

Super Sunday. Celebrate.

Introduction: Pg. ____

Last weekend, Marsha and I traveled to a church in Florida to share our story of helping start Redemption Hill. On the way down, we hit every air travelers favorite dynamic at 37,000 feet: TURBULENCE. Suddenly the cockpit messages back to the cabin: ("This is your captain speaking. It may get a little bumpy on our descent.") And then the fun begins.

Now, I rarely get bothered by turbulence. My wife on the other hand, goes full silent mode, clings to the arm rests and prays like her life depends on it! When it hits roller coaster level, she'll even reach for the essential oils.

What I did not expect, was my new friend Jackie from the South Shore muttering multiple: "Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh!" and digging her nails into my left forearm, while we bounced through the friendly skies.

Sometimes life is full of turbulence. Sometimes it is full of another displeasing dynamic: HEADWIND.

Headwind works against the plane, blowing against the flight path and slowing it down. Tailwind works with the plane, blowing in the direction of traveling and speeding it up!

I was fascinated to check the flight tracker on our return flight and discover we were traveling 520mph with a tailwind of 141mph!! helping us blaze home at 661mph.

Yes, I made the mistake of sharing that information with Marsha.

T: Over the past two years, we have experienced massive amounts of HEADWIND.

- COVID - headwind.
- Relational isolation - headwind
- The circumstantial assault on our mental health - headwind
- Political polarization and increasing division - headwind

It is disrupting marriages, the emotional health of our children, and the mission of God's people.

When it comes to living our lives for God and engaging in the great work he deposits deep in our hearts, Jesus told us in John 16:33: "You can expect headwind." [That's my translation. Jesus says, "trouble," but I believe the master of metaphor would be happy with my paraphrase.]

The question is not whether or not we will face headwind, the all important question is: will we let the relentless headwinds of the kingdom of darkness stop us?

We have to ask...

"What Will Stop Us?" Nehemiah 3-4

If Nehemiah could speak to us this morning, he would encourage us out of a deep reservoir of conviction and personal experience of God's favor and faithfulness.

The Point: Let nothing [and I MEAN NOTHING] stop what God puts in the heart.

T: I want to give us three declarations to embolden us to continue in the great work God has called us to do! The first is this...

1) We will not be stopped by heroic individualism (3:1-32).

At first glance, chapter three might be one you'd want to skip over. Ah... bunch of names. The heading says, "Rebuilding the wall." "Ok, got it." Chapter 4, please...

BUT... let's pump the breaks for a couple minutes.

#1) When the Bible speaks, God speaks, and something tells me if you had God over for dinner, you would not go catch a quick episode of season 2. You would hang on EVERY WORD he's saying.

#2) After all, "ALL Scripture is breathed out by God (inspired) AND PROFITABLE (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Let's see how profitable it is! We're going to read the first 5 verses and draw insights from the entire chapter.

Nehemiah 3:1-5 (text displayed)

Chapter 3 provides a 360 degree description of the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem. Starting from the Sheep Gate, and moving counter clockwise, all the way to the Muster Gate.

What do we learn about their work? [You might want to write these down]

6 Characteristics of United People Engaged in a Great Work

- Urgent Devotion: When God puts a great work in your heart, you will move forward with a level of urgency. As soon as Nehemiah invited them to build again, they said in 2:18: "Let us rise up and build." (cf. John 9:4)
- Spiritual Motivation: Verse 1 tells us the priests are active in the work of building again. Who wants to be a part of a church where the pastors don't roll up their sleeves and get their hands dirty? Eliashib is our kind of high priest! We also see they dedicate or consecrate their work to the Lord, which is a theological way of saying, "THIS IS FOR YOU." Then verse 2 shows us the work was done by a diversity of people...
- Shared Contribution: We all have a choice to make: Will we be "I people" or "We people"?
 - Starting in verse 2 and picking up big-time steam in verse 6 through the end of the chapter, we will see this phrase: "And next to them, and next to them, and next to them... and after him"
 - There are roughly forty different areas where repairs need to be done. Gate after gate. Section after section. The work is happening.
 - Though there are different responsibilities and different levels of contribution, [don't miss this!] the structure of chapter 3 "gives the impression that each contribution is as significant as every other." - Nykolaishen
- Distinct Diversity
 - We see women and men. Young and old. Families and individuals. Sometimes people are marked by their occupation, other times by their geographic location.

- I love what Alexander Nykolaishen says: “Although [God] is able to bring about whatever he wants simply by willing it into existence, most of the time [he] seems to achieve his ends through the cooperation of people. And although at times he uses select individuals to accomplish great things, he seems to prefer to involve as many as possible. God does not intend his work for only a few. It is for all.”
- “TO EACH is given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:7). Then we see...
- Sacrificial Volunteerism:
 - Volunteers flocked to Jerusalem from Jericho (2), Tekoa (5), Gibeon (7), Mizpah (7, 15, 19), Zanoah (13), Beth Hakkerem, Beth Zur, and Keith (14, 16-18).
 - They left their families and donated their time, energy, and skills! The text does not mention a paycheck or direct deposit. After all, chapter 5 tells us they didn’t have enough money to feed their families.
 - Churches do not move forward because of the paid few, but the collective efforts of everyone. Finally...
- Personal Ownership
 - We see in verse 31 how the temple servants and merchants rebuilt the section near where they served and worked. There was a personal ownership. Do you think they did their work to the best of their ability? No doubt!

Please hear this: heroic individualism is a mirage in the kingdom of God. I’ll give you 2 reasons.

#1) There are ALWAYS people working behind the scenes.... the Venue & AV & Music Teams who get here at 7:30am to set up. I’m talking about the people who show up to pray when no one is watching!

#2) There is only one hero! His name is Jesus.

Implications for RHC

“A church’s greatness is not measured by its size. It is measured by the percentage of people taking responsibility for what Christ has called them to do in his service. Greatness in the kingdom is marked by service.” -T.J. Betts

As we enter into a new season of our history, post-pandemic and the next 10 years of our church, we are called to serve in an even greater way: telling everyone we possibly can about the life found in Jesus!

How are going to build again?

2022 Vision Statement (Empowered)

We see a church full of people gifted by God’s Spirit for the good of others. As each person’s unique design is discovered, lived, and celebrated with equal excitement, we will collectively take thousands of joyful steps to serve others! Countless deeds of mercy, kindness, hospitality, healing, teaching, encouragement, and more will lead to story after story of the supernatural becoming natural and God’s love going public in every corner of our church and city. Redemption Hill will be a church where everyone lives empowered everywhere!

T: We WILL NOT be STOPPED by heroic individualism. It’s okay to say it will a little conviction! #2.

Nehemiah 4:1-12 (text displayed)

2) We will not be stopped by voices of opposition (4:1-12).

Opposition (1-3)

- When Sanballat and Tobiah, the enemies of Nehemiah and the people of God, hear that the work is actually happening, verse 1 says they were “angry and greatly enraged.”
- They begin hurling insults! They sarcastically deride the work as impossible.
- Sanballat begins mocking them with 5 questions in verse 2, all meant to demoralize the workers: “What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore it for themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish it up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the haps of rubbish and burned ones at that?”
- Translation: They are weak. They are irrational dreamers. They don’t even have what they need to do the job!
- Then Tobiah chips in, in verse 3: “If a fox leaps on the wall, it will come tumbling down.”
- These dudes were vicious.

T: What is Nehemiah’s response? Prayer.

- He asked God for justice, for God to do to them what they planned to do to the people. Nehemiah calls on God to vindicate himself by thwarting their plans.
- Verse 6 tells us after they prayed, they continued working. I love what it says, “So we built the wall. And the wall was joined together to half its height, FOR THE PEOPLE HAD A MIND TO WORK.”

This progress only enraged Sanballat and Tobiah all the more.

- Verses 7-12 tell us that they plot and plan a physical assault. Verse 8 says they were going to sign against Jerusalem and cause confusion to the work. Verse 11 reveals their ultimate aim: We are going to sneak up on them and take them out. They are coming to kill!
 - There’s a complement hidden in here. Too good not to preach.
 - You’re going to have to kill me, to stop this work!
- This word traveled to Jews who lived near them, who (verse 12 says) came from all directions and said to them ten times (an idiom of saying - over and over): they are coming to kill.
- It’s little wonder that the people are discouraged in verse 10. They begin believing the taunts of the enemies. They begin doubting themselves, doubting the great work God had called them to do. Varying levels of doubt are sure to creep into our minds in the midst of opposition. It’s okay to doubt, but it’s not okay to be content with our doubts. Like Nehemiah, we should turn to God and bring him our doubts.
- We see their response in verse 9. “While they plot, we pray.” But not only prayer... once again they put feet to their prayers. “And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them night and day.” God, you protect us, but we’re going to do everything we can do to protect our families and our city.

Listen, enduring voices of opposition is not fun, but it comes with the territory! Reread the gospels and see what Jesus endured. Jesus, they said you were out of your mind! Jesus, they said you had a demon! Jesus, they called you illegitimate and said you did your miraculous work by the power of Satan.

When the voices of opposition come, and they have come like never before over the past year in my life, nothing has helped me more than remembering what Jesus endured. Nothing has helped me more than remembering what he told us in Matthew 10:24-25 – “A servant is not greater than his master. If they call the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.”

There are two other things I want you to know about opposition:

1) Behind every voice of opposition is the Great Opposer of God and our souls. Ephesians 6:10-20... "Finally, be strong in the Lord and the strength of his might. Put on the FULL armor of God. [Why?] For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood..." Listen, Satan knows his time is short. Go read Revelation 12. Satan knows he is a conquered foe. He knows he has been defeated "by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony." and he is absolutely enraged!

2) While we have an opposer we have a greater advocate! If death could not stop Jesus, the true and greater Nehemiah, and Jesus is in us and for us, what voice of opposition will ever be able to stop us! "If God is for us, who can be against us!" (Romans 8:31

T: Oh, no, no, no, no, NO! We WILL NOT BE STOPPED by the voices of opposition. Finally...

3) We will not be stopped by faithless hearts (4:13-23).

Nehemiah 4:13-23 (text displayed)

It's not just outside opposition. It's the war inside, in our souls!!

The greatest threat to the progress of the gospel in us and through us IS NOT the world. It is NOT a virus, NOR the voices of opposition. It's NOT even the enemy of our souls, Satan and all his little demonic minions.

The greatest threat to the advance of the gospel IS US.

We can either walk in FAITH, respond in FAITH, or we can move forward with faithless hearts.

The declaration we are making today is this: WE WILL NOT BE STOPPED BY FAITHLESS HEARTS

Text

- Look at verse 14. What does Nehemiah say: "DO NOT BE AFRAID." I have a really good friend who will text or tell me, when we're really up against, when challenges in life and ministry come, "DNF." "DNF." "LMF" Do NOT FEAR. We all need friends like that. Thank you, JESUS.
- FEAR falls when FAITH rises!
- Where does faith come from?
 - Looking up.
 - REMEMBER the LORD... This is where the battle is won. This is where faith is found. REMEMBER. REMEMBER... who he is and what he has done.
 - God we remember, YOU ARE GREAT!
 - God, we remember, YOU ARE AWESOME!
 - That's what will give us courage to FIGHT FOR... Let's be a church that FIGHTS FOR one another. The world is FIGHTING AGAINST one another. Tailwind, not headwind!

Now, look at this... Verse 15.

- Verse 15 - The enemy is exposed. God has very sneaky ways of exposing the enemies of his people.

- How do Nehemiah and the people respond. Full of FAITH, a faith revealed in an unstoppable resolve.
 - Look at verses 16-18. They are working on the wall, while simultaneously being on guard. A trowel in one hand to build the wall and a sword in the other to defend themselves!
 - Look at verses 19-20. They devise a strategic plan under the Sovereign protection of God. If they attack on this side. Come and fight with us! But just know as they fight against us, "OUR GOD WILL FIGHT FOR US." We see this refrain over and over: Moses said it in Exodus 14:13-14. David said it 1 Samuel 17:37. "Our God WILL FIGHT for us." God, you are our only hope!
 - And then look at verses 21-23. We see their faith revealed in their unstoppable resolve.
 - 21 - They worked as long as they had light.
 - 22 - Those who lived miles away from Jerusalem stayed and slept in the city in order to be ready to defend. They inconvenience themselves, sacrificed their family time, and put their lives on the line for the sake of the mission.
 - 23 - Nehemiah goes so far to say in verse 23: We slept in our clothes and kept our weapon right beside us. We are always ready, full of faith. Nothing is going to stop us from fulfilling what God has put in our hearts!

What does Nehemiah 3-4 tell us?

Heroic individualism will be a temptation. Voices of opposition will be a constant companion. Our own hearts will consider giving up. But God speaks a better word! He whispers in our ear and says...

The Point: Let nothing stop what God puts in the heart.

Conclusion:

What dream for good has God placed in your heart?

How are you working to see heaven touch earth?

Listen to what we see as a church family over the next 10 years.

Multiplying from New England to the Nations (2030 & Beyond)

We see a multiplication movement spreading across Greater Medford, as 755,000 people restlessly wait for the hope of Jesus. Fueled by our pursuit of God and filled with his Spirit, we will make disciples who urgently lead others from spiritual apathy to abundant life in Christ. As people taste true freedom, joy will fill living rooms, classrooms, and conference rooms. By 2030, we will see dozens of new groups and at least 3 new churches cover the map. This vision will come alive through bold prayer and action. We will impact lives from New England to the Nations.

This is our vision. We are going to pray, and work, and sweat, and sacrifice and work together to see God make it happen through us!

We will not be stopped by the HEADWINDS of heroic individualism, voices of opposition, or our own faithless hearts. We will PROPELLED by the TAILWIND of God's SPIRIT, with Jesus before. Us!

Nothing is going to stop what God has placed in our heart!

PRAYER: Whatever the assignment... whatever the vision... HEADWINDS are coming... Decide now: will they stop us?