Jews to react.

4:8;

Again- reactivity- They are furious...and herding- they all plot together...to bring confusion complete with blame shifting and more reactivity-

6:6-7

"Its reported (and by the way Geshem agrees- that you guys are rebelling. Aren't you afraid? When these rumors get back to the king- youre dead.

I have a quick fix- come and meet with me and lets settle this whole thing.

He's counting on Nehemiah having a Failure of Nerve and giving in.

4:10-11

We get a taste of the doubt and fear that starts to creep up.

"Oh man- maybe they're right. We're not strong enough. and this is dangerous. Its all a waste of time. We need to stop."

6:2 & 4

Distraction- Come on, lets talk about it. Lets have another meeting.
Really they wanted to kill him.

6:10 & 13

A trap- appealing to his self-preservation- Intimidation and fear

Back to 1)

All of their tactics appeal to people who just want to live in the grey life of no risk, no reward.

William Carey- Missionary to India. Faced incredible opposition from his peers when we he told them he believed God was calling him to go to India to spread the Gospel. He faced them boldly- and is famous for this phrase.

"Expect great things from God. Attempt great things for God."- William Carey

Starting with almost no money- and very little support- from 1800-1821- the work William Carey started had resulted in 1,407 baptisms. Not to mention the ongoing effect of the modern missions and church planting movement.

He kept his mind serene- and his life clear.
He quelled the storm- and rode the thunder.

Hang on- I think we might have a rare picture of William Carey.

Tucker pic

There it is- SAME ENERGY.

Transition: now lets see Nehemiah do this.

2) A Non-Anxious Leader Quells the Storm & Rides the Thunder.

I gotta tell ya- I almost made history here this morning- would have been my first point to ever just be a picture.

Anybody want to guess what a non-anxious leader that quells the storm and rides the thunder looks like?

Tucker Pic

Take a look at what Paul says- again in 1 Cor 16- same section of the letter he talks about a wide open door full of opposition.

1 Corinthians 16:13-14

13 Be alert, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong. 14 Do everything in love.

Be alert- thats a serene mind and Clear life.

Quell the storm- Do everything in love

Ride the thunder- be courageous be strong. Again- its reminding me of someone.

Tucker Pic

Back to 2)

Lets put a quick definition on at least what I mean when I say “Quell the Storm” and “Ride the Thunder”

A storm is a metaphor for something chaotic that brings about opposition to your mission.

So “Quelling the storm” is bringing calm, order, reassurance, humor, lightness, stability, and direction to a chaotic and potentially fearful situation.

Think: a teacher leading her students out of building during a fire.

to “Ride the Thunder” is to not back down from the mission in the face of adversity. Its to use the opposition against itself- producing courage and resolve in others.

Think: A half-time speech from a coach of a football team that is down by 3 touchdowns. He pulls out the bulletin board material.

4:14

After I made an inspection, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the great and awe-inspiring Lord, and fight for your countrymen, your sons and daughters, your wives and homes.”

Brings peace by Remembering the LORD.- This is a tactic.

You don’t rise to the occasion- you fall to the level of your training.

If you are going to REMEMBER the LORD- you have to know him first.

How much have you trained your eyes to look to God’s character and his love for you.

BIBLE READING

Sin doesn't own you.
Death can't stop you.
He is with us- Quell STORM
Fight- RIDE THUNDER

4:4-5

Listen, our God, for we are despised. Make their insults return on their own heads and let them be taken as plunder to a land of captivity. 5 Do not cover their guilt or let their sin be erased from your sight, because they have angered the builders.

He's saying- Lord bring your justice. Don't let them get away with wrongdoing.

RIDE THE THUNDER PRAYER

Using all they have said as judgment of themselves.

Where is your PRAYER LIFE?

4:9

So we prayed to our God and stationed a guard because of them day and night.
Prayer- quelling storm- like disciples going to Jesus.
Weapon in hand- Ride Thunder- Ready to act

It is a false dichotomy to Either PRAY or ACT. We do both.

4:18 - 20

Each of the builders had his sword strapped around his waist while he was building, and the one who sounded the ram's horn was beside me. 19 Then I said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, "The work is enormous and spread out, and we are separated far from one another along the wall. 20 Wherever you hear the sound of the ram's horn, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us! "

Quell the Storm- I got you protected- Our God will Fight For us.
Ride the Thunder- Lets stay about what God has called us to- Rally to help!

6:3

So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing important work and cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?"

This is keeping your mind serene and your life clear. Removing distractions.
to distraction- I'm doing important work. I can't come down.

Ultimate differentiation. I understand you're having an issue..but your fear is not mine.

Tucker Pic

6:8-9

8 Then I replied to him, “There is nothing to these rumors you are spreading; you are inventing them in your own mind.” 9 For they were all trying to intimidate us, saying, “They will drop their hands from the work, and it will never be finished.”

But now, my God, strengthen my hands.

Truth & prayer

Serene Mind- Clear Life- Can't Lose.

Tucker Pic

6:11 & 14

11 But I said, “Should a man like me run away? How can someone like me enter the temple and live? I will not go.”

My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat for what they have done, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the other prophets who wanted to intimidate me.

Should a man like me run away?

also humility to say I can't enter the temple. He shows their pride.

Leaves vengeance to God. No quick fix mentality.

Tucker Pic

6:15-16

15 The wall was completed in fifty-two days, on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul. 16 When all our enemies heard this, all the surrounding nations were intimidated and lost their confidence, for they realized that this task had been accomplished by our God.

Wall is finished- becomes a testimony to Gods work.

William Carey quote

Expect Great things from God. Attempt Great things for God.

Tucker Pic

I love the joy on the face of Tucker here. It reminds me of something.

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, 2 keeping our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

When we “Remember the Lord”- we have something that Nehemiah didn’t. We have how the Lord has fought for us.

On the cross- Jesus quelled the storm. Making peace by the blood of the cross. When he died- he quelled the storm of judgment against you.

Imagine a huge Tsunami coming at you. For all of your sin. When Jesus died on the cross- he opened up the ground and all of that storm was swallowed up- so nothing hits you.

Because of the cross- Sin doesn’t own me. And Death can’t stop me.

That is the truth we are to focus on in the storm.

Hebrews 12:3-4

3 For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, so that you won’t grow weary and give up. 4 In struggling against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood

Hebrews 12:7

7 Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline?

You are now children of God. So when suffering comes- you know it is just shaping you- making you stronger.

Devil starts with what you’ve done and tears down who you are.
Holy Spirit starts with what God has done, and builds up who you are.

Holy Spirit testifies we are children of God. He can’t touch you.

2 Thessalonians 3:3-5

But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. 4 We have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command. 5 May the Lord direct your hearts to God’s love and Christ’s endurance.

Prayer Counselors

Lords Supper