

April 15, 54 P.M.
Commissioning Service Pulpit Committee

BUILDERS

Neh. 2:18

In 1940, when Britain was at war, Winston Churchill wished to encourage his people to redouble their efforts, to go forward in spite of difficulty. He used this expression, "This is your finest hour." Tonight, as we stand at the beginning of a year in which we must fight against the indifference and the lethargy that come from being satisfied with minor accomplishments, I would borrow his words and say, "This is your finest hour," and now is the accepted time for real achievement.

2 Cor. 6:2.

You will be held accountable for what you do with this hour. On one of the college campuses at Oxford University is a sundial on which these thought-provoking words are inscribed, "The hours pass and are laid to our charge." Is that not another way of saying, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God"?

Two of the weapons of the devil that your new Pulpit Committee must be alerted against are the gas bombs of inertia (a refined word for laziness) and procrastination. Remember that you are to

Be strong!

We are not here to play---to dream, to drift.

We have hard work to do and loads to lift.

Shun not the struggle---face it; 'tis God's gift.

Maltbie D. Babcock

Several years ago Dr. Duke McCall wrote a book entitled God's Hurry. Most of us never think of God being in a hurry. The following

scriptural passage has never penetrated our minds: "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years" (2 Pet. 3:8). All of us who have sat by the bedside of a gravely ill loved one know how an anxious night can seem weeks long. In like manner, as God looks anxiously at our church, seeing so much that needs to be done, so many who need to be reached, and sometimes workers who play at the job, surely, each day stretches out into a thousand years.

Every morning lean thine arms awhile
Upon the window-sill of heaven
And gaze upon thy Lord,
Then, with the vision fresh within thy heart,
Turn strong to meet the new day.

Cox

Nehemiah was a builder - so are we!

The prophet was one of the Jews who had been taken as a captive to Persia. In the twentieth year of the reign of Artaxerxes, while Nehemiah was serving as cupbearer to the king, certain Jews arrived from Judea, and gave Nehemiah a deplorable account of the condition of Jerusalem and of the Jews of the dispersion who still lived in Judea. Nehemiah immediately conceived the idea of returning to Jerusalem in an attempt to better the situation for his people, rebuild the walls of his ancient city, and restore it to its former dignity. He was successful in obtaining the king's consent to his mission, and was appointed governor of Judea. The factual story as told by the builder himself is far more interesting than any fiction, and it contains some

valuable lessons for you as committee of this South Norfolk Baptist Church.

Nehemiah worked cautiously. When he reached the ancient site of Jerusalem, he did not disclose his plans to anyone, not even to the Jews who were living there. The scriptures tell us that he went at night to survey the ancient ruins. A detailed account of his findings is not given, but, doubtless he took notice of any building material which might be used in constructing the new walls---stones that had been stumbling blocks in the way of travelers since the city was sacked by Nebuchadnezzar; stones that had long lain in unsightly heaps, covered with moss and the accumulated waste of time, signifying only destruction and defeat.

Nehemiah organized his forces. When Nehemiah had perfected his plans, he then took counsel with the Jews and enlisted their support to rebuild the walls. It is not often that a great accomplishment is achieved for the Lord by one man single-handed. Most victories are wrought for Him through the co-operative efforts of His people. The third chapter of Nehemiah grows almost monotonous by the repetition of one phrase "And next to them . . . and next to them . . . and next to them." Every man had his task and his place on the wall in which to work, but they all worked side by side. There were no gaps in the organization. Some of the men served as full-time guards, while others devoted themselves to construction work; but one thing is significant--- they were all on the alert for the enemy all of the time. The Word says, "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

which had his sword girded by his side, and so builded." (Nehemiah 4:17-18). There is never a time in the service of our God when Christian people do not need to be on the alert for the attacks of Satan and his representatives. This is especially true when we begin an active work of construction for our Lord, whether it be the actual building of a physical plant, or the enlargement of a work program.

Nehemiah encountered opposition. The opposition with which he had to deal is the same type with which the Lord's people have had to deal always. Nehemiah's manner of dealing with it was the right way. It worked for him and it will work for you. The weapons used by his enemies, represented by Sanballat and Tobiah, have become stock methods of discouraging, discomfiting, and defeating the Lord's people. They are easily recognizable.

RIDICULE was the first weapon used by the enemy. Nehemiah states that when the enemy heard that they intended to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem "they laughed us to scorn" (2:19). They said, also: "Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall." (4:3).

Ridicule is often enough to stop a good work, especially if the workman is a young Christian. It is a vicious thing and should be avoided at all times. It is significant that Nehemiah did not attempt to answer criticism of his work; but he did pray. No logical argument will suffice against malicious ridicule. The only answer is a completed task. Remember, in beginning your new work, the first tool Satan usually uses to discourage the work is ridicule. Don't try to answer your critics by talking back to them. Just talk to God and keep close to your task. Hear the word of Nehemiah: "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our

God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them." (4:9)
Nehemiah's word to his people was this: "Remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses." (4:14)

There is more involved in the work you do than just the building up and maintaining of this organization. Your own children, your own family, your own home are involved. The enemy is seeking to destroy all that is sacred and precious to you; but the word of Nehemiah through inspiration to his people is the Lord's word to you today: "Remember the Lord."

COMPROMISE was the next tool which the enemy sought to use. Sanballat sent a messenger to Nehemiah, saying, "Come let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono." (6:2) The cause of righteousness often suffers because of time consumed in waiting for a conference. The meeting which Sanballat tried to arrange with Nehemiah would only have hindered the progress of the work. The most Nehemiah could have expected from the enemy would have been an offer that would have postponed the completion of the Lord's work and placed the Jews in a definite disadvantage. Christianity has never gained in any way through making alliances with its enemies. Nehemiah recognized the true status of the situation. He said, "They thought to do me mischief". (6:2) His answer to his enemies was sufficient for him in his day, and it is sufficient for you in this day: "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?" (6:3).

MISREPRESENTATIONS - called propoganda in our day, but meaning the same thing - was the next tool the enemy used in an effort to stop the building. "Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand; wherein was written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words." (6:5-6)

Nehemiah was direct in his denial of the accusation: "I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart." (6:8)

Satan has often been able to stop a good work by getting out a false report on the worker. A favorite device is to spread the falsehood that the worker is working for his own glory, or to advance his personal interest in some manner - that he has ulterior motives. Many a gentle heart has been broken, and many a great work has been delayed by such measures. Another falsehood which Satan is fond of spreading is that there is division among the workers, and that the work is failing. No one wishes to unite with a group that is failing in its efforts, or where fightings and friction exists among the members. Such misrepresentations are deceptive tools used by Satan to hinder the Lord's work.

THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE was another tool which the enemy used in an effort to stop the work. It is significant that some of the allies whom Sanballat and Tobiah enlisted in their conspiracy to stop the rebuilding of the walls were blood kinsmen of the Jews. The Ammonites, descendants of Lot, united with the Arabians and Ashdodites to hinder the work of God through His people. If you should encounter opposition in your work, the most effective opposition in your work, the most effective

opposition will not come from the atheist, infidel, or avowed disbeliever in God. Your most effective opposition will come from someone on whom you should have a rightful claim for support - someone on whom you should have a rightful claim for support - someone who should be sympathetic with you in your work - from professed Christians, even members of your own group.

What was the strategy Nehemiah used? Unbroken vigilance. He states that neither he nor his fellow workmen removed their clothes either day or night, except when they were washed. They were ready for an attack from the enemy at all times. But did they strike back? No. They did not even answer back. Nehemiah turned to his people with the everlasting word of assurance: "Our God shall fight for us." (4:20)

Even with all of the opposition which the great builder encountered, the wall was completed because of two reasons: Nehemiah was wholly dedicated to one supreme purpose, as suggested by his own words: . . . "What my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem." (2:12); and "the people had a mind to work." (4:6).

In commissioning those who have been chosen by this group to direct your activities for the coming year, I can say to you on the authority of the Scripture that if you as Committee have the conviction that God has put it in your hearts to do a certain work for Him this year, and if the members of this organization will take their places, shoulder to shoulder, with minds and hearts directed by a singleness of purpose, regardless of whatever obstacles you may have to overcome, and regardless of what opposition you may encounter, your work will be completed.

"Master, where shall I work today?"

And my love flowed warm and free,

And He pointed out a tiny plot,
And said, "Tend that for me."

But I answered quickly, "Oh, no, not there."
Not any one could see,
No matter how well my task was done --
Not that little place for me.

And His voice, when He spoke, it was not stern,
But He answered me tenderly,
"Little one, search that heart of thine,
Are you working for them, or me?
Nazareth was just a little place,
And so was Galilee."

Author Unknown

You may not be called by God to occupy a prominent position in this church; but you are all called to be faithful and your faithfulness will manifest itself by the way you co-operate with your committee. The Jews needed a leader such as Nehemiah to lead them in rebuilding the walls of their city; but Nehemiah could have never finished the task alone. The people had to work with him. This organization needs officers to lead in the work, but the officers cannot complete the task alone. All of the members must work wholeheartedly, devotedly, and co-operatively.