



“Back to Back”

Fourth Sunday of Lent, March 14, 2021

“We are using this season of Lent to envision God’s mission for Highland on the other side of the Coronavirus Exile”

Four Enemies

Sanballat the Horonite: a Samaritan leader (north)

Tobiah the Ammonite: (east)

Geshem the Arab: (possibly King of Kedar, to the south)

The Ashdodites (see 4:7: to the west)

Surrounded!

Four Incidents of Opposition

Nehemiah 4:1-6: Mockery & discouragement

Nehemiah 4:7-8, 11: Literal attack & confusion

Nehemiah 6:2-7: Treachery & rumor mongering

Nehemiah 6:10-13: Deception & enticement

Four Principles for Highland Covenant

God uses small things to do big things (in light of incident 1)

Ready to rally to the crisis (in light of incident 2)

Keep to Your Priorities (in light of incident 3)

No short cuts as ends do not justify means! (in light of incident 4)

Overcoming: 6:15-19

52 Days to build the walls!

Four Principles for Highland Covenant (Expanded Notes)

1. God uses small things to do big things

- Do not despise the day of small things (Zechariah 4:10)
- David the unlikely runt
- The least shall be the greatest
- The mustard seed principle
- God uses things that are not to nullify the things that are
- When we are weak, then we are strong
- 5 loaves and 2 fish Jesus uses to feed the multitude
- In the kingdom-of-God physics, size is irrelevant
- In order to show God off as the PRIMARY actor: see Nehemiah 6:16
- Let us not look at our size compared to large churches
- Let us not create a vision motivated by a desire to look important
- Let us be faithful to what is set before us and let God manage results

2. Ready to rally to the crisis

- Nehemiah respond to the threat of real attack by:
 - Set armed guards in low and open places: 4:13
 - Half worked while half stood guard: 4:16
 - Workers carried swords: 4:17,18
 - Rally to the sound of the trumpet: 4:20
- Limited common mission, everyone with a home mission
- Means we are disbursed in much of our kingdom labor
- Togetherness means we are not doing everything together but we ready at a moments notice to drop our things and rush to another's aid in a time of critical need where more are needed,
- Like preparing Kay's condo
- This is part of of our Love One Another charter
- It is the idea of having one another's backs
- The image of a small band under attack, back to back, everyone facing outward to the common enemy

3. Prioritize Your Work

- Last week I called the church to prioritize common ministry commitments for the sake of protecting life balance
- Nehemiah models discernment in chapter 6, refusing 4 requests to meet in the plain of Ono.
- His rationale: why should the work stop and I leave it and come down to you?
- Many are the demands that come our way. All are good. Let not the good be the enemy of the best.
- A lack of clear focus could have led Nehemiah to yield to the pressure, which in turns out in our narrative was a trap to harm him. Metaphorically we might think all such lack of discipline in clarity and priorities could likewise serve as a trap.
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4. No Illicit Shortcuts! Good Ends Do Not Justify Bad Means!

- The greater danger of the enemy within. Compromise, disobedience-these lead to collapse faster than outside pressures, which often only serve to strengthen and to focus.
- What is tempting is to consider short cuts in the name of good ends, either motivated by zeal or by fear
- Nehemiah's safety was very important for the success of the mission, but to disobey God by going into a place in the temple reserved only for priests would ultimately display a lack of trust in God, an attitude that says that we know how and when to set aside God's rules and guidelines
- We would rather have a specific mission fail if by its success we would be required to do something unethical or against our conscience.