

### **Busy, Busy, Busy**

#### **Nehemiah 4:21-23**

Nehemiah 4:21-23 - *“So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared.”* <sup>22</sup> *At the same time I also said to the people, “Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day.”* <sup>23</sup> *So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing.”*

#### **Background Notes**

Here we have a summary of Nehemiah’s continued efforts to complete the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem. Parts of Nehemiah’s walls can be seen in the excavations of the Old City of Jerusalem. They go all the way back to the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC!

The rebuilding of the wall around ancient Jerusalem was a tremendous accomplishment, and it required a lot of hard work. There was the work of cleaning away the rubble of the old wall, the job of carrying heavy blocks of stone to the building site, and then the labor-intensive process of placing the blocks at ever-increasing heights. Hard work!

Not only was there a lot of hard work, there was also a lot of opposition. The people of the surrounding Persian provinces did everything they could to stop the wall building, because they didn’t want to see Jerusalem become a strong city. Nehemiah weathered the storms of ridicule and the threats of attack, and he directed the rebuilding of the wall with godly spiritual leadership.

In previous Talks we’ve mentioned that the book of Nehemiah contains valuable lessons for spiritual leadership, as well as principles for building strong spiritual walls. Building “spiritual walls”? What does that mean? It means building a strong Christian life and testimony. God wants us to be strong and stable Christians - Christians who know the Word and can defend the faith; Christians who stand true and help others; Christians who are not automatic basket cases when trouble comes their way. Whether as individuals, as families, or as churches, or as ministries - the Lord wants to see strong spiritual walls.

In chapter 4 we see Nehemiah’s continuing efforts to complete the wall against the backdrop of continued opposition. All the workers worked more than an eight-hour day – *“from daybreak until the stars appeared”* (v21)! The men mentioned in verse 22 would have been those who lived outside of Jerusalem. Rather than to go to their homes after the working day was over, they were asked to stay inside Jerusalem so they could help guard the walls at night.

The people mentioned in verse 23 were Nehemiah's close associates – Nehemiah himself, his relatives, his personal servants, and his personal guards. Remember, Nehemiah was the appointed governor under the Persian king, Artaxerxes I, so the "guard" would have been Persian soldiers who came as guards for Governor Nehemiah. Nehemiah 2:9 says that the king sent captains of the army and horsemen to accompany Nehemiah to Jerusalem. So Nehemiah's personal guards were working on the wall as well!

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Unity is essential to wall building.

Remember - we're talking about building spiritual walls, and unity is essential to wall building. Ephesians 4:3 says, *"Endeavor to keep the unity in the bond of peace."* We've seen this truth in previous Talks, but it certainly comes out loudly and clearly at the end of Nehemiah 4.

In verse 21 we see that half of the people were working on the wall, and half of the people were standing guard. That takes a lot of unity. Suppose those who were building complained because of the hard labor, and said they would rather stand guard? Or suppose the ones who were standing guard were bored by just standing there, and wanted to build? They had to be **unified in purpose** to get the job done!

Which job was more important? Laying the blocks of stone - or standing guard? Both jobs were important for getting the job done! Unity of purpose!

When I come upon highway construction, I sometimes envision myself as part of the work crew. I wonder which of the jobs I'd like to do. How about the job of standing there, holding a sign to direct traffic? Or the job of a guy covered in dust operating a jackhammer? Which job is more important? Not which job is more exciting or more boring - but which is more important to getting the construction done?

Of course we know that all the jobs are important. Suppose the person holding the sign were to mess things up? There would be nasty accidents. Or suppose the guy with the jackhammer didn't do his job well? The new road surface would break down quickly.

This certainly illustrates unity of purpose. Unity is essential to road construction - and wall building!

### 2. Spiritual leaders must set the example.

Nehemiah is a great example of an excellent leader - all the way through. Notice that Nehemiah didn't direct the wall building from an air-conditioned office or a remote location. He wasn't a bureaucrat. He directed the wall building from

the worksite! Of course this doesn't mean that there will never be useful desk jobs in the work of the Lord. It's the spiritual picture that's emerging here. The principle that's being taught here is that spiritual leaders must set the example.

Nehemiah said, *“So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing”* (v23). Nehemiah himself, his family, and his close associates were totally involved in the work - setting the example. In verse 16 we read, *“So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah.”*

The Bible certainly teaches this doctrinal point, that spiritual leaders must set the example. Look at the qualifications for church leaders that are given in 1 Timothy 3. The spiritual and moral qualifications for elders and deacons and church leaders are not only given as requirements for spiritual leadership - they're actually qualities that every Christian should follow. Spiritual leaders are to model those godly qualities and set the example.

If you're a spiritual leader, or if you would like to be a spiritual leader, you've got to set a godly example. You've got to be more than “just a Christian”! Spiritual leaders must set the example.

## Practical Applications

### 1. How is your attitude when you are called upon to do double duty?

In verse 22, the men who were asked to stay in Jerusalem at night probably lived outside the city. They came in by day to help build the wall. Nehemiah asked them to stay on after work and help to guard the wall at night (v22). They didn't get to go home at night. The workers who lived in Jerusalem got to sleep in their own beds, but these guys had to camp out at the wall so that they could guard it!

They worked on the wall during the day, and they guarded the wall at night. Double duty! But we don't hear about any complaining. What a great attitude they had! They knew the principle of Colossians 3:23, *“Whatever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord.”*

1 Timothy 5:17 says, *“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in word and doctrine.”* Teaching elders are to be given “double honor,” because they're doing double duty! There are many Christian elders who do double duty without complaining, and the Bible says we should recognize and give credit to our leaders who do double duty.

What's your attitude when you're called upon to do double duty? What's my attitude? We never know when we might be called on to go the extra mile, and work longer hours than anyone else. Let's follow the example and the model that was set for us by those men in verse 22!

## **2. Expect to be busy in the work of the Lord.**

Notice verse 23 once again. Nehemiah said, *“So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing.”* Have you ever been *that* busy? Have you ever been so busy that you had no time to even take a shower?!

Some of translations differ here. Some mention washing. Some say going for water or *“to the water with weapons at the side.”* Remember when Gideon’s men were being tested, and they took their weapons even when they went to get a drink of water? They didn’t even have time to take a leisurely drink.

We don’t know exactly which is the more accurate translation, but there’s no doubt that Nehemiah and his workers were very busy building the wall, as well as being ready to fight, if necessary. There was no time for them to kick back and relax!

We can expect to be very busy at times in the work of the Lord. In Mark 6:31 says that the Lord Jesus and His disciples were so busy that they even didn’t have time to eat! That’s when the Lord took them aside for some rest and relaxation. But before long the crowds of people caught up with them, and soon they were involved in feeding the five thousand people who had gathered to hear the Lord!

There is a time and place for rest and relaxation in the Christian life, but believe me - it won’t last long! You’re going to be busy when you’re involved in the work of the Lord! The Lord will give you all the strength you need for what He has called you to do, but you can expect to be busy in the work of the Lord.