

Spiritual Sword Fighting Nehemiah 6:1-16

One of my discoveries through this pandemic has been that my youngest daughter loves films with lots of sword fighting.

One of the traditions that we started in the first lockdown was family cinema time. We've watched all sorts of family friendly films. But if there is one genre that is designed to get my 6 year old laughing, it's a film set in the 18th century with big costumes and dramatic sword fighting.

My plan today is to teach us **three spiritual sword fighting techniques**.

Sadly, I have no abilities to teach you actual sword fighting. I am a 21st century man. I know how to drive a car and reset the WiFi. But don't ask me to survive in the wild where there isn't a Tesco Express or fight in a duel with a sharp sword. I wouldn't make it.

However, I **can** teach you some spiritual sword fighting techniques that will enable us to be more effective in the most significant battle that we will ever engage in.

What am I talking about? This is the great mission of Jesus Christ to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

If you've been listening for the last two weeks you'll know that both sermons have focused on gospel opposition. We've seen how Satan stirs up trouble from **both** outside and inside the church to stop us from holding out God's word.

Maybe you're thinking, surely it's time for a change? Surely after two weeks on the tactics of the enemy we should move on to something else?

Well here's the thing. God has deliberately ordered the book of Nehemiah with **three** consecutive chapters on **building push back**.

He's done this to give us the right expectations for our participation in gospel ministry.

What will it be like to be involved in growing the church?

- It will feel more like a fighting in a **battle** than lying on a **beach**.
- The battle will be **ongoing** as our enemy hates what we are doing. He is determined to do whatever it takes stop us spreading the message of Jesus to a needy world.

With this in mind let me show you some techniques to help us succeed in the battle.

First, how to fight distraction (Vs 1-4)

Look at verse 1. **Read verses 1 to 2a.**

Despite the previous opposition chapters 4 and 5, building progress has been made.

In fact, the wall is built. Only the doors are left to fit.

As a response, Nehemiah receives a nice message from his enemies.

Let's meet and chat. Why not pop over for the day and let's enjoy a catch up over coffee and cake?

How would you have responded to such an invitation?

Maybe this is the end of the opposition? Maybe this is the opportunity to talk about a truce? And even if it isn't surely it's worth the time to at least talk?

Listen to how Nehemiah responds. Verse 2. **Read verses 2b-4.**

According to Ecclesiastes chapter 3, there is a time to speak and a time to be silent.

Nehemiah discerns this is not a moment for conversation.

It is a time for him to keep his distance so that two things can happen.

- His life can be **preserved**
- His **priorities** can be maintained

He knows they are trying to trap him because they want him dead. So there is no way he is heading off for a quiet chat. He doesn't want a quick end. So he says "No, I'm not coming."

Nehemiah **also** knows he has limited time. He only has 24 hours in a day and there are important things that must be done. Therefore, he must use it well so his priorities will be maintained.

There is the danger of distraction.

I'm more and more convinced that we Christians need to rethink how we use our time.

Perhaps when we are younger we have the illusion that time is limitless. We imagine that our lives can be filled with an unending list of activities we do.

At some point we realise we can't.

There are all sorts of tools that help us squeeze more activities into the day. We can get electronic diaries and task management systems and we might even get quicker at doing things that used to take us ages. But even with all the best efficiency apps available, we are still limited to 24 hours a day.

It's not just our daily hours. We are limited in our years. None of us are invincible. The clock is ticking. We will never be able to read all the books in a library or watch everything on Netflix.

This means we all have to start saying no.

The key question is, how do we work out what should get our yes and what should get our no?

It all depends on your view of eternity.

Is there life after death? If no, then we essentially have one brief life so we had better pack it full of whatever brings us greatest joy.

This is the dominant view in Western culture. Whatever works for you, get on and do it before it's too late.

According to the Bible, this view of the future is dangerously mistaken.

God's Word says eternity is real. All of us will live forever. Some in a New Creation and some in hell. Only faith in Jesus can give us a happy future.

It is this vision of the future that should impact our daily, monthly and yearly decisions.

- **I don't have to pack in everything now**

Life is not about getting the most experiences in a row.

- **I want as many people as possible to be with me.**

This means I want to get involved and invested in gospel ministry.

As we've seen our enemy doesn't want us to be doing this.

One of the ways he likes to stop us is by distracting us from the great works of gospel sharing.

Satan sometimes distracts us with bad things. But you know something, his favourite weapon is to distract us with good things. Activities that aren't bad in themselves. However, they just aren't as important as being involved in the Word of God being shared.

Someone once put it like this, **"The good is the enemy of the best."**

You may be someone who feels overwhelmed by lots of good activities. Maybe it's work. Maybe it's planning. Maybe it's a course. Maybe it's a sport. Maybe it's a house project. Maybe it's driving your kids from activity to activity.

If this is you then let me plead with you, don't put your spiritual life on hold until the cloud of busyness passes over. You won't be able to do everything for your spiritual life that you might want to do. But you can do something. Make decisions now that show you believe in eternal life. **Make these decisions for yourself and for your kids if you have them.**

Many of us are **driven by the fear of missing out**. What do we fear missing out on? I want us to be driven by the fear of missing out on knowing God and being with him forever in his eternal kingdom.

All of us are hoping for the easing of lockdown restrictions. What are you most keen to do when life is safer and there are more freedoms? **How far up your list is meeting with God's people on a regular basis to share fellowship and friendship? Or serving with them?**

Put the big rocks in first illustration.

Be encouraged if this is what you are doing.

Nehemiah said no. He did this so he could stay focused on the great work of God.

We must follow his example. We must fight distraction.

Second, how to fight lies (Vs 5-9)

Listen to what Nehemiah's enemies try next. Verse 5. **Read verses 5 to 7.**

Did you notice that they sent **an unsealed letter** to Nehemiah?

This is a bit like sending a postcard from holiday. Everyone who wants to can read it on the way.

The enemies were deliberately hoping to spread gossip and lies about what Nehemiah was doing.

I love his response in verses 8 and 9. He comes across **as a straight talking Yorkshireman**. Listen to this. **Read verses 8 and 9.**

What's his response to the lies? He tells the truth and he prays.

Safeguarding is important in our church. It's to protect everybody. Both those who are led and the leaders themselves.

We often hear the phrase, "There is no smoke without fire."

When applied to Christian leadership it often means that if someone is accused of something then there must be something in it.

There might be but not necessarily. The reason is because we have an enemy who tells lies in order to stop gospel work. It would be utterly naïve not to anticipate this.

Let's pray for our safeguarding at Trinity Church.

At first sight it may not seem like a gospel issue but healthy safeguarding is critical for the gospel is to continue to advance.

We must fight lies.

Third, how to fight sin (Vs 10-16)

As we finish, let me show you one more popular tactic used by Satan to derail God's building project.

Look at verse 10. **Read verses 10 to 13.**

Nehemiah took the initiative to visit one of the people who had a reputation of speaking God's word. But to his horror he discovered that Shemaiah was on the payroll of his enemies. They had bought him out. They paid him money to say things that would lead Nehemiah to sin and so discredit him from leadership.

Shemaiah **fastened** onto Nehemiah's fear and tried to make him rush inside the temple for protection.

According to God's Word, only the priests should be inside so if Nehemiah went through with this plan then he would be disqualified from leadership. The building project would then be in ruins.

Satan still employs this tactic today. Sadly, the Christian scene is littered with leaders who have fallen into sin and discredited their ministry. Ravi Zacharias is a recent example. Of course this doesn't stop Jesus building his church. But it usually stops or seriously hinders specific gospel work.

One of the ways we fight the temptation to sin is through having the **courage** to do what God has revealed in the Bible.

What is courage? Here is a quote I find helpful from a Christian writer called J.I Packer. He says, "Courage is not an absence of fear, but a resolute doing of what is known to be right however much we feel afraid, disturbed or hurt."

This ability doesn't come from ourselves. No, it comes from God above as he works in us to strengthen us to do what is right.

In Conclusion

How is your spiritual sword fighting?

Our enemy is real but our God has given us all the resources we need. He will certainly attack us with distraction, lies and sin. But God has taught us how to fight.

And God will build his church.

Look at verse 15. After all the opposition of three consecutive chapters, what are we told? **Read verses 15 and 16.**

Let's pray.