

I Am Doing A Great Work: I Cannot Come Down

Key Verse: Nehemiah 6:3 (KJV) – “And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?”

There is a kind of distraction that arrives dressed as a duty. It does not come wrapped in the obvious rags of sin—no blazing red flag, no vulgar temptation, no scandalous proposal. Instead, it comes in the respectable garments of a meeting, a request, a ministry opportunity, a good conversation, a necessary errand, a noble cause. And that is precisely why it is so deadly. The enemy of your soul has read your theology. He knows you will flee from evil. So he has learned a better weapon: he sends you good things that are not God’s things for this hour. That is the art of holy distraction—and you must learn to recognize it, or you will spend your life building what God never asked you to build.

We turn to Nehemiah, a man who understood this warfare better than most. The wall of Jerusalem lay in rubble. The people of God were in reproach. And God had laid one thing on Nehemiah’s heart: rebuild the wall. Not the temple—that was another man’s calling. Not the city government—that would come later. Not a revival campaign in Samaria—that was not yet. Just the wall. A dirty, stone-by-stone, sweat-and-sorrow work of restoration. And when the enemy saw that Nehemiah would not be turned aside by threats or mockery, he changed his tactics. Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;) that Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. (Nehemiah 6:1–2, KJV)

Notice the strategy. Sanballat does not say, “Stop building or I will kill you.” He says, “Let us meet together.” A conference. A dialogue. A peaceful summit. The plain of Ono sounds neutral, reasonable, even diplomatic. Had Nehemiah gone, he would have been murdered—but the invitation itself did not say that. It said: Come, let us confer. That is how distraction works. It offers you an appointment that seems important, but it pulls you off the wall. And here is the deep truth we must grasp: distraction is not primarily about time management; it is about assignment management. The enemy does not care how busy you are. He cares whether you are positioned where God placed you. If he can get you to the plain of

Ono, he has won—even if you spend the whole day there praying. A prayer in the wrong place is still a disobedience. A good work outside your calling is still a snare. Now consider the man himself. Nehemiah was not a builder by trade. Before this moment, he held a cup. He was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, a pagan Persian monarch. Every day, he tasted the king's wine to prove it was not poisoned. That meant Nehemiah had already learned a terrible truth about obedience: he was ready to lay down his life for a heathen king. Day after day, he swallowed the wine and waited to see if he would die. That was his job. That was his faithfulness to an earthly throne.

How much more, then, would he be willing to lay down his life for the God of heaven? If he could risk death to serve Artaxerxes, would he not risk the displeasure of Sanballat to serve the Lord? Would he leave the wall for a conference call when he had already stood in the presence of a tyrant? The logic of Nehemiah's answer is unassailable: I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. The greatness of the work does not lie in its visibility—a wall is not a cathedral. It lies in its divine origin. God had sent him. God had opened the door. God had moved the heart of a pagan king to supply timber. If God had gone to all that trouble to put Nehemiah on that wall, then no invitation from Sanballat could compete.

Here is the first deep insight: You cannot be distracted from a work you are convinced is great. The problem for most of us is that we secretly think our assignment is small. We compare our wall to someone else's temple. We look at our daily grind—changing diapers, writing reports, shepherding a small flock, cleaning a building, sitting with a sick parent—and we whisper, "This is not great." And because we do not see the greatness, we are easily lured to the plain of Ono. "Just a quick meeting." "Just this one event." "Just a break from the ordinary." But Nehemiah's secret was not superhuman focus. It was supernatural sight. He saw the wall through God's eyes. And once you see that God has entrusted you with a piece of His redemptive history, a trip to Ono becomes a joke.

Now we must add a crucial layer. Nehemiah's response was not rude. It was resolute. He did not insult Sanballat. He did not call the meeting demonic. He simply said, I cannot come down. That phrase is the heart of holy distraction. Notice the implied geography. To come down, he would have to leave his position on the wall. He was already up. His work had elevation. He was not being asked to step sideways but downward. Every distraction that pulls you away from your primary calling is a descent. It may feel like an honor, but it is a lower place. You do not climb to distraction; you climb to obedience. Distraction always asks you to

leave the height God gave you and walk onto the plain. This is why the apostle Paul warned the Corinthians, Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58, KJV). Unmoveable. That is the opposite of distraction. It does not mean you never change tasks; it means your center of gravity does not shift. You can pivot within your assignment, but you cannot abandon your post.

Consider another scripture. When the disciples in Acts were faced with the good work of serving tables—feeding widows was a noble, necessary, merciful task—they refused. Not because serving was wrong, but because it was not their assignment. It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables (Acts 6:2, KJV). There it is again: leave. Every distraction requires a leaving. The question is not whether the new thing is good. The question is what you leave behind. The apostles said, in effect, “We are doing a great work—the word and prayer—and we cannot come down to tables.” They appointed deacons instead. They protected their focus not out of selfishness but out of stewardship.

Here is the second deep insight: The art of holy distraction is not the art of avoiding bad things; it is the art of discerning the difference between a good thing and a God thing for this season. Sanballat’s invitation was not evil on its face. “Let us meet” could have been a genuine peace offering. But Nehemiah discerned the timing, the intent, and the trap. How? He had a wall in front of him. The visible, tangible, commanded work was staring him in the face. And when your present obedience is clear, every alternative becomes automatically suspicious. You do not need to discern whether Ono is good; you only need to look at the half-finished wall and say, “That is my answer.”

Now we must speak to you, the one listening to this sermon. You know your wall. You know the one thing God has pressed into your hands in this season. It might be raising children in the fear of the Lord. It might be finishing a degree. It might be caring for an aging parent. It might be leading a small group or writing a book or rebuilding a marriage. And you have already received invitations to Ono. A new position at work that requires 60 hours a week. A ministry role that sounds impressive but will gut your family time. A volunteer opportunity that is good but not yours. A friendship that demands constant crisis management. And you have felt the pull. You have thought, “Maybe just this once.” You have wondered if saying no makes you unloving. Nehemiah’s answer silences all that. He had already proven his willingness to die. The cupbearer’s life was a daily laying down of his life. He did not fear Sanballat because he had already faced Artaxerxes. The same is true for you. If you have already given your life to Christ, what can a distraction take from you? Your reputation? Your

approval rating? Your sense of being needed? You have been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20, KJV). A dead man cannot be distracted. A dead man has only one direction: the work his Master gave him before the tomb.

And here is the final, deepest insight: The journey itself is too great for us to be distracted. The Christian life is not a series of disconnected tasks; it is a pilgrimage. We are strangers and pilgrims on the earth (Hebrews 11:13, KJV). A pilgrim does not stop at every interesting village. He has a destination. He has a city with foundations. He has a promised land. When Nehemiah said, “I cannot come down,” he was not just refusing a meeting. He was refusing to step off the path. The wall was not merely a project; it was the path of obedience. And you, Christian, have been set on a narrow way. Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction (Matthew 7:13, KJV). Distractions are often the broad way dressed up as a detour. But there are no detours in the kingdom. There is only the path, and the ditch on either side.

The apostle Peter, distracted by the wind, began to sink (Matthew 14:30, KJV). He was doing the impossible—walking on water—but the moment he looked at the waves, he left his first work: looking at Jesus. And Jesus did not say, “Nice effort.” He said, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? (Matthew 14:31, KJV). Doubt and distraction are kin. Both take your eyes off the one who called you. So then, what is the art of holy distraction? It is learning to say a focused “no” so that you can say a powerful “yes.” It is understanding that your primary assignment is not a burden to escape but a gift to guard. It is remembering that you once risked your life for a pagan system—and now you serve the King of kings. If Nehemiah would not leave the wall for Sanballat, do not leave your post for any voice that does not carry the same authority as the one who said, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15, KJV).

Let your answer be plain. When the invitation comes—the good, reasonable, flattering, urgent invitation to the plain of Ono—send back one word: I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. And the God who called you to the wall will be glorified, not in your busyness, but in your obedience.