

W369_Nehemiah_4.mp3

[00:00:02] This is a recording made in the Chapel of the Open Book and is number four of the series of studies in the book of Nehemiah. It is our custom at this meeting to read a portion of scripture together. So those of you who are listening, if you care to switch off for a little while, we shall be reading together. Second Epistle of Peter chapters one and two. It's possible that we felt as we read those dreadful passages that it wasn't very edifying for any of us. But you see, if you're always picking out the comforting passages of scripture and never allowing this rough edge sometimes to come up against your heart, mind and conscience, you'll be a little bit unbalanced. So you've only got to think about the days in which you live to realise that, as Peter said, in the next chapter. The second epistle I've written unto you because the day is coming when there shall be mockers, when there shall be denying, and he's urging them to stand fast and to hold fast to the truth and not be asleep, but be very, very conscious that they are still be the fan ballots and the Tobias and the Geese hens and all the others that we've seen in Nehemiah out to do the selfsame thing to cause the work of God to cease. Will you go back to the thought of Nehemiah? What was happening was he was building a wall and Ezra came along afterwards and built a temple.

[00:01:31] Now, in the epistle to the Ephesians, we are told that we are a part of a temple that God is building. And in Ephesians four he gives us the unity of the spirit, which is a wall around it, to protect its doctrines. So you see, without a great stretch of imagination, we can still transplant Nehemiah into the present period and our own selves and say, just as the Maya had these opponents, these who mocked at him, those who sought to lead him astray into other departments. So we shall have to be on our guard all the time. And we, if we are keeping the unity of the spirit, are building a wall. And the temple is the picture of the church of the one body, which is the truth, the sacred truth that we are being called upon to maintain. Now, when we go back to the book of Nehemiah, don't go for a minute. We are going to see what reaction took place in Nehemiah's mind and works with regard to this opposition that was growing so strongly. But before we do that, let's continue in the New Testament with regard to a few more passages. What about this question of fighting? Because you see, the builders were become the Nehemiah. And they were divided. The the people were divided into two now. Son was put on guard with swords and spears. Others went on with the work. With proud, you know, the speaking with sword and trowel.

[00:03:14] Well, now, of course, we may bring out all sorts of scriptures and apparently in one measure, put them against each other. You turn to somebody or other cheek. Well, that doesn't sound very much like a military action. The scripture says you are to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ. The scripture says, fight the good fight of faith. Paul again says, I have fought a good fight. But, he adds, I finished my course. I've kept the faith. So you see, the fight is the fight of faith. Uh, just exactly how far the word fight is. A true translation may be a matter of consideration. The word used is not usually a military word at all. It's the agonistic word. The word that gives us our English word agony and has to do with the contests, rather, in the Greek sports than a military expedition. Nevertheless, the emphasis is that we are not really to pray that we are to watch. And we are not ready to give the other cheek, but we got to resolutely stand fast and hold fast the faithful word against all comers. It's not so much going out into a military campaign, but let me quote Ephesians chapter six. There's the whole armour of God given. And then when it's all portrayed that you may be able to stand and withstand in the evil day. To stand and withstand. You're on guard all the time. Nehemiah wasn't instructed to go out and and try to capture the city of Samaria.

[00:04:55] He was told to safeguard the building of the wall and the temple that was coming. And that is, I think, a lesson that we do well to remember. While we do not go out and raid the other people, we will not allow them to remove one stone from the wall that God has given to us. Coming back to the figure of the unity of the Spirit, we have a sevenfold unity to keep. And we are not allowed, by the grace of God to say, well, one of them is a bit controversial. Perhaps we'll won't say anything about that. That's letting the enemy in. So we've got now this spirit that we want to seek by the grace of God, that while we do not go out and interfere with these other people. We do stand resolutely for the truth that God has entrusted, and there shall be no compromise. There should be no letting down. There should be standing vigilantly until at last you remember it says, And the wall was built and met on both ends. And they could put the gates up and the bolts and the locks and so on. Well, there are many other passages that come to your mind. I got a note here that when the Armour of God is given in the epistle to the Ephesians, it wasn't that we should have a pageant or walk about dressed up in armour. There's a sword of the spirit.

[00:06:17] And you see how our savior used it. When he was tempted to the devil three times. As these tempt came to Nehemiah, he used the Sword of the Spirit to repel that temptation. Just saying it is written and the second time it is written again and the third time it is written again. So that is the way in which in some measure we are to use this lesson, the Old Testament and its practice. If you will, now. Oh, there's one passage that I think we perhaps ought to include, and that is two Corinthians chapter ten, verse four. Two Corinthians Chapter ten, verse four. He says, for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. So he was using the figure of the day in which he lived. But he says they're not carnal. So with that in mind, we turn to Ephesians, which I've only partly quoted to notice what he says there with regard to the ones with whom we are in conflict. With whom do we fight? Or with whom is this contest against? Ephesians six. Verse 12, for we wrestle not against flesh and blood. For flesh and blood is the is the New Testament way of speaking of mankind. We have no conflict with mankind. They may have a conflict with us, but we do not seek it with them. But we do have a spiritual foe and our blessings are all spiritual blessings.

[00:08:00] They are destined to be enjoyed in heavenly places. And where our inheritance is there we will find our foes, as we shall notice in a minute in the Old Testament. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness, of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high or heavenly places. So we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. But we do have spiritual thrones. And those principalities and powers are said to be beneath the seat of the church of the one body beneath the feet of the Ascended Christ. And they are the ones that are our particular adversaries. And then again, if you will turn to the epistle of Jude, which immediately follows the epistles of John, you will find that he's traversing very much the same as the second Peter. But he puts together two statements, which I think we can include as we are trying to get some little idea of Nehemiah chapter four. He says in verse three of Jude. Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, he doesn't mean common in a modern sense. It means a salvation that belongs to all God's people. It was needful for me to write unto you and to exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. So we are urged to contained, but we are warned not to be contentious. I think we can see the difference, can't we? We earnestly

contend we stand against all comers with regard to the faith which has been entrusted to us.

[00:09:47] That is the element of being armed in the days of Nehemiah. Now we turn to the other end of Jude and we see, he says there. Verse 20. But ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith. So there is fighting and building. That is contending for the faith that is building up in the faith. And the two go together in nearly the sword and the trowel, so that in the New Testament, as well as in the old, we have very much the same antagonism and very much the same sort of exhortation. And looking again at Jude. It says in verse four, for there are certain men crept in unawares, crept in unawares. And if you will turn to two Timothy chapter three six, you'll see the word is used in the epistle that belongs to our own selves. Two. Timothy Chapter three, verse six. For this sort, are they which creep into houses. Creep into houses. They creep in unawares. Now, it's rather strange to realize that this word means to dress up. Cause it does mean to creep in. That's why they dress up. But it really means to dress up. And does that immediately make you think of the passage in the book of the Revelation where it says in chapter 13, verse 11. And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth.

[00:11:30] And he had two horns like a lamb. And he spake like a dragon. See there's the attempt to disguise the dressing up. And the word is used in the prophet Zechariah of putting on a prophetic dress to deceive. So then we also have 1 or 2 references I'd like to turn to before we go back to the abaya. Bring those with us in the Acts of the Apostles. Chapter 20. Chapter 20. The apostle is saying goodbye to the believers in Ephesus. A sad moment. An end of a ministry has come. He only knows now that in front of him prison and afflictions await him. But he says in verse 24, None of these things move me. Count on my life dear unto myself so that I might finish my course with joy. And it's good to know that in two Timothy four, he says, I have finished my course. Henceforth, the crown. So here's the beginning of the Ministry of Paul. The second Ministry of Paul on that note. And two Timothy four is the end of it on the same note. That's encouraging, isn't it? In spite of all the opposition of the world, the flesh and the devil that made the burden of the apostle almost unbearable. But now notice a little bit what he says in verse 28. Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with his own blood.

[00:13:10] A very wonderful statement that needs a good deal of careful handling. But Solomon Indeed. But do notice this. He stresses that the equipment of the church to withstand all the deceit and all the aggression is to be well fed with the word of God. That's one thing for I know this, that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you not sparing the flock. Also, he is the saddest part of all. Paul himself told the Ephesians that of their own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them. That's one of the saddest things you can think that nearly every work that's been commenced by men of God have gradually come to this terrible end. Don't be downhearted about it. God has written it to warn us and to encourage us nevertheless to put our trust in him, but to be watchful, not to take it too, too for granted that because we have stood for 50 years for this truth, that we've got a big set of books and they're being read by many people that we can let down now. And it's quite easy. We're all right, you know. That's opening the door to the enemy. You'll take the advantage at once. And so we could go on with these many passages in the New Testament. There shall be mockers. In the last time they ever sang Barrett and his crew mocking these feeble Jews, as you may remember.

[00:14:40] So shall we now turn as I think perhaps it's wise we should. Otherwise our time will be quite gone with this big introduction to Nehemiah chapter four and see his response to the attacks of these men. In our last study, we were looking at a whole list of names in chapter three of those people who turned to and helped in the building of the wall. And we found that instead of this being a dull list of names, it began to live very much as we traced out their various activities. Well, now it goes on to say in Chapter four, but it came to pass that when Sam Dunn had heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth and took great indignation and mocked the Jews. And he spake before his brethren and the army of the. Of Samaria and said, what do these feeble Jews. Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burnt? And then Tobiah, the Ammonite, who was a very slavish sort of person, he echoed his master's words and said even that which they build if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall. And you see there are some folks who can't stand that mockery breaks them down. Well, you've got to be prepared for it. You've got to be prepared to find some of your best distorted.

[00:16:08] I don't know whether you know Kipling's if. But there's a bit that appeals to me. I can't quote it. I don't suppose. Exactly. If you could hear the truth. If you can hear the truth. You've given you life, boy. Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools and then stoop to build again with worn out tools. That's only Kipling. Talking about the ordinary man. As a tester, isn't it? That's what's happening. And so he goes on presently in verse. Second, but it came to pass that when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabians and the Ammonites and the astronauts know they're getting a bit more around them, they're increasing in their number. Heard of the walls of Jerusalem were made up and that the breaches began to be stopped. Then they were very rough. And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem and to hinder it. Nevertheless, we made our prayer unto our God and set a watch against them day and night because of them. You notice the two things we made our prayer unto our God, and they didn't sit back and say, That's all right. We made our prayer, but we set a watch day and night. These two things walk together. The person who is most in prayer, if it's the true thing, will be most on his guard. Our savior didn't say to his disciples, Pray. He said Watch and pray.

[00:17:39] Watch and pray and hear. Nehemiah, without waiting for the New Testament is doing that. He was a man of prayer, but he wasn't that man of prayer who went in and shut himself in a room and let the whole thing slide while he was having his quiet hour. He was out there busy. And sometimes those two things do not always go together. And Judah said, Oh, here it comes. The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, decayed. There is much rubbish so that when I go to build a wall. Or the deadening effect of much rubbish. Most of us have lived through a period when we've seen rows of houses reduced to rubble. When you can't see one stick of furniture left but just a heap of rubbish. What do you think of that in doctrinal terms? And then go back to any attempt on the part of any child of God to commence to re, as it were, revive an interest in some neglected part of the Word of God. And you nearly die of faintness because of the much rubbish. You go back in history to 1909 when one poor little solitary person attempted to try to get people to be interested in the glorious truth of the epistle to the Ephesians, or there was plenty of rubbish there to make one disheartened. But by the mercy of God, 1 or 2 began to stand by. And we are here today. Or may we be by grace.

[00:19:12] Learn the lesson to stand fast and hold fast and continue, but don't despise the idea that rubbish doesn't have a terrible effect upon those who are that engaged in it. As our adversary said, they shall not know neither see til we come in the midst among them and slay them and cause the work to cease. And it came to pass that when the Jews, which dwelt by them, came, they said unto us ten times. From all places, when she shall return unto us, they will be upon you. Now, if anybody can tell me what that means, I shall be very glad. But I don't think it matters. It doesn't matter what they say, as long as they put the wind up you. Now, here's a statement. You're all wondering what on earth they mean. From all places. When she shall return unto us, they will be upon you. And they said it ten times over. They knew the value of a value of advertisement. Keep on at it and din it into your mind and put you on edge. Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall and on the higher places. I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears and their bows. So now they are building and they are standing armed. He began to divide them up between the two. And so we borrowed from Jude and the words that have been borrowed from Jude with sword and trowel we are building.

[00:20:41] That is our great work. If you go to Ephesians four, the disciples, the apostles of the Ascended Christ were for the edifying or building of the church, which is likened to a body and a body likened to a temple. And the safeguarding of that truth is the keeping the unity of the spirit. And we are not engaged in warfare unless the enemy approach too near. And then we have to stand on guard. Stand fast. Hold fast and quit yourselves like men. Be strong. And then the next thing that we discover is an emphasis not only on the arms, but on the warning. It is. Verse 17. They which builded on the wall and they that bear burdens with those that laded every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon while they were working at a disadvantage, weren't they? Such a disadvantage. And we have worked at disadvantage. We still do because half of our energy is expended in trying to meet and defeat that, which is an intrigue or an opposition or in some measure trying to stop the work instead of going straight forward in an open field. But still, God knows, and I want to feel that we all are conscious that the whole of the Bible in its setting is telling you and me that we are in a battlefield. There's not one of us have ever known peace except the beginnings of the peace of God that comes through trust in him.

[00:22:26] But whether the nations are at actual warfare, cold or hot, or whether it should be called peace and safety, there's a war on all the time. A war either by actual invasion or by deception. The very prosperity may be a part of the very program to destroy. And we want to remember that this is more or less how we should have to do our work. We should have to be building, but have a weapon in our hand at the same time. Well, it won't be a very good building frames, will it? You can't build walls and handle stones and put cement in the right place and one hand hold a weapon. Always be looking around to see what's going to come. God knows, doesn't he? I don't suppose if he looked at the wall they built that it could be described that they speak about the masonry of the pyramids in Egypt, that you couldn't put a penknife between the slabs of stone. I daresay you can put some pen knives between some of these. So don't be downhearted friends if some of our work looks a bit rough shod. We've done it with an enemy looking at us and an enemy attempting to deceive us and to destroy the work that we have done. God knows, even if we don't make a margin for one another and in the next thing. Verse 18 for the builders, everyone had his sword girded by his side and so built it and he that sounded a trumpet was by me.

[00:23:46] Now that could be lifted out, couldn't it? And we always are exposed to that sort of idea that we are blowing our own trumpet. But that isn't what it means, is it? You know what it means. The trumpets play a great part in Israel's affairs. There is a feast of trumpets heralding in the last month of their festival year. And so looking forward to the day when, in the book of the Revelation, the Seventh Angel shall sound and the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. The sounding of the trumpets. But if you will go into the story, you'll find there's 2 or 3 kinds of trumpets. There's a ram's horn trumpet. There's a silver trumpet. And the various notes that they play and the number of times they make a blast have a different meaning. It's a sort of a most current one. Now, coming along in the car tonight. We heard a buzzing sound and I said, Oh, I suppose that's a siren saying, Leave off. It's time for relaxing work. Now that shows where my mind goes, thinking of holidays all the time. But somebody else whose name I will not mention, he is such a glutton for work. He said, Oh no, that's a circular saw. They're working, you see. But now you see what a difference it would make in that business if I heard the siren go and I marched off home and it was telling me to get on with my work.

[00:25:14] So you know what? I'm cannae do, don't you? Will you turn with this word of the the trumpet to the apostles statements which we find in. Is it one Corinthians, Chapter 14? One Corinthians, Chapter 14. Yes. Verse eight. Thank you, he says, speaking. Of course. He's now speaking particularly of the spectacular gift of tongues that they had in the early church. One of those things that was rather be a snare to somebody who wanted to be prominent in the assembly to stand up and speak with an unknown tongue. You know what the apostle Paul says? He said, I would rather speak five words with understanding than 10,000 words in an unknown tongue. And so he's going along that line a little bit when he says verse six, Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall it profit you? Except I shall speak to you either by revelation or by knowledge or by prophesying or by doctrine. And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds. How should it be known? What is piped or harped? I could not writing out Muffat's translation. He goes over the ground again, but he puts it like this. Inanimate instruments such as the flute or the harp may give a sound, but if no intervals occur in the music, how could one make out the air that is being played either on flute or harp? If you don't know whether it's God, save our gracious Queen or something else, well, you'd be looking a bit of a fool, won't you? If you don't know, in the Army, friends, if you were in the army and you weren't sure whether the bugle said come to the cookhouse door, boys, or charge the enemy, you might make up your mind according to your own feelings, mightn't you? So here's a sore if you're going to have a trumpet blown on the wall to warn the enemy, make sure there is no uncertain sound, isn't it? Well, let's get a little look at that then, shall we? First of all, one Thessalonians Chapter one.

[00:27:41] Where we can see that so far as we are concerned, we don't have to have trumpets made of brass or ram's horn. But there is a little suggestion here in one Thessalonians. A that we might borrow from this. And this is verse eight. I think going goes have to see how he's introduced it. One Thessalonians one three remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and patience, of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father. Notice it's not your love and your hope and your faith, but it's the work and the labor associated with it. Something obvious.

[00:28:30] Knowing brethren, beloved, your election of God will have all know that election. He had no private access to the secrets of God. Nobody said, I know your elect of God for our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power. And this

is in verse six. You became followers of us and the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Ghost, so that you became in samples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia for from you sound it out the Word of the Lord. There's the word that means to blow a trumpet. So these Thessalonians blew a trumpet, but not their own trumpet in boasting. But they blew a trumpet in the sense that their very lives were making a witness that couldn't be misunderstood. No uncertain sound. And then in Romans, the 10th chapter. Romans The 10th chapter, verse 20. Verse 18. He's there speaking about the gospel. We'll read a little bit earlier than that. Verse 13, for whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him, of whom they have not believed? How shall they believe in him? Of whom they have not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher? How shall they preach? Except they be sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, that bring glad tidings of good things? But they are not all obeyed the gospel.

[00:30:03] For Isaiah, says Lord, who hath believed our report. So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Now comes the trumpets out. But I say, have they not heard? Yea, verily their sound went into all the earth and their words unto the ends of the world. A trumpet sound in preaching the gospel is also another thing that we can take to ourselves. And then with regard to this emphasis upon uncertain sounding, you know, how the apostle was so concerned with regard to his own speech, two Corinthians, chapter 217. We'll never defeat the foe if we stoop to use his methods. Ours must be, as the Apostles put it, not done in a corner. It must be out in the light. Two Corinthians Chapter two, verse 17. For we are not as many. All have a sad thing to think that so early in the Apostle's ministry, he had to say as many we are not as many which corrupt the Word of God, and the word corrupt means to water down, to water it down. A temptation that you'll be exposed to as well as I have been. Just soft pedal that offensive bit of teaching of yours and the doors of these other chapels will be open to you. That's the sort of thing corrupting all soft peddling the word of God. But he says, in contrast to that, as of sincerity, but as of God in the sight of God, look at the three things he says before he speaks about his speech.

[00:31:42] But as of sincerity, but as of God in the sight of God speak, we in Christ. And from that we go on to Chapter three. Where he says in verse 12, seeing then we have such a hope, we use great plainness of speech and not as Moses who veiled his face.

Great plainness of speech. And then in chapter four, verse two, therefore, seeing we have this ministry as we have received mercy, we faint not but having renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. No hiding all out in the open. No covering up. And then if you go back to Acts 20, as we've looked at it earlier, but there's another statement there that in harmony with this, which we ought to include in Acts 20, when Paul is giving a review of the ministry that he had fulfilled up to that time, he says in the 20th chapter, verse 20, and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you. But I've showed you and have taught you publicly and from house to house. There's an emphasis upon the thing being brought right out into the open and again in verse 27, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for battle? Well, now, just to bring a little bit to a conclusion, I want to go back as I have time.

[00:33:34] I wasn't sure. I want to go back to the question about the fighting. And for this I want to turn to the book of Deuteronomy. Folks are looking at the clock, but we've got a big subject to be crammed into a few minutes. Deuteronomy Chapter two. They are now starting the children of Israel to enter into the land of promise. But they've got to go through the adjacent countries and you see what it says in verse four. Ye are to pass through the coast of your brethren, the children of Israel, which dwell in sea, and they shall be afraid of you. Take ye good heed unto yourselves. Therefore, verse five, Meddle. Not with them. Meddle not with them. And you'll see. Presently there are others. There are others who are called the Moabites, verse nine, contained with neither contained with them in battle. That's again, the word meddle. And then you find others are mentioned until at last verse 24, Rise ye up, take your journey pass over River Arnon. Behold, I have given unto thine hand spy on the Amorite King of Heshbon and his land begin to possess it and contend with him in battle. That's the very word. Medal. Medal with him. Now, to lift out from this the thought We are not to meddle with the world in which we find ourselves.

[00:35:07] If we want to go through the land that belongs to these others, we promise to keep to the main road. We promise to walk upon our feet, as they said. We promise to pay for the water we drink. We are just passing through. We are not judging you. We're not trying to put you right. We just say allow us to go on our pilgrim journey, for we are

going home to our own inheritance. That's our attitude to the outside world. Meddle not with them. Or there's many a Christian. If he could only have read Deuteronomy would never have been elected upon the town council and vexed his righteous soul, as Lot did when he went into Sodom. He thought he was going to put Sodom, right? But you know what happened to him. Don't you meddle? Not with him. You're not put into this world to meddle with them. The only ones with whom you are to meddle are the equivalents to the Scion, the king of the Amorites, who were the legitimate foes. These are comparable to we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but with spiritual enemies that are right on the frontier, endeavoring to dispossess us of our inheritance. Meddle with them. Well, now, this has been rather a strange subject this evening. I haven't kept closely too near my fire. I've looked at it and then found sort of echoes in the lives and the experiences, particularly of the apostles Peter and Jude and the apostle Paul and his witness and warnings to the churches under his care.

[00:36:34] I had to decide either to say, Well, we won't bother to look at Chapter four at all, or we will make it a jumping off ground to have one more opportunity to face the fact that we've got enemies that we do well to recognize them. And the only way to meet them is our trust in the living God to go on with the work is given to us to stand ready to hold fast the faithful word, be prepared to be misunderstood and mocked if needs be. That at long last to have the joy of knowing that the world is built and the work's been done. And after that we can leave it to the Lord as to what He's going to do with it and how far He will say to us when that day comes. Well done, good and faithful servant. That's a thing that none of us can be sure about. Even as the Apostle said, he wasn't sure until the very end. He said, I have fought a good fight. I finished my course. I get the fight, the attacker beside of you and me at the finish. What? Blessed and happy people. We shall be. We have yet to come to another aspect of truth in the book of Nehemiah before we finish. And that, I think, will bring our studies to a conclusion.