

January 18, 2026

“I Don’t Have Time for This!”

Nehemiah 6:1-9

Intro:

I appreciate that all of you have seen the title of the sermon this morning and haven’t said, “That sounds about right”, and gone home.

The sermon today, and the one next week, are based on a couple of the keynote sessions that I got to listen to while at the Pastor and Spouses retreat in Banff this past November. The speaker was Rev. Dr. Lennett Anderson, who is a pastor in a Baptist church in Nova Scotia. If you have never had a chance to listen to him preach, I would encourage you to look him up on YouTube and watch one of his sermons.

Anyways, in speaking to a room full of pastors and spouses of pastors, he strongly encouraged us to return back to our churches with the phrase, “I don’t have time for this.” You might think that this is not something that pastors, or anyone in ministry, or anyone who would be a willing servant of Jesus, should ever say. And certainly it is not something that should just be tossed around without prayerful consideration. It is, however, not a bad idea to give some thought and reflection to the public opinion that good servants of Jesus should automatically do everything that is asked of them to do. In spite of what you might have learned, or might have been taught in some churches, always saying “yes” is not what it means to live a servant life – especially in ministry.

So, this morning we are all going to learn to put into practice the art of saying, “I don’t have time for this.” And the lesson begins with Nehemiah, on the wall of Jerusalem, overseeing the finishing touches to repairing and restoring the city and the temple after it had been destroyed by the Babylonians over 70 years earlier.

Nehemiah:

We enter into the narrative at chapter 6 of Nehemiah. Nehemiah has been given the task of overseeing the completion of the wall. This job started quite some time earlier when Cyrus, the Persian king, was prompted by God to let the Israelites return to Jerusalem after their time in exile had been completed. You can read about that in the book of Ezra, which is a companion book to Nehemiah. While enthusiastic about the work initially, the people didn't do a good job of maintaining their task and after setbacks and opposition, they gave up. This is the scene that is reported to Nehemiah in chapter one, and what brings him to the point of almost inconsolable grief. His passion to see this put right is so great that the king, Artaxerxes, notices Nehemiah's distress and allows him to take an extended leave from his duties as cupbearer and see to finishing the work.

This is the task for Nehemiah, one stirred in his heart by God and sanctioned by the king. Letters are written, permissions are given, and armed escorts are sent to accompany Nehemiah, all with the goal of completing the task he has to do. It isn't all smooth sailing, as there are several factions and people in the region around Jerusalem who don't want to see that city restored and the people return. By the time we get to chapter 6, Nehemiah has had to settle disputes and set up a "working" army, as it were, where the people quite literally held a trowel in one hand and a spear in the other. It is with that picture in mind, workers on the wall both building and guarding, that we come to chapter 6.

The work is almost done and the only thing left is to hang the doors at the entrance to the city. This is good for Nehemiah and the Israelites, bad for those trying to oppose the work. And so Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and the rest of the group working against Nehemiah try one more desperate plan to try and stall the work. They send out a message to Nehemiah asking him to come down from the wall and meet with them in the plain of Ono. Diplomacy is always a good thing, right? Isn't it better to try and work things out than to be constantly at odds with people? Not in this case. In this case, it is a trap and Nehemiah recognizes it as such. And as Lennett Anderson said, Nehemiah answered by saying "I don't have time for that." It is a distraction. It is not the work that he was supposed to be

doing. It is nothing more than an elaborate plan to derail what God is trying to do. And Nehemiah doesn't have time for that. Four times they send that same message, and four times, Nehemiah responds "I don't have time for that." The fifth message is more public. It brings an accusation of rebellion and the threat of being tattled on by this coalition of enemies, unless Nehemiah gets off the wall and gives up finishing his task. But those rumours are just lies. Nehemiah knows it and calls them on it, and they give up their effort.

In the next verses, which we didn't read, we find out that Tobiah and the group hired someone on the inside to try and convince Nehemiah to get off the wall and do something else – that something else being to hide away from the bad press. But again, Nehemiah responds with "I don't have time for that."

The reason he doesn't have time is that he is where he is supposed to be and doing the thing that he is supposed to be doing. The job God gave him was the most important thing, and it was the thing the enemies of God wanted to interrupt and stall.

Our Walls:

Satan hasn't changed tactics in the thousands of years since then. He is still trying every way he can think of to interrupt the work that God is doing through His people. One of his most successful tactics is to get people doing all sorts of things they shouldn't be doing, instead of doing the thing that they are supposed to be doing. It is the unhealthy realization of the old phrase "if you want something done, ask someone who is busy to do it". The meaning there is that people who are busy are more likely to be disciplined enough to actually finish the thing being asked of them. But it isn't healthy to do everything people ask of us. Sometimes we are busy doing all sorts of things, but not what we are supposed to do.

Nehemiah was supposed to be on that wall, seeing to it that the people finished the work. He didn't have the time, or the inclination, for anything other than that. He felt free to say "I don't have time." We also need to have the freedom to say, "I don't have time for this."

But we need to be careful here. This phrase is not an excuse. It is a good thing that my kids are not listening to this sermon, because they will hear “I don’t have time for this” and use it to try and get out of doing all of the things that they are supposed to do. This phrase is not an excuse to do nothing. It would be easy for us to say, “I don’t have time because I am waiting for the call to the thing I am supposed to do.” But that could be only a justification for not paying attention to what God is really wanting you to do. Sometimes we know what we are supposed to do, but we don’t want to – it is too scary, or seems too big, or requires us to step out of our comfort zone. So, if we claim to not have time, because we are waiting for the clear sign from God, then we can avoid doing that hard thing.

Nehemiah was focused on the task at hand – he was on the wall. He wasn’t going to let anyone distract him from the thing that he knew God wanted him to be doing.

What is the thing that God wants you to be doing? Are you on a wall, or are you stuck waiting for God to tell you what you should be doing? Chances are, He already has and you just didn’t hear it. Or maybe you are on the wall, you are doing the thing, but other really good things keep coming up that you also think you should be doing and suddenly you struggle to have enough time to do any of them well. Your days are too busy and full and you are not giving yourself the time you need to rest and focus on the important thing.

Conclusion:

God invites us to participate in His mission. He has gathered us together in a body of believers that is called the church for that purpose. He has given to each person in this body certain and specific tasks and roles. He has equipped each of us in special ways to be able to accomplish those things. What God calls us to do might change from time to time as He shapes and forms us with new and different skills and passions, and we need to be open to that as well.

What is it that God is asking you to do in this season of your life? What is the wall that He wants you to be standing on? Do that. And when something else comes along that would pull you away from that, feel free to say “I don’t have time for this.”

Let’s pray.