

5. KNOCKED DOWN, NOT KNOCKED OUT

J. Oswald Sanders wrote a book called "Spiritual Leadership". It is thoroughly biblical and completely practical. One of the most valuable lesson we can learn from the book is "The Cost of Leadership", not "The Recognition of Leadership". Sanders lists seven areas where any person, man or woman, will pay a price for being a leader. One of those areas is CRITICISM. Sanders says, "No leader is exempt from criticism, and his humility will nowhere be seen more clearly than in the manner in which he accepts and reacts to it." Tonight, we will take note of how Nehemiah responds to his critics, and see how his humility comes through the test.

Before we see Nehemiah's humility, let's take a look at another spiritual giant in NT, Paul the apostle in 2 Corinthians.

2Cor. 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-- always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

The greatest thing about being earthen vessel is that we know who our Maker is. His name is Jesus, who is the Maker of heaven and earth. To His name, every knee shall bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord. So our enemy can attack us all they want, we might be knocked down time to time, but not knocked out. He is always with us.

A. BRING IT ON

Nehemiah 4:1-3 But it so happened, when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, that he was furious and very indignant, and mocked the Jews. And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they complete it in a day? Will they revive the stones from the heaps of rubbish--stones that are burned?" Now Tobiah the Ammonite was beside him, and he said, "Whatever they build, if even a fox goes up on it, he will break down their stone wall."

As I said in the last Saturday lesson, as soon as we started to walk with Jesus, we do carry enemy's crosshair on our foreheads. There will be ridicules, attack, nasty malicious criticism and discouragement that come from the enemy.

Nehemiah 4:4-5 Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach on their own heads, and give them as plunder to a land of captivity! Do not cover their iniquity, and do not let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have provoked You to anger before the builders.

Nehemiah didn't retaliate their verbal attacks and wrongful criticism with his own anger. Instead he got down on his knees and prayed to God. How often do we want to get even with those who try to hurt us! But if we do the same things what the others did to us, what are we different than them.

Rom. 12:17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

Prov. 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

Here is an application that we can use at our work places and neighborhood. Somebody might make fun of us, because we are Christians and go to church services, read Bibles and pray to the Lord. They call us names, "Bible thumper," "Weird", or whatever. What would we do? We can stick potatoes into their car tail pipes or you can be a better man by keeping a cool head and pray for them. Some of us might say, "If I do that, I don't get no respect from them." Which one would we rather have, respect from them or an approval from our God? Our choice!

B. THE WORK CONTINUES

Nehemiah 4:6-12 So we built the wall, and the entire wall was joined together up to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. Now it happened, when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the walls of Jerusalem were being restored and the gaps were beginning to be closed, that they became very angry, and all of them conspired together to come and attack Jerusalem and create confusion. Nevertheless we made our prayer to our God, and because of them we set a watch against them day and night. Then Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is failing, and there is so much rubbish that we are not able to build the wall." And our adversaries said, "They will neither know nor see anything, till we come into their midst and kill them and cause the work to cease." So it was, when the Jews who dwelt near them came, that they told us ten times, "From whatever place you turn, they will be upon us."

The sequence of satanic attack is almost patterned. We see ridicules from the enemy. They mock at us and harass us for being Christians. The closer we walk with God, the more they get upset. Then they will change their tactics to frontal attack or persecution against us and our belief. It will be followed by discouragement. This probably is the most effective weapon against any Christian. Because it starts from within our hearts.

Charles H. Spurgeon, Baptist minister of London, England, had a pastor friend, Dr. Newman Hall, who wrote a book titled "Come to Jesus." Another preacher published an article in which he ridiculed Hall, who bore it patiently for a little while. But when the article gained popularity, Hall sat down and wrote a letter of protest. His answer was full of retaliatory invectives that outdid anything in the article which attacked him. Before mailing the letter, Hall took it to Spurgeon for his opinion.

Spurgeon read it carefully then, handling it back, asserted it was excellent and that the writer of the article deserved it all. "But," he added, "it just lacks one thing." After a pause Spurgeon continued, "Underneath your signature you ought to write the words, 'Author of Come to Jesus.'"

The two godly men looked at each other for a few moments. Then Hall tore the letter to shreds.

In spite of the opposition, the work continues. We cannot slow down in loving and serving God because of the enemy's attacks against us. That is precisely what the devil and his hosts want us to do.

The purpose of the wall is to keep the outside influences out. Once the wall is down and the outside bad influences infiltrate to the inside, it takes a lot of effort to remove the rubbish.

While we have the excitement of rebuilding the wall, if we are not careful, we will let our enemies come into the midst of our hearts without even realizing it. One compromise, one slip, that's all it takes.

C. PRAY AND WORK

Nehemiah 4:13-23 Therefore I positioned men behind the lower parts of the wall, at the openings; and I set the people according to their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows. And I looked, and arose and said to the nobles, to the leaders, and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, great and awesome, and fight for your brethren, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your houses." And it happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and that God had brought their plot to nothing, that all of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work. So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half held the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah. Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other held a weapon. Every one of the builders had his sword girded at his side as he built. And the one who sounded the trumpet was beside me. Then I said to the nobles, the rulers, and the rest of the people, "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated far from one another on the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us." So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. At the same time I also said to the people, "Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day." So neither I, my brethren, my servants, nor the men of the guard who followed me took off our clothes, except that everyone took them off for washing.

Nehemiah didn't just pray to God and did nothing. He trusted God and used common sense to handle the problems. Prayer should not be used in replacement of irresponsible actions. God does expect us to do what is right and necessary all the while we trust him with all of our hearts.

One note of caution, we can do all we want in common sense, but we don't put God first, we have nothing.

Psalm 127:1 Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain.

V 14 says, "Remember the Lord". That is the true cure for our discouragement. We can wander around in the midst of problems and choose not to see God's promises. Or we can stretch out our hands to God who pull us out from it.

In the same verse, Nehemiah saw his people's fear and know that he had to get their eyes back on the Lord. Their focus was on the debris and the enemy, and until that changed, there would be no progress. During times of discouragement, it's important for all of us to refocus our attention on the Lord. We can do this by meditating on His promises, memorizing His Word and reflecting on His character.

Psalms 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!

Keeping in close contact with fellow believers is so important. We can pray for one another and care for one another and display the love of God to one another. The pastor cannot take care of everyone; the elders cannot take care of everyone. It is everybody's job to care for one another.

There is no such thing as a vacation, holidays, or day-off in spiritual warfare. As soon as we let our guard down, we will be whipped.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) The outside enemy is easily detected, but the enemy within is hard to find.

Discouragement is the enemy within. What do we do when we get discouraged? We must go to God who is the ultimate Encourager and the One who gives peace that pass all men's understanding.

2) His promises are true and practical. And our God keeps His promises.

In Hebrews 13:5, He says that He will never leave us, nor forsake us. In Psalm 23, He tells that even though we walk through the valley of shadow of death, we will fear no evil, because He is with us. God is within us, around us and whenever it is necessary He will be upon us to empower us.

So I say, "Fear not, God is with us."

3) Our enemies are looking for the weak areas in our hearts.

We need to see where our weaknesses are. Is it alcohol? Gambling? Pornography? Gossip? Depression? Not trusting God? When we realize what those lower parts or openings to our hearts are, we need to post extra caution in those areas and be ready for the enemy.

4) Spiritual warfare is not nine-to-five, nor is it just five days a week. It is twenty-four/ seven.

We cannot let our guard down anytime.

5) As Nehemiah didn't act upon his own strength, but he depended on God in prayer, we need to bring all of our burdens to Him.

Our strength and efforts against the devil are limited. But if we depend on Him, God will take care of us.