

## **Work Worth Doing**

Nehemiah 3-4

Minister Theo Ma

October 18, 2020

In Nehemiah, we've examined the relationship between work and faith. We learned that we shouldn't just be idle waiting for God, but also that our work must be motivated by faith and empowered by God. But sometimes we can feel discouraged in our work. Recently I've been feeling discouraged about my ministry. It's hard to see the impact of youth ministry when we are unable to meet in person. The work can feel worthless. Likewise for those who try to witness to co-workers, friends, and families it can be discouraging when they continually reject the gospel or when they focus on your mistakes rather than on your efforts to represent Jesus. For all of us who struggle with sin, it can be disappointing when we keep failing. For all of you who are discouraged doing God's work, today's passage is for you.

In Nehemiah 3-4 we see 3 realities of working faith. The first is that the work will not be without obstacles. God opened the door for this work by changing the king's mind to allow the rebuilding of the wall. But opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem arose in chapter 2, and again in today's passage. These are Israel's historical enemies who occupied the land during the exile. Their trash talk in 4:1-3 highlights the obstacles Israel faced. First in v. 2 Sanballat says that they are feeble like a withering plant, that they're hopeless. This is because those who were doing the work were not professional builders but amateurs, including priests, perfumers, and even daughters. Sanballat also asks if they will finish in a day, which implies that it will actually take forever. The work is daunting and overwhelming. Tobiah says in v.3 that even a fox can scale and breach the wall, making them feel that their work is worthless, that it won't serve its purpose of defending Jerusalem. However, as the wall actually progresses, the opposition becomes angry in vv. 7-8. Now a fourth group, the Ashdodites join the opposition. Jerusalem is now surrounded by enemy groups on all four sides, isolated, with no allies. In vv. 10-12 the Israelites are beginning to become burned out and discouraged about the scale of the project, and ten times their enemies have started attacking the villages outside Jerusalem. There is too much to do and they are not safe. These are all relatable obstacles for us, and they were experienced by others in the Bible, like Moses facing Egypt and the rebellious Israel, David facing persecution from Saul, and Jeremiah pleading with Israel to repent and witnessing their exile when they refused. We can feel that in our work of faith we are hopelessly weak, we will never finish, we

are overwhelmed, we are tired, our work is worthless, we are alone, and we are insecure. We are powerless to change the hearts of those we witness to. And our struggle with sin will never end until Jesus returns. But we find comfort in knowing that this is not outside of God's plan, and that all of God's people experience this together. We are not alone. God is with us and is in control.

This leads to the second reality, that working faith must look to God. Let God reset our perspective. Acknowledge obstacles, but put your faith and hope in God. This changed perspective realizes that God is strong enough (v. 14). Here Nehemiah uses a title of God that expresses His greatness and awesomeness (see Deuteronomy 7:21). He is all powerful (Daniel 7:9-14). We are weak but He is strong. He is capable of causing our work to have effect. We shouldn't fear others because God is the one who is to be feared, and He is on our side (v. 20). God fights for us. He not only can fight for us but will fight for us. He is worthy of our trust. We have even more confidence that God is trustworthy because He proved it by giving up His Son for us (Romans 8:32). Why would He withhold anything else, having given what is most precious? And from Philippians 2:13 we also know that God is working in us already. He gives us strength to do His work. So let us not despair. Our obstacles may be great, but God who works in us is greater.

The final reality about our work is that it will be remembered. In chapter 3 we see that all those who helped rebuild the wall are forever recorded in Scripture. The faithfulness of the priests, officials, craftsmen, and even daughters are remembered. But so is the unfaithfulness of those who thought the work was beneath them (3:5). Although building a wall is not inherently spiritual, Israelites made it spiritual through working by faith. Likewise our work, chores, and routine may not seem spiritual, but it becomes spiritual when we seek to do God's will in everything, when we are motivated by faith to do everything the way He wants us to, for His glory. And God will remember our work of faith, even as it is done in secret (Hebrews 6:10; Matthew 6). Let us take courage when facing inevitable obstacles, for they force us to rely on God, who is more powerful, who works in us and for us, and who remembers our work.