

STRENGTH FROM GOD

There are many difficult jobs in this world. Some things are hard to do. We send missionaries to remote parts of the world to try to help people with medical needs, teaching them how to grow food for themselves, and trying to enlighten them about God's love for them. That, in and of itself, is a difficult job. In most places, the work is made even more difficult by people that oppose Christianity. In some of the African areas, the witch doctors stir up the people to avoid the missionaries and not accept help from them. In our own country, people have a lot of stress and many find that drugs are a way to escape from the reality of life. There are people who have devoted their lives to helping people to be rehabilitated and that too is a very difficult job. Just the addiction itself is hard enough to deal with and this situation is complicated by those that oppose rehabilitation -- those that make a profit selling drugs. These that oppose may be the local pusher on the street corner or it may be the beer company that glamorizes the use of its products.

Many worthwhile causes are so difficult that a lot of sincere people who want to help, find it easier to just give up because they don't see how they can get it all done. A lot of worthwhile jobs are like that -- they are so big that most of us need help. The wise person learns that help is available and the Source of all help and strength is God Himself. Nehemiah had a difficult job that he took on and he too found a lot of opposition in getting the work accomplished. Nehemiah found his strength in God and did not give up.

When Nehemiah surveyed the situation in Jerusalem, he immediately saw that the city was defenseless and needed the protection of a wall. Other nearby nations liked the fact that Jerusalem was vulnerable and saw that rebuilding the wall would upset the balance of power which was in their favor at that time.

NEHEMIAH 4:6-9 From the very beginning of the venture to build the wall around Jerusalem, the leaders of the surrounding nations opposed the work. The first thing they tried to do was to claim that the Jews were in rebellion against Artaxerxes. Nehemiah knew better than that, he had personally gotten the endorsement from the king. In a spiritual sense, many Christians find that they don't get involved in any significant ministry because they listen to those that oppose the work of the Kingdom of God. There are those that will criticize and question whether a person should be taking on roles of leadership in ministry and this will stop many a sincere person because they don't have confidence that the job is something that the King of Heaven has endorsed. You may recall that Paul had to remind young Timothy to "stir the gift that was in him, given by the laying on of hands."

The next things these enemies of the Jews tried was ridicule. Ridicule is a powerful weapon that works on most of us. We are so uncertain of ourselves and so much in need of approval from other that we can be manipulated by those around us. One of the main topics that worldly comedians use is religion and they use it in such a fashion as to make anyone who claims to be serious about spiritual things to be less than totally bright. This is a good reason to not put our trust and our confidence in ourselves but to look to Jesus and rely on His word. We need to realize that those that ridicule are ridiculing God and that He doesn't need anyones approval.

Those that opposed the work were not just working independently, they were organized. It seems that the forces of evil are organized in their efforts to destroy the souls of people. There

is organization in crime. Regions are divided up to be controlled by various mobsters that are involved in a variety of evil undertakings: pornography, prostitution, drugs, gambling. I believe that the organization goes even further than the obvious. The organization is more on a cosmic basis and involves more than the profit making things such as drugs and prostitution. The attempts to discredit the church and Christianity in general are part of the scheme. We can see in the Revelation of John how organized evil will control the economic fortunes of the world and the motive will be to cause people to worship Satan.

The response of Nehemiah was exactly what we ought to do in our day and time and that is seek help from God and to be watchful for what is going on in the world around us. Most Christians do not know what is happening and many do not want to know. We are called to spiritual warfare and we are called to build up our defenses against the enemy and because we do not "watch" we do not know the enemy. Being watchful is not something that we do during special awareness weeks but is a continual effort just as Nehemiah set a watch day and night.

NEHEMIAH 4:10-12 People do get tired and they get discouraged when the job seems so big. In the case of the Jews, just cleaning up the mess so that the job of building could get started was a major undertaking in itself. After working on such a job and with progress as slow as it usually is with such things, the people were exhausted and in need of encouragement. They were getting just the opposite of encouragement from their neighbors. They were getting threats of attack and harassment that just did not go away. These people were threatening to kill them. It is easy to just say those words, but it is a different thing when the threats are directed toward you. I remember in late 1985 that I was awakened by a call about 4:00 AM and there was someone on the phone cursing me and threatening to kill me. I hung up the phone and he call right back. Needless to say, this was quite upsetting and I took measures to do something about it.

Nehemiah saw that he needed to do something about the threats that the people working on the wall were continually getting. He faced a possible mass desertion of the workmen if something were not done. He armed the workers and set up an alarm system so that all would be ready in case of an attack. He also brought their families closer to the workforce for improved morale and finally addressed them with a strongly motivational message.

NEHEMIAH 4:15-18 Sometimes all that is needed to thwart the work of the devil is for God's people to be aware of what is happening and to be on guard against his tricks. The fact that the people were organized so that each person could call for help and expect to receive it from his friends was also a help. There is a lesson for us to learn in the church. We need to be ready to help each other and to be informed about what the enemy is doing as we go about building up the church or our lives. Nehemiah had the trumpeter by his side to sound the alarm and we need such people around who can and will sound the alarm for our society. Our problem seems to be that no one is really listening as the warning is being sounded.

NEHEMIAH 4:19-20 Nehemiah was a good leader in that he did not try to sugar coat the difficulty of the work that was before the people. He let them know that the challenge was difficult. He also stressed team work in the effort especially when it came to the defense of the workers and the wall. People will rise to the challenge of hard work especially when they realize that they are not in a situation alone. Some people need a touch from you to provide the encourage that they may require, to hear a warning or to be challenged with a job that is worth doing even though it may be difficult.