

RELIGION

All things are possible with God

Nehemiah 4-6

In the kingdom of God, there are few — if any — one-man shows. It is necessary for many people to be involved in most of the tasks of life. This basic principle seems to have escaped the notice of certain individuals. Yet, the fact remains.

Nehemiah, cup-bearer to king Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 1:11d; 2:1) went to the city of Jerusalem with a delegation from Shushan, the palace (Nehemiah 1:1). The purpose of this group was the rebuilding of the wall of the city. Nehemiah 2:3-8. Upon his arrival, Nehemiah waited three days before he made his personal survey of the destruction. Nehemiah 2:11-15. This leader, then, approached the local Jewish leaders, and presented his purpose. Nehemiah 2:17-20.

The record gives a list of the people who became part of the team of the wall-builders. A reading of the list (Nehemiah 3) shows that people from all walks of life became builders. Governmental leaders, tradesmen, professionals and common people worked together on this project. The materials were supplied from the resources of the king.

As with any positive task, there was opposition to the re-building of this wall. It is important for us to remember that the wall of the city was for protection from enemies, and indicated that the city was no longer a disgrace to its inhabitants. The

opposition was led by Sanballat and Tobiah. Nehemiah 2:10; 4:1,3. "...When Sanballat heard that we build the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews." Nehemiah 4:1. This attitude was expressed in the declarations of ridicule. Nehemiah 4:2, 3.

Nehemiah knew of this opposition. His personal response was prayer — "Hear, O our God; for we are despised; and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity: And cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders." Nehemiah 4:4, 5. Nehemiah reported the actions of the workers. "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.

The attitude of the workers angered the opposition leaders. "But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, and conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it." Nehemiah 4:7, 8. Again, Nehemiah turned to God.

Sunday School Lesson

Rev. James Temples



"Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them." Nehemiah 4:9. The negative attitude began to contaminate some of the workers. Nehemiah 4:10.

Then opposition became direct and persistent. "And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you." Nehemiah 4:11, 12.

These threats called for personal action. Nehemiah wrote, "Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows." Nehemiah 4:13. Thus, the builders had to defend their work. The workers were scattered the length of the wall — with great distance between them. Nehemiah devised a signaling system that would allow the workers to aid

each other, if the enemy attacked. Nehemiah 4:19-22. He reported that "neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes, saving that every one put them off for washing." Nehemiah 4:23.

The living conditions in the city were difficult. Food was scarce and money was limited. This placed a great hardship on these people. As usual, some shrewd ones took advantage of the difficulties of others. Nehemiah, as the governor, addressed this situation, and persuaded the culprits to change their business practices. Nehemiah 5:1-14.

The opposition leaders changed their tactics. Attempts were made to lure Nehemiah from the task. Nehemiah 6:1-2. "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?" Nehemiah 6:3. However, these adversaries were insistent — "Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner." Nehemiah 6:4.

The next tactic was in the form of an open letter. Nehemiah 6:5. This letter stated that "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." Nehemiah 6:6. Their next point is quite interesting — "And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore and let us take counsel together." Nehemiah 6:7. The response was immediate. "Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart." Nehemiah 6:8.

Opposition can wear down the morale and even the strength of the best of the workers. The leader must do all that is within his power and ability to counteract these negative forces. Nehemiah wrote that "they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done." Nehemiah 6:9a. However, Nehemiah once more turned to prayer — "Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands." Nehemiah 6:9b.

The opposition attempted another scheme. Nehemiah was invited to come to the temple — to hide in a room — for his own protection. Nehemiah 6:10. "And I said, Should such a man as I flee? And who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in." Nehemiah 6:11. "And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him;

but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me." Nehemiah 6:12, 13. He, then, prayed regarding the opposition. Nehemiah 6:14.

We are told that "the wall was finished...in 50 and two days. And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God." Nehemiah 6:15, 16.

Most tasks are not easy. However, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Romans 8:31; Numbers 14:9; Psalm 118:6, 8. The promises of God remain the same. Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8. May we always trust in the word of God.

Rev. James C. Temples' Sunday School Lesson has appeared in the Early County News each week since 1967. A native of Early County, Rev. Temples taught in public schools 32 years and 10 years at Southeastern College of Assemblies of God, in Lakeland, Florida. He also served as pastor and evangelist during those years. He can be contacted at P.O. Box 1569, Auburndale, Fla. 33823; 863-965-0157. Email: jctjet@aol.com.

Choose to be part of the minority

What kind of person was Nicodemus? John 3:1 says, "Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews." It seems simple enough to me. He was a man, a Pharisee, had a weird name, was a ruler and a Jew. Nicodemus was the minority man.

As a minority man, Nicodemus got to see someone the majority of people never got to see.

Jesus Christ walked upon the planet for 33 years, only the last three of which were open to the public. Only a very small minority of people in human history ever had a sit-down with him. Nicodemus' status in all the aforementioned minorities earned him this right. Some Jewish leader needed to get to the bottom of why some Jewish people were calling Jesus Christ the king of the Jews.

It happened at night, for various speculative reasons. Perhaps they met around the light of a campfire. Perhaps there was only moonlight. Maybe they faced off in front of two entourages. Maybe they faced each other one on one. But one thing is certain, Nicodemus got to see

Jesus face to face, which puts him in a small minority of first century people.

Wouldn't you like to see Jesus face to face and enjoy this privilege forever? You can! But only if you belong to a very special minority.

As a minority man, Nicodemus got to ask a question the majority of people never bother to ask.

Actually, Nicodemus didn't ask it out loud. But since he was meeting with the very God of heaven and earth, Jesus knew his very thoughts and intentions. So, Jesus articulated Nicodemus' question for him.

Everyone wonders about life after death. All people have some sort of question about heaven. But how many people are running around asking specific questions about "the kingdom of God." Life after death is what we want, heaven is where we all want to go, but "the kingdom of God" is not so much about us as it is about God. Self-centered people don't tend to ask God-centered questions.

I am convinced, based on what John will record in chapter six and in other parts of scripture, that God

The Gospel Truth

Dr. Charles F. DeVane Jr. First Baptist Church



drew Nicodemus to Jesus, God put this question in his heart, and God provided him with the perfect answer.

Wouldn't you like to have God answer your most important question? He will! But only if you belong to a very special minority.

As a minority man, Nicodemus received an answer the majority of people don't want to hear.

Nicodemus' first response to this business of being "born again" was mainstream. He rolled his eyes and laughed out loud. It wasn't the answer Nicodemus wanted to hear.

Nicodemus thought, like the majority, that entrance into the kingdom of God could be earned. We pull ourselves up to heaven by our own boot straps, or so we think. Like the former Saul of Tarsus, Nicodemus had great confidence according to the flesh. But

with!"

The word of God says that if we read the Bible and don't be a doer of the word then we are like someone that looks in a mirror and sees themselves and then walks off and forgets what they look like.

You are a child of the king and his royal blood flows through your veins. We are made in his likeness and image, but through sin so many pervert that image. The question is, "When you look in the mirror does your life reflect the image of Christ?" If not then let Jesus change your life and truly become a new person in Christ Jesus. Then when you look at yourself the love of God will shine through. Can you say amen?

this confidence must have been wavering, and his conscience must have been bothering him, or else he would have never come to Jesus that night.

Christ's command was shocking. "You must be born again," he said. It's grace, not merit. It's faith, not works. It's from above, not below. It's something God does for man, not what man does for God. It's the person and work and glory of Jesus Christ, not the person and work and glory of a pharisee or a preacher or a good little church member. It's radical grace, like wind in the hands of a sovereign God, which blows and becomes good news to only a minority of souls.

Wouldn't you like to hear the secret to spiritual success, the key to the kingdom of God? You just did!

But only if you belong to a very special minority.

As a minority man, Nicodemus made a commitment the majority of people never make.

I know there is no record of Nicodemus praying a prayer or signing a commitment card in John 3. His last words in the chapter are, "How can these things be?" Did Nicodemus get it, or not?

The only right response to the gospel is repentance and faith. I prefer the meaning of the word "is" in the previous sentence because repentance and faith "is" one event, two sides of the same coin, one enormous commitment most people never make.

Scripture and history are on Nicodemus' side. In John 3, Nicodemus is questioning Jesus the rabbi. By

CHURCH NEWS

Arms of Faith

Arms of Faith Missionary Baptist Church will celebrate their 144th church anniversary Sunday, May 18 at 2 p.m. Pastor Edward Williams is the guest speaker. Dinner will be served after the service. Everyone is invited to attend.

New Hope Baptist

New Hope Baptist Church will host a benefit gospel sing for Alice Chambliss Saturday, May 17 at 7 p.m. Everyone is invited to attend.

Bright Star Baptist

Bright Star Baptist Church will have annual revival services May 12 through May 16 at 7:30 p.m. Rev. David Johnson will be the guest speaker. Everyone is invited to attend.

St. John M.B.

Saint John Missionary Baptist Church will host their ushers anniversary Sunday, May 18 at 11 a.m. All ushers are asked to attend. Everyone is invited to attend.

Damascus Baptist

Damascus Baptist Church will have homecoming services May 25 at 10:45 a.m. Rev. Robert Pullen,

Damascus native and former pastor, will be the speaker. The "Willing Servants" of Colquitt will present special music in the worship hour and after lunch. A covered dish lunch will be served. Everyone is invited to attend.

Wesley Chapel

Wesley Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church will have its annual revival meeting May 26 through May 30 at 7:30 p.m. The Rev. Earl Hallmon will be the evangelist of the week. Everyone is invited to attend.

Providence Assembly

Providence Assembly will have homecoming services May 18 at 10:30 a.m. Minister Jeanette Miller of Echo, Ala., will be the guest speaker. Dinner will be served after service with a gospel sing following dinner. Everyone is invited to attend.

True Love M.B.

True Love Missionary Baptist Church will celebrate Men and Women's Day Sunday, May 18 at 4 p.m. Rev. Millie Rambeau of Live Oak Church along with

John 7, Nicodemus is defending the claims of Jesus the messiah. And by John 19, Nicodemus is boldly and lovingly helping bury the body of Jesus the savior.

I believe Nicodemus believed. I believe Nicodemus repented. True belief is always marked by a change of mind, heart and behavior. In other words, Nicodemus was "born again." This makes him a part of a very important minority. Nicodemus was an evangelical Christian.

So when you think of Nicodemus, think of him as a minority man. And pray that you will be able to be numbered in this minority. Repent. Believe. Be born again. Be a part of the only number that will ever really matter.

Does your image reflect Christ?

Years ago mostly country folk called a mirror "a looking glass." Mirrors fascinate everyone and everything the first time they see themselves in one. The American Indian was amazed by this looking glass way back in history when the pioneers and pilgrims came to America. A baby can't figure out why they see themselves or even who they are looking at. An animal just can't get enough of looking in a mirror and dogs will bark thinking they are seeing another dog.

This old hillbilly had never seen a looking glass and when he did he bought it and brought it home. He didn't show it to his wife. He hung it out in the barn. He just couldn't get over his

Other Voices

Gary Toole



mirror. He couldn't look at himself enough. Not that he was good looking. It just amazed him. He would go out everyday and spend a lot of time in the barn looking in that mirror. So his wife got kind of suspicious and she thought he had another woman. One day she went out there to try and catch them and he wasn't in the barn but she did find the mirror and she looked in it and said, "So, you're the hussy my old man has been running

Benefit Gospel Sing
for
Alice Chambliss
Sat., May 17
7:00 p.m.
New Hope Baptist Church
Blakely • US Hwy. 27S