

## Nehemiah 4-5 – Fellowship Group Notes – 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> March 2015

In Nehemiah 4 and 5 we find various opposition to the rebuilding. We shouldn't be surprised! It's the same for us today. We'll consider what this opposition was like and how Nehemiah and we should respond to it. We'll also finish our time considering whether sometimes we are in fact wrongfully that exact opposition.

### The opposition

#### **4:1-3 – Opposition who mock and ridicule**

- What's the first outward action of Sanballat's anger? And Tobiah's?
- The wall was a big thick wall, this is some huge fox! – What kind of mockery and ridicule is this? In what ways are we as Christians mocked today? Should we *expect* to be mocked (John 15:18-19)? E.g. If we affirm God's teaching in the Bible that Jesus Christ is the only way to God, then logically what can we expect? Have you been mocked in your workplace or amongst friends? If you aren't mocked for your faith, should this raise questions? (We of course shouldn't on purposefully seek it though for the sake of being mocked!) When the opposition mocks Christians, who are they ultimately mocking?

#### **4:7-8 – Opposition who are physically dangerous**

- How has the outward action of anger - the mockery of 4:1-3, changed its shape in 4:7-8?
- In the UK we are not, or at least very rarely physically persecuted. But elsewhere if the current rates of persecution continue then it's predicted that 2/200 Christians will die a martyr's death. Again, should we be surprised? Is this to be *expected*?

#### **5:1-9 – Opposition from within**

- External opposition to the rebuilding was to be expected. We saw the brewing hint of it back in 2:10, 19. And external opposition to the church and Christians today should also be expected. But here the opposition is internal; it's inside the city walls. It's been hinted at in 3:5 where the opposition are those who don't cooperate with the work. But now it's full blown.
- What's going on in 5:1-5? What's the problem facing the people? If everybody's working on the wall, what of the farms – the people's livelihood and food source? *To add to the problems there's been a recent famine (v3)*. And who is taking advantage?
- With care (!) discuss how opposition within the church today can arise.
- In what areas of church life can opposition be very visible? How do we see the same opposition from Nehemiah's situation (stemming from economic difficulty) in the church today? How can people's finance/work issues oppose activities in the church?
- Discuss whether opposition within the church often stems from particular attitudes, beliefs or characteristics (e.g. is the opposition opposing church activities because of a principle or a practice? Are they opposing *what* is done or *why* it's done? Are those opposing activities the ones who are *always* opposing everything the church does? Are they just pure grumblers?!)
- How can internal opposition affect different leaders in the church? How does it affect a pastor, Sunday school leader, deacon? *It's very common for a leader in any setting to spend 80% of their time and energy focussing on the 10% of the group who are opposed to certain activities or ideas - how will this affect the other 90% who are in agreement?*
- How must we be aware of all these issues when it comes to the 'vision' process at Surrey Chapel?

### The response

In what ways do we see Nehemiah and the people respond to the opposition in each case above?

- 4:4-5 (very much a Psalms style prayer for deliverance), 4:9 - **prayer** - why's this important when facing opposition?
- **Prayer and...**
- 4:6, 4:9, 13 (and onwards) **action**. We'll look at one specific part of the action in a moment but first, why is both prayer and action necessary? *God works His Will through our actions* (Neh 2:8).

#### **Responding to internal opposition - 5:6-19**

What various steps does Nehemiah take to respond to the internal opposition?

- He addresses it, v7. He appeals to their relationship with God, v9. He acts and is the good example, v10. He positively resolves the situation, v11.

### **Summary**

How does 4:9 sum up Nehemiah's (and the peoples) approach to opposition? *The Oliver Cromwell approach: "Trust God and keep your powder dry"*.

**Are we the opposition?** - Are there times in your life in church that you have in fact wrongly been the opposition? Do you find you are consistently opposing actions, activities or principles of the church? Do you need to ask God to change these attitudes?