

ALL TOGETHER FOR VICTORY AHEAD

In Kentucky alone there are more than one million people above the age of nine years who have never made any profession of faith in Christ. Many of our own relatives, neighbors, and friends are without Christ. Doubtless there are multitudes who would like to know Christ as their Saviour, if only someone would introduce them to Him.

Far too many lost people in the vicinity of each of our churches can say, "Nobody cares for my soul." Through the years they have been associated with professed Christians who knew that they had no hope of heaven, and who talked to them about everything else except that which they most wanted to hear them speak—the salvation of their souls. They are convinced that nobody cares for their souls because they have been let alone. Our neglect of souls is a terrible and a distressing fact. A great need of this hour is a genuine concern for the salvation of the multitudes.

In connection with the multitudes within the bounds of our state and of the Southern Baptist Convention who need to be evangelized, educated, and enlisted, and in the light of the enormity of this task, we need to be reminded of this statement in I Corinthians 3:9: "We are God's fellow workers." These words teach us that God is a laborer. He is ever working. Redemption proves His ceaseless activities. From the birth to the death of an individual, God never ceases to exert Himself in his behalf. He constantly works for the welfare of people.

As Christians, we are God's fellow workers. There is a difference in our natural powers, spiritual gifts, position in the church, and the length of our service. But, every Christian is invested with the power to work for God and is therefore obligated to do so.

"We are God's fellow workers." What a title! What distinction! How august the dignity! That is the highest tribute that can be paid to us. We are workers with Him in His field. He furnishes the soil, the seed, and the sunshine, but He expects us to do the cultivating. God will not do anything for a man that he can do for himself, but He will do everything for him that he can not do for himself. God gives the soil, the seed, the sunshine, and the rain, but man will never have a loaf of bread unless he prepares the soil, sows the seed, harvests the wheat, grinds it, mixes it, and bakes it. God made the stone, the clay, and the wood, but man will never live in a house unless he puts these together and builds the house. God wants all to be saved, but only those will be whom Christians introduce to Christ. Cooperation works both ways. If we will work with God, He will work with us. When we work together success is certain.

As we face this glorious and tremendous task of reaching these thousands through our Baptist Sunday Schools in Kentucky, there are some very important lessons which we can learn from Nehemiah. He possessed the spirit of tackling a worthwhile and challenging task and seeing it through to a successful finish. He had the vision of a glorious city arising from an ash-heap. Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, He meditated for three days before he decided upon a course of action. Man of God that he was, he sought the counsel of the Most High in prayer. Prayer solved his problems and opened the way to success. After investigating the whole situation, he called a meeting of the Jewish leaders and pictured to them the desolate condition of the once powerful and splendid city. So ardent was his eloquence and so cogent his argument that the assembly shouted as one man, "Let us rise up and build."

It must have been with proud satisfaction that Nehemiah wrote, "So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof; for the people had a mind to work." This brief statement is the record of a grandly successful achievement despite discouraging odds and seemingly insurmountable difficulties. They completed the job in the brief period of 52 days notwithstanding:

1. Numerous sneers.

The enemy sneered at:

(1) Their character.

Sanballat said, "What do these feeble Jews?"

(2) Their motives.

"Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice?"

(3) Their enthusiasm.

"Will they make an end in a day?"

(4) Their attempted task.

"Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?"

(5) Their completed work.

Tobiah said, "Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall."

The Sanballats and Tobiahs are not all dead yet. As we attempt to reach the multitudes for Christ and our churches, we too shall receive the sneers of modern Sanballats and Tobiahs.

2. Active opposition.

After their enemies had mocked them and ridiculed them they entered into a conspiracy to fight against the work. Ignoring their conspiracy, Nehemiah and his people kept right on building. A plodding persistence in the face of almost any opposition is sure at last to triumph. When the enemy sent Nehemiah an invitation to meet them for a conference, he made the famous answer, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."

3. Despairing friends.

Some of his faint-hearted men grew discouraged. Judah said, "We are not able to build the wall." In other words, "What's the use? Let's quit." What an inspiration such people are! "It can't be done" has killed many a project that could have been done. The pessimistic "insider" is often more dangerous than the spiteful "outsider." Just before the battle of Yorktown friends on every side were despairingly saying to General Washington, "You can't do it; you might just as well give up." The great Washington would not let himself despair. He kept at it, and independence was achieved at Yorktown.

Notwithstanding numerous sneers, active opposition, and despairing friends the wall was rebuilt by Nehemiah and his force. The secret of their success is worth our learning. In fact, it is the secret of all true success in Christian service.

The essential factors in every church that succeeds in reaching her share of these additional people are as follows:

I. An Unshakable Faith in God.

They built the wall by a courageous trust in God. Nehemiah said, "Be not afraid of them; remember the Lord." The taunts and jeers of the enemy only served to make them trust the more implicitly in God. With unshakable faith in Him, they employed the means at hand and invoked the divine blessing all the way along.

Nehemiah was willing for God to have all the glory. An old Jesuit motto reminds us: "A great deal of good can be done in the world if one is not too careful who gets the credit." Hard work and complete dependence on God never fail.

II. An Inspiring Leadership.

Nehemiah was a great leader. He was sent by God; he understood men; he was able to win their confidence; and he was able to win their loyalty. He put all classes to work. He divided the labor, having some to watch while others worked. To each worker he assigned a task for which he was fitted. He inspired the workers with courage and enthusiasm. He put first things first and allowed nothing to draw him aside from the task that God had committed to his hands.

III. A Corp of Willing Workers.

Nehemiah could not have done anything if he had not had a corp of willing workers. "The people had a mind to work." They pushed on in the face of unpleasant circumstances because they had been filled with an inspiration to work. Each worker was willing to do all he could to help. That is the very spirit which we need in this great undertaking of our churches.

IV. Their Enthusiasm For The Task.

The enthusiasm of the people for the task explains the rapidity with which the work was completed. An important human essential for successful service is a holy enthusiasm for the task. These workers were enthusiastic because they were each thinking of their homes and loved ones. They were all working for their personal safety, religious liberty, and national honor.

V. A Spirit of Cooperation.

They worked together. "So built we the wall." Nehemiah could not have accomplished this remarkable achievement without the cooperation of the people. Their project was successful because of a willingness on the part of each to do whatever and all he could. Sometimes they bore burdens; sometimes they grasped swords and spears; sometimes they stood sentinel. There was no selfish picking and choosing. Nobody declared, "I will do this, but I won't do that." Each one was ready to do anything which needed to be done. Each did his share of the work, and it is no wonder that the wall went up quickly. That spirit of cooperation in this important task which Southern Baptists are undertaking will guarantee success.

This is a challenge to all of us to go forward with Christ. The law of the Christian life is "Advance." The Captain of our salvation never orders a retreat. He never brings His people into the position from which retreat is necessary, or in which advance is impossible. Nowhere in the Bible can you find a case where retreat had to be made while God's guidance was followed. In proportion as we yield ourselves to His guidance we can depend on being conducted forward. We now have the greatest opportunity we have ever had, and the gospel of Christ should have the most vigorous application and proclamation by those who believe that it has ever received.

Some Christians give Christ place; others give Him prominence; and still others give Him the pre-eminence. Let each of us give the peerless Christ His rightful place in our lives and service. Let us place Him above self, above family, above friends, above business, and above everything else as He wills that we should do. Let us place Him first in our living, in our giving, in our working, and in our hoping. If you will only enthrone Him, worship Him, love Him, walk with Him, and serve Him, you will discover that your life will be one of boundless possibilities, of unspeakable joy, and of unending victory. For the glorious privilege of walking and working and witnessing together as followers of Christ, let us thank Him with the gratitude of our hearts, with the praises of our lips, and by the obedience of our lives. As we go our separate ways rejoicing in Christ Jesus, let Him smile through our faces, speak with

our tongues, work with our hands, walk with our feet, and love with our hearts. Let Him seek sinners through us, inspire believers by us, and comfort saints through us until the day break and the shadows flee away.

"Only one life; 'twill soon be past;
Only what's done for Christ will last."