

**Opposition: The Reality of a Leader - Part 4**  
Nehemiah 6:1-19

**Introduction:** Jesus came to bring TRUTH to the world. He is the Word made flesh to dwell among man, and mankind knows **grace and truth** through Him, because He is full of **grace** and **truth** (John 1:14, 17). Jesus claimed to be the **way, the truth, and the life** (John 14:6) so that mankind could have access to God the Father through Him and no one else. He gave the message of freedom to those who believed in Him *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you **know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**"* (John 8:31-32). He offered truth not because it was convenient, easy, or because we were necessarily searching for it, but because it is what we NEEDED to move us from darkness to light, hopelessness to hope, and death to life. The truth that God would put on flesh and live like us to save us, the fact that God's wrath would be satisfied by punishing His own Son on the cross, and the fact that we can be saved by believing in Him and repenting of our sin WITHOUT DOING ANYTHING ourselves is the earth-shattering reality that angels rejoice in, we bank our life on, and the consummation of which the universe groans.

But truth is set in opposition to the brokenness of this world. This world was plunged into sin by means of a deceptive lie and has lived out that reality ever since. We are reminded as we anticipate Easter that Jesus not only exposed the lie of this world, but He was opposed by false accusation His entire ministry. In **John 8** we get a picture or overview of this type of opposition. When He told people that He was the **light of the world** and that by following Him one could have the **light of life**, the Pharisees responded by calling Him a liar (your testimony is not true) (John 8:12-13). We then see that there were **false narratives** about Jesus in the public realm - *"Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?"* (John 8:48). Far from backing down, Jesus made more truth claims: *If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death* (8:51), and *"truly truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."* (8:58). When the people heard this, their only response was to silence Him through violence, as they picked up stones to throw at Him (8:59). This was not the last time, as a few months later they would try to stone Him for claiming He and the Father were One (John 10:30-31). When they could stand Jesus no more, they would drum up **false witnesses to lie** to get Him convicted and put on the cross (Matt. 26:59-63).

Jesus addressed the **"why"** behind all of this opposition in John 8. There are **two main sources of opposition to truth:** **1)** When our eyes are blind to God, our eyes are blind to the truth - *"Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you **cannot** bear to hear my word. (8:43)...The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God. (8:47).* Until the people we interact with in the world have their hearts softened and eyes opened, they CANNOT understand the truth and will rail against it, and us. **2)** There is NO TRUTH in Satan, who is the father of lies - Satan is a murderer from the beginning and speaks lies out of his **character**, meaning he is by nature a liar (this is the exact opposite of why God does not lie because it goes against His nature - Heb. 6:17-18) Those who do not know God are under the influence of their father the devil and do the will of their father. In other words, lies are the operating system of the machinery of the devil.

False narrative. Lies. Deception. False accusation. Violent reaction to the truth. There is nothing new under the sun. This was true during Jesus' ministry. It is true today. And it was absolutely what Nehemiah faced in rebuilding the wall. This morning we will unpack not only the reality of the lies against us, but how we face them with **grace and truth** like our leader, Jesus Christ.

**When Opposition is Overcome by a Leaders Example** (5:14-19)

In chapter 5, the wealthy from among the nation, those with resources, were leveraging the poor who were committed to rebuilding the wall by withholding food, charging interest, and forcing the forfeiture of property or enslaving family members as payment. Nehemiah responded swiftly in anger but also in wisdom. He not only got a verbal commitment from the abusers but held them accountable to reverse their practices and refund what they had taken. This led him to recount how he acted as Governor for the 12 years he was stationed in Jerusalem.

### Leaders are Selfless When They Fear the Lord

- **He knew that he'd have to give an account for all things one day (19)**
- **He saw the people he lead as souls to care for, not those to further an agenda (18)** - this gave him **compassion** on the people rather than disdain
- **He knew true freedom was a willingness to give up freedom** - see **1 Cor. 9:15-18** - Paul gave up his freedom and rights for the sake of the gospel, making himself a slave to all that he might win more
- **He knew that changing a culture starts with the leader**

### When Opposition Uses Public Peer Pressure (5:1-4)

The wall was almost finished except for the doors and gates, and the enemies around were more than concerned, they were desperate (v1). Their tactics became more deceptive, dangerous, and aggressive.

#### Tactics of Peer Pressure Facing Peer Pressure

### When Opposition Uses False Accusation (5:5-14)

Desperation kicked up the opposition tactics to 11. They were done with the "Mr. Nice Guy" stuff, now the gloves were coming off as well as any semblance of decorum. They sent a **5th letter**, this time the "open" variety, one that would be known by the immediate community and even back to the King. They used **false accusation** as one of the last ditch efforts to stop the train that Nehemiah had going full speed. How do these tactics work?

#### Tactics of Creating a False Narrative

- **Narrative created by vague but multiple reports (6)** - This open letter represented "many" people as well as leading officials (Gesham also says it). These were not substantiated, but that does not matter in our culture (or any for that matter). If enough people say it, it must be true in our minds.
- **False accusation with a semblance of truth (6b-7)** - The public accusation was three fold: you intend to rebel, you want to be king, and you've set up prophets to validate and proclaim this. Obviously, if true, this would have been high handed sedition and would have forced King Artaxerxes to not simply remove Nehemiah's head from his body, but also knock down the wall that was now almost finished. With every false narrative there is enough truth to make it believable. It was true that the Jews were re-establishing worship in place given to them by God, anticipating a King that would come to lead them. But the intention of Nehemiah had nothing to do with rebellion or his own kingship.

In 1983, the German news magazine *Stern* was convinced they had come into possession of Adolph Hitler's lost diaries, which would have given light to the mind of a madman, exposing the interworking of

a Nazi regime that committed unimaginable atrocities. The story was that at the closing of the war, Hitler had his private possessions flown out of Berlin to a different location, including his personal diaries. One of these planes crashed along the way, preserving volumes within. A known forger named **Konrad Kujau** had apparently come into possession and was willing to sell at a price. Not only did Stern buy it, but **Newsweek and The Sunday Times** purchased these, even though it was found by simple tests these were not only forgeries, but terrible ones to boot. There was a desire for these to be real, enough people validated them, and millions were duped into believing these to be real. False narrative against believers works the same way. Enough people believe it and it **becomes truth in the public realm**.

- **Fear driven ultimatum given (7b)** - Once something is public, it does not easily come back. Much like toothpaste once its out of tube, false accusation accomplishes what it sets out to do whether it is substantiated or not. I remember **John MacArthur** shared in chapel that was not concerned about threats against his life or family, but his biggest concern would be **false accusation**, since that is a tactic that is fought in the public court, not in the realm of truth and reality. The enemies of Nehemiah knew this, and they basically said, "*Stop working or the King is going to hear about this!*" We need look no further than Joseph in Genesis 39 to find that false accusation works, though never counteracts God's purpose and goal in our life.

#### **Tactics of Using False Prophets**

A second deceptive tactic was the hiring of a false prophet (12). The enemies had hired someone from inside to betray, knowing that Nehemiah would listen (at least initially) to this man. Shemaiah the son of Delaiah (10) potentially was a priest (if his father was the same mentioned in 1 Chronicles 24:18), which means he would have had credibility. His message: "*Lets lock ourselves into the Temple where we will be safe, since I know they are coming to kill you.*" Notice that the possibility that they would come to kill Nehemiah was not shocking revelation, but the way that Shemaiah represented it was. The way he phrased his warning represented that this was a prophecy or revelation from God.

The tactic was to take Nehemiah down in two ways: One, if he had gone along with this, he would have violated the Law by entering the part of the Temple reserved for priests alone, and TWO, they could discredit his leadership by causing him to cower in fear, becoming the object of more taunts. Nehemiah saw through this false prophecy and refused to go along with it.

This tactic is nothing new. In **Matthew 7:15-21**, Jesus told His disciples to beware of **false prophets** who would be ravenous wolves dressed in sheep clothing (seemingly harmless but ultimately destructive). They would be known by their fruit and course of their life. Paul told the elders at the church of Ephesus that there would be wolves who came **into the church** and would speak twisted things and draw disciples away with them (Acts 20:30). We are reminded in **1 John 4:1** that **many false prophets** have gone into the world. They are the ones who deny Jesus Christ and can be uncovered by what they proclaim about Jesus. Today we see this very thing happening. We have a public narrative believed by the masses in our country that a child in the womb of its mother is not given and created by God in His image, but simply a mass of cells that can be aborted on demand with no consequences. This lie is so deep that even when presented with clear facts and visual substantiation, the lie is still clung to. We see the lie perpetuated in the church, that those who stand for the truth are unloving or bigoted or narrow or judgmental or mean. We hear others espousing a gospel that is somehow about us, about our comfort or wealth or material instead about a reconciled relationship with God. There is nothing new under the sun. So how do we stand firm in the midst of this inevitability?

#### **Standing Firm When the False is Flying**

How do we deal with the false accusations and narratives about us? Notice how Nehemiah responded to these:

1. **He responded to false accusations with the truth, but did not try to defend or argue** - Look at verse 8, where he makes a statement, "*No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.*" After making this statement, he did not address it anymore. Often the more we try to defend ourselves, the more the narrative continues. We stand in the truth and eventually the lie will be exposed or go away.

Look no further than Jesus. When He was in the midst of false testimony, He remained silent (Matt. 26:63). "***When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly.***" (1 Pet. 2:23). "*He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, He did not open His mouth.*" (Isaiah 53:7).

It's a natural reaction to want to defend ourselves, especially when the statements against us are false or not complete. But Jesus committed no sin and did not respond in kind, so He could stand in confidence. Nehemiah knew the truth and was willing to take the consequences. When we get into a tit-for-tat responsive game, the longer the narrative goes and grows. There is wisdom in keeping our mouths shut and allow those who spew lies to speak more and more, revealing their true character and nature. This takes confidence in the Lord that knows a **false witness will not go unpunished** (Prov. 19:5), that He HATES a lying tongue and one who stirs up discord among brothers (Prov. 6:16-19), and always acts justly.

2. **He prayed that God would strengthen him and deal with his accusers** - He needed God's help because ALL OF US STRUGGLE when we are attacked by what is false (9). But he also called for God to deal with those who were against him instead of trying to vindicate himself or to accuse his accusers. Leaders KNOW they will face false accusations, and it is a mark of an insecure leader that tries to defend himself or fire back to all those who would speak falsely against him. Fearing God means a leader can trust God will always do what is right and best in every situation.

3. **He stood by God's Word and Courage when he was threatened** - When there was a credible threat by a credible source, he had to lean on what he knew was true. First he said "*Should such a man run away?*" A leader stands firm in the midst of threat, and one that hides when it gets hard is no leader at all. Second, if he had gone into the Temple for security, he would have trusted structures instead of God, and would have been willing to violate the Law to save his own skin. He was convinced of the truth and this became a grid to think everything through. This is exactly what God told **Joshua** as he entered into the Promised Land: to meditate and do the Law of the Lord, and to be strong and courageous.

**Courage and conviction to the Word are intimately united and create an iron clad defense against the arrows of false accusation and advice.**

4. **He understood that God's purposes do not mean we won't face false accusation** - Perhaps one of the hardest realities to get our minds around, Nehemiah knew that even though God was with him and for him, it did not mean that these threats were not real, nor did they keep him from consequences.

Look back at Genesis 39. The story of Joseph illustrates this principle clearly. He was sold into slavery by his brothers, finding himself in a foreign nation alone and betrayed. But **the Lord was with Joseph** (39:2) so he had success in his owners house, blessing all that he did and in turn blessing the whole of Potiphar's house. We like this idea. He was mistreated by his brothers but the story is redeemable. But then he was accused by Potiphar's jealous and deceiving wife after he righteously withstood her advances. Instead of being rewarded for doing the right and honorable thing, she created a false narrative which put Joseph into prison, once again finding himself betrayed and alone. At this point of the story we could be asking "*what in the world is going on!?* *Why is Joseph being punished for doing what is right? Why is this false narrative winning, and why is the truth speaker facing the consequences?*" But as Joseph felt the sting of prison accommodations, he simultaneously knew the reality that **the Lord was still with him** (39:21), and continued to show His steadfast love to him. Joseph began to advance within the prison system, putting him in position to eventually become one of the most powerful men in Egypt, saving his family from famine and established the Jewish people as a burgeoning nation.

What do we glean from this? God's intentions supersede even what seems fair or just in this life. It means that some of us will face false accusation or the brunt of a false narrative, but that does not mean God's will is not being done. God not only uses suffering and trial to move us where He wants us to be, sometimes He refines us in the midst of **lies, falsehood, slander, and accusation**. Joseph did nothing wrong, and ended up in prison. Jesus did nothing wrong and ended up on a cross. We may do nothing wrong and end up losing a friendship, or reputation, or a job. But when we have confidence in the Lord and can stand blamelessly, we can accept it as God walking us through it.

**5. He needed a united heart to Fear the Lord** - "*Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.*" (Psalm 86:11). Here is where concepts collide. It is a clinging to truth that helps us walk in proper fear. But David also pointed out that our hearts can be divided, fearing God and fearing man, trusting ourselves and trusting Him, desiring to please ourselves and truly pleasing Him. It is our prayer not only to know and understand the LORD, but our heart desire to fear Him alone. This can only come through God's grace in our life, which means we are daily dependent on Him for grace and truth, and we seek Truth in Scripture since it reveals where truth is found, which is in the Person of Jesus Christ, who was full of grace and truth.

#### **When Fear Tactics Are Reversed** (5:15-16)

All the tactics failed, and the Wall was finished in **52 days**, an improbable and incredible feat, considering the tools and resources available. Upon completion, there was a **reversal of fear**:

*"And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us **were afraid** and fell greatly **in their own esteem**, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished **with the help of our God.**"*

The enemies were as devastated as they were deflated. Their strength was drained and their strength and resolution to fight was gone. Convictional leadership and the ability to stay the course not only got the job done, it put opposition in its place.

So we are left with the real question: "**Whom do we fear?**" Are we characterized by the fear of the Lord? Do we do all things, from work to entertainment, from resting to activity, from leading to following, in light of the fear of the Lord? If we are going to live fearlessly in this world of trouble, if we are going to fight for joy and hope, it all begins with a proper understanding that God is glorious, in control, and is good. We live in reverence of Him, knowing we will live with Him forever, knowing we

will account for all that we do, and knowing that He is working in and through us. In this world we will have trouble and tribulation, but Jesus has overcome the world!

After declaring that Jesus did not open His mouth when He was reviled and suffered, Peter gave the TRUTH REALITY that keeps us away from the wrong fear and clinging to what is real:

***"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and overseer of your souls."***

1 Peter 2:24-25