

THE SECRET OF TRUE SUCCESS

"So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof; for the people had a mind to work." Nehemiah 4:6

Nehemiah was born in exile. In his youth he was appointed by Artaxerxes, king of Persia, to the responsible position of cupbearer to the king. He was brought up in the royal court at Shushan, or Susa the ancient capital of Persia. Some of his Jewish brethren, including Hanani--his brother, who had escaped captivity came to visit Nehemiah. He inquired of them concerning his people and their beloved city Jerusalem. With saddened voices they reported that the Jews in Jerusalem were badly afflicted and were in a deplorable condition. He was told that their enemies were making life miserable for them. He learned from them that Jerusalem was wasted, its walls broken down and its gates burned with fire. When he heard this report he sat down and wept and mourned and fasted and prayed. Later he was performing his duty in the presence of the king, and the king noted his sad countenance and asked him to reveal the cause of his sadness. He told him that Jerusalem was in ruins and asked for permission to return to his beloved city in order that he might rebuild its walls, restore its gates, and lead in its construction. The king granted his request, and gave him letters to the governors of Syria and Palestine and especially to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, ordering him to supply timber for the wall, the fortress, and the temple. He was also appointed governor of the province of which Jerusalem was the capital. Armed with these credentials and powers, and stirred with a spirit of patriotism and devotion, ~~he~~ went immediately to Jerusalem with a determination to help his brethren.

When he arrived in Jerusalem he made a secret, personal investigation of the whole situation and discovered the real condition of everything before he began to discuss his plans with any one. Thus he could anticipate objections and be prepared to meet them. Many excellent projects, in religious and secular matters, fall through because their promoters have been too hasty and poorly informed. Nehemiah's next step was to call a meeting of the Jewish leaders and give them an account of God's leading which had brought him to Jerusalem, not by any means forgetting the favor of the king. He pictured the desolate condition of the once powerful and splendid city, a condition which brought upon it the reproach of all beholders. So ardent was his eloquence and so cogent his argument that the assembly shouted as one man, "Let us rise up and build!" This is a fine example of what one person of enthusiasm, courage and faith can do to inspire many persons and lift them out of the Slough of Despond.

It is with proud satisfaction that Nehemiah writes, "So we built the wall". This brief statement is the record of a grandly successful achievement against discouraging odds, and despite seemingly insurmountable difficulties. But Nehemiah accomplished his great task of rebuilding the wall and that within the brief period of fifty-two days. They completed the task notwithstanding:---

1. Sneers The enemy sneered at:---

(1) Their character

"What do these feeble Jews?" said Sanballat.

(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

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

The Sanballats and Tobiahs are not all dead yet. Often, even today, when you would attempt some new or difficult work for Christ, there are a good many modern Sanballats and Tobiahs ready to stand about and say, "You can't do anything; you are not strong enough; you are not experienced enough; you haven't money enough; the idea of your attempting such a thing!"

2. Active Opposition

After their enemies had mocked them and ridiculed the very idea of their building the wall, they entered into a conspiracy to fight against the work. Their conspiracy expressed itself in bitter and active opposition but Nehemiah and his people kept right on steadily building. This is another illustration of the fact that a plodding persistence, in the face of almost any opposition, is sure at last to triumph. The enemy sent Nehemiah an invitation to meet them for a conference. However, he was far too shrewd to be caught thus, and made the famous answer, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down." Each time they sent for him he sent back the same reply.

3. Despairing Friends

Some of his men grew discouraged. They were faint hearted. Judah said, "The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, so that we are not able to build the wall." In other words, "That'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 no less dangerous than the spiteful "outsider". Just a little while before the battle of Yorktown, General Washington was in the darkest period of the long and hard struggle. Friends on every side were despairingly saying, "You can't do it; you might just as well give up". But the great Washington would not let himself despair. Whoever else might, he would not. He would keep 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 a secret worth our learning. In fact, it is the secret of all true success in Christian service. The essential factors in every successful church are:----

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

the material realm, workers are prompted to effort by the urge of necessity. An important essential, from the human standpoint, of successful service for the kingdom, is a holy enthusiasm for the task. These workers were so enthusiastic because they were each thinking of their homes and loved ones, and they were all working for their personal safety, religious liberty, and national honor.

V. A Spirit of Co-operation

They worked together under their leader. Notice that "we". "So ~~we~~ built the wall." Nehemiah could not have accomplished this remarkable achievement without the co-operation of the people. There is here a great lesson on the value and necessity of co-operation in Christian service. Success in war is due to two principles--the one is divide your enemy, and the other is unite yourselves. On these two conditions success is certain. Real and vital co-operation in church work will be equally successful.

They built the wall by willingness on the part of each to do whatever he could. Sometimes they bore burdens; sometimes they grasped swords and spears; sometimes they stood sentinel. There was no selfish picking and choosing. There was no mean declaring, "I will do this but I won't do that." Each one was ready to do anything; the thing which seemed just then the best thing to be done. Each had and did his share of the work. It is no wonder that the wall went up steadily and triumphantly up.

We must each have that spirit of co-operation in our church work if it is to succeed. Some church workers are like an old-fashioned clock; they will not work unless they are placed precisely to their liking. But the better and more useful church workers are like watches; they will work equally well in a position. The secret of our success is going to be in real team work. Team work calls for:---

1. A common purpose
2. Faith in God and one another
3. United service
4. Best efforts
5. A spirit of sacrifice

"It's very well to have courage and skill
And it's fine to be counted a star,
But the single deed with its touch of thrill
Doesn't tell us the man you are;
For there's no lone hand in the game we play,
We must work to a bigger scheme,
And the thing that counts in the world today,
Is, How do you pull with the team?

They may sound your praise and call you great
They may single you out for fame,
But you must work with your running mate
Or you'll never win the game;
For never the work of life is done
By the man with a selfish dream,
For the battle is lost or the battle is won
By the spirit of the team.

You may think it fine to be praised for skill,
But a greater thing to do,
Is to set your mind and set your will
On the goal that's just in view;

(Over)

God and then employed the means at hand, and all the way along implored the Divine blessing. This was due to an unshakable faith in God.

II. An Inspiring Leadership

Nehemiah was the ruling spirit. Dummelow speaks of him as having penetrating shrewdness; perfect simplicity of purpose; persistent prayerfulness; and the most energetic activity. His heart was passionately devoted to the welfare of his beloved Jerusalem. He was not a prophet or a priest, or a scribe. He was a layman, a political leader, a plain citizen, and a business man. Of course, he was only one man, but he was one of those men who count for hundreds. He was only one man, but in this world men have not to be counted but weighed; and it is when men are weighed--weighed as to their intellect, their convictions, their courage, their principles, their self-denial--that it is seen that one man is not as good as another. All the great epochs of the world have gathered around one man, just as this restoration gathered around Nehemiah, and so filled his soul that the electric power of his patriotic purpose enkindled the hearts of the people with a flame that never expired till the work was done.

Nehemiah was a great leader. He was sent to God; he understood men; he was able to win their confidence; and he was able to win their loyalty. The principles upon which he based his leadership and organization were somewhat as follows:--

1. Put all classes to work
2. Have a division of labor---some watchers and some workers
3. Have an adaptation of the work and the worker
4. Concentrate on the assaultable points
5. Have honesty and economy in administration
6. Secure co-operation in the work
7. Inspire the workers with courage and enthusiasm

Nehemiah accomplished his great task because he put first things first, and allowed nothing to draw him aside from the thing that God had committed to his hands.

III. A Corps of "Willing Workers"

Nehemiah knew how to do the work and he had been given the authority to do it by the king but he could have done nothing if the people had not had "a mind to work". He could not have done anything if he had not had a corps of willing workers. They pushed on in the face of unpleasant circumstances because they had been filled with an inspiration to work. It seemed that each worker was willing to do what he could to help. How we need that spirit today in all our churches. Happy is the pastor who had a vision of a real task and who had a people with a "mind to work".

"I would not work my soul to save,
For that the Lord hath done;
But, I would work like any slave,
For the sake of God's dear Son."

IV. An Enthusiasm For The Task

The enthusiasm of the people for the task explains the rapidity with which the work was completed. In all walks of life, especially in