

BUILDERS OF THE WALL – HAVING A MIND TO WORK (Nehemiah 4:6)

Eugene Jenkins

Introduction

Nehemiah was a devout Jew, who, while in captivity, made the best of a bad situation and became the cup bearer (butler) to the Persian king, Artaxerxes. In the first chapter of the book that bears his name we see his great concern for his people (1:2-3). He learned from Hanani, one of the remnant in Jerusalem who had made his way to Shushan, that: The people were in great affliction and reproach; the wall of Jerusalem was broken down; the gates of the city were burnt down. Upon hearing this Nehemiah wept, mourned, fasted and prayed.

What about us? How many of us today are as concerned about the condition of the church as he was the walls? What is your attitude?

King Artaxerxes, seeing that his countenance had changed, inquired concerning his problem. Then, in response to his concerns, the Persian king not only let him go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls, but provided the material to do so (2:1-8).

Considering the king's response, let me ask: "Could it be that we often do not get things done because we show too little concern? Is it possible that there would be ample help if more understood the urgency of our work?"

As is the case with most good works, there were those that did not want the walls rebuilt. Sanballet the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arabian were such people. They were grieved (mad) that someone was there to help the remnant rebuild (2:10, 19). Thus they set about to stop them, using every device at hand.

Yet, in spite of their enemies, and the many dangers, temptations and challenges, the people were successful in building the wall! They are a great example to us that in spite of Christianity's many enemies, victory can be won **if** we have a mind to work (4:6).

We Should Learn from Nehemiah and the Wall Builders of the **Need to Work**

Many Christians act as if there is no work to do! *Is it true that there is nothing to do?* Of course not, and it will not be true until Satan quits, ". . . walking about seeking who he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). And that's not going to happen until the end of time! *This being the case, whose responsibility is it to get the church to recognize the need and thus to get to work?*

Today it is primarily the elders responsibility; or in the congregations where there are no elders, the men as a group are responsible. Unfortunately, in too many cases they don't see the need to do much more than "keep house," and thus little is done on the battle front against Satan's advances. This should not be, and we can be assured that God will hold every man who is negligent in his duty accountable!

This being the case, the leaders of the church must recognize the need, and then actually take the lead, as Nehemiah did. *How do they do so?*

1. By educating themselves concerning the need:

“So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned” (2:11-15).

2. By challenging the church to act, based upon the need:

“Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach” (2:17). 3) Doing so with encouragement & authority: *“Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me” (2:18 a).* Properly doing these things today will likely have the same effect as it did then. *“And they said, Let us rise and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work” (2:18 b).*

It needs to be clearly understood that although every person is answerable to God when they fail to do His work, those He has put in the leadership position are doubly answerable! Therefore leaders, make sure you are not just “keeping house”!

We Should Learn from Nehemiah and the Wall Builders, That We Can Know **Who Our Enemies Are**

Nehemiah, and the people, had to recognize that Sanbalat, Tobiah, and Geshem were their enemies. Yet, it is not always easy to tell, because enemies often act like friends at first. This is why Paul warned the elders in Ephesus,

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch. . . (Acts 20:28-31).

How can some, “. . . of your own selves. . .” arise to do harm to the church? Because they “act” like friends, but aren’t, or else are swayed by evil men to change from truth to error!

Our enemies are the same as Nehemiah's were, just with different names, who use the same tactics in their efforts to stop us from doing the Lord's work. Their tactics were, and our enemies tactics are (among other things):

1. Laughing, and acting as if we are wrong or misinformed, and have no authority: “. . .*they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? Will ye rebel against the king?*” (2:19).
2. Mocking: “*to treat with contempt or ridicule: DERIDE*” (Webster), with the hope of getting them to faint from their labor; [4:1-2], “*What do these feeble Jews?*” – they can't succeed; “*Will they fortify themselves?*” – it's impossible; “*Will they make sacrifice?*” – how pathetic for them to try; “*Will they make an end in a day?*” – They are foolish to think they can rebuilt the wall at all; “*Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?*” – There job is nothing but a dream.
3. Ridicule: “*to make fun of; a deliberate often malicious belittling*” (Webster). “*Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall*” (4:3). Were Sanbalat's words really for the ears of Tobiah? No, they were for the builders of the wall. You see, a fox is a very small and light animal. Thus, if the builders could be convinced their work was no stronger than that they would quit building! Thankfully Nehemiah was wise enough not to listen, and he challenged the people to not listen as well. He then prayed that God would turn their enemies wishes on their own heads (4:4-5). “*So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work*” (4:6). They had the mind to work BECAUSE they recognized who their enemies were and thus would not listen to them!
4. Conspiracy & threats: When their words would not stop the work, their enemies threatened to fight. When they, “(7) . . .*heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, (8) And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it*” (4:7-8). Surely, such posturing would stop the work, or at least hinder it until the people would get tired and go home, or so they must have thought. Thankfully, recognizing the need to continue the work Nehemiah nor the people were unduly affected. They were wise enough not allow the threat of battle to stop them. Yet, they did not ignore it altogether. They prayed for God's protection, AND, they “*...set a watch against them day and night...*” (4:9). The enemy then sent rumors among the people, saying, “*They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease*” (4:12). *How many times has the Lord's work stopped because of workers listening to, and thus being affected by, such threats – and thus becoming afraid?* That is exactly what the words were intended to do; to cause the workers to loose heart, thinking themselves foolish. Sadly, too often their ploy works! We learn from Nehemiah and the people, “*who had a mind to work,*” that we don't have to be effected by such foolish words.
5. Trickery by compromise: trickery = “*the practice of crafty underhanded ingenuity to deceive or cheat*”; compromise = “*settlement of differences by arbitration or by consent reached by*

mutual concessions” (Webster). Their laughing, mocking, ridicule, and threats having failed, the enemy turned to trickery through compromise. They first requested an audience with Nehemiah, saying, “*Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono*” (6:3). He knew they only wanted to do him mischief. Thus, he responded, “*I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, while I leave it, and come down to you?*” (6:3). When that did not work, they made false accusations and then said, “*Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together*” (6:7). It would seem that they would recognize that he would not be tricked, but the enemies of God are usually persistent. Nehemiah, relying on truth and God, responded: To his enemy, “*There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart*” (6:8). To God, “. . . *they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands*” (6:9). In both cases he knew that they only wanted to get him away from the people in order to do him mischief. So, let us learn the truth so that we will know what is untruth, and thus be able to recognize our enemies by what they say and do!

**We Should Learn from Nehemiah and the Wall Builders,
of the Need to Encourage & Challenge Others
to Join Us in Starting, Continuing, & Finishing the Needed Work**

One of the ways to challenge others to work is to stand upon truth against the enemy, such as Nehemiah did in answering Sanballat's, Tobiah's and Geshem's charge that they were rebelling against the king. “*Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem*” (Nehemiah 2:20). Also, as he did when the enemy passed the rumor ten times, that, “. . . *From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon us*” (4:12).

Did Nehemiah throw up his hands in despair and quit? No! Instead, he got to work preparing defenses that protected them but still allowed the work to continue.

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. And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work. And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the Habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me (Nehemiah 4:13-18).

Everyone, willing to sacrifice, did their part in watching and building.

So we laboured in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labour on the day. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing (Nehemiah 4:13-18).

Of great importance is that in each case Nehemiah reminded the people that their authority and power to build the wall came from God! It is because of his faithful leadership, and their knowledge that God was with them, that “. . .the people had a mind to work” (4:6), and that “. . .the wall was finished. . .in fifty and two days” (6:15). Without confidence in him, and faith in God’s help, their enemies would have surely stopped them! We know this because many fail due to poor leadership and/or a lack of faith!

Conclusion

There surely are many more lessons we could glean from Nehemiah and the re-building of the walls in Jerusalem. Among them, these lessons are vital to our success in faithfully carrying out the Lord’s work. Recognize the need to work and get busy working. Recognize who our enemies are, and don’t be fooled or hindered by them. Encourage and challenge others to not only start the work, but to continue in it until the task is completed.

Sadly, many fail in their task, and thus souls are lost, because they either don’t do the Lord’s work at all, are overcome by the enemy or stop working prematurely. I pray that is not the case with you – or me!

Works Cited

Merriam-Webster (2004) *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th edition, Springfield, Massachusetts, U. S. A.