

Working & Warring (3)

Text: Nehemiah 4:16-23

Introduction:

1. Nehemiah teaches us many lessons concerning the art of Christian service. It also contains many principles of how to be a spiritual leader.
2. This chapter: The battle erupts as the walls are being built. In the Christian life have to learn to be servants & soldiers, builders & battlers, workers & warriors. **Both** are necessary.
3. In this chapter, we note the two waves of attack used by the enemy to try and stop the work of God: 1. Contempt 2. Conspiracy. The third wave of attack will come in Chapter 6 – Compromise
4. Having learned of the enemy's tactics, Nehemiah sets up a defense plan so they can continue in the work and at the same time, be in a position to resist the enemy. Note **“from that time forth”** in Vs. 16. They learned from their experiences to be better prepared and equipped for the future to face the enemy. Several key things were put in place:

I. The Arming of the People (Vs. 16-18)

A. The Involvement of Leadership (Vs. 16)

1. Nehemiah's Personal Retinue (16a)
 - a. These were Nehemiah's right-hand men (Vs. 23), his leadership team.
 - b. It is important that those in leadership take the initiative in the spiritual battle God's people find themselves in.
 - c. Leaders need to get their “hands dirty” in the work of the ministry but balance that with giving adequate time to keep watch for the enemy's movements
 - d. 'habergeons' = coats of mail, breastplates
2. The People's Rulers (16b)
 1. They were there to encourage the workers in their labors and provide leadership in the event of an attack
 2. As a worker, knowing that those in leadership are standing guard, would give you a sense of security and thus your hands would be strengthened for the work.

B. The Inclusion of Laymen (Vs. 17-19)

1. The Bearers (Vs. 17)
 - a. Their task was to remove the rubbish
 - b. There were those whose role was to load and others to carry.
2. The Builders (Vs. 18)
 - a. Involved with the actual construction on the wall.

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- b. Their sword was hung at their side as their role demanded the use of both hands.
3. The picture of the **Sword & the Trowel**: Both speak of the ministry of the Word.
 - a. The trowel speaks of the ministry of the Word in edification, building up in the faith.
 - b. The sword speaks of the ministry of the Word in contention, defending the faith
 - c. The sword and trowel principle seen in Jude (Note Vs. 3 & 20)

II. The Alarm for the People (Vs. 18-20)

A. The Position of the Trumpet (Vs. 18)

1. 'trumpet' = the shofar trumpet made out of the horn of a ram or goat. It was used for giving signals for war as in the case of Joshua (6:10-16) and Gideon (Judges 7:18-22). PLAY SOUND
2. "by me" = Nehemiah was a master organizer and delegator, but he took personal ownership of this most important role of warning God's people. Note: Those given the oversight of the people of God must take this role seriously.
3. The example of Ezekiel: Ezekiel 3:17-18 *"Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: **therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.** When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand."*
4. The example of Isaiah 58:1 *"Cry aloud, spare not, **lift up thy voice like a trumpet**, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins."* Note: It is interesting that of all the instruments God could have used to describe the ministry of preaching, he used the trumpet. Our denunciations of sin are not to be soft, smooth and compromising, but loud, distinct, clear and sharp.
5. 2 Timothy 4:2-4 *"Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season..."*

B. The Purpose of the Trumpet (Vs. 19-20a)

1. To alert (Vs. 19) and assemble (20a) the people
 - a. The trumpet blast would alert the people of God to which part of the wall was under attack from the enemy. They could then concentrate their forces at the point where the enemy was **currently** challenging. Imagine the enemy challenging at the Fish Gate and the watchman sounding at the Valley Gate!

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- b. The enemy often attacks different parts of the wall at different times. Even in modern warfare, large sections of the war front often go through silent periods with little to know action.
2. Principle: God's men need to be watchful and discerning as to which part of the wall is under siege by the enemy right now and sound the warning so that God's people can "resist the devil" so that he will "flee from us".
3. Challenge: We seem to be very good at blowing the trumpet at places on the wall that are important but NOT under attack at the present. Luther: "If I profess with loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is merely flight and disgrace if he flinches at THAT point."
4. Challenge: We seem to be more concerned today with shooting at the man willing to blow the trumpet at the enemy's attempt to surmount the wall than uniting together to repel the enemy.

C. The Perspective of Faith (Vs. 20b)

1. With all their preparation and organization for battle, Nehemiah knew that the outcome of the battle would always be determined by the intervention of God's power. Nehemiah was a man of faith and had a God-centered approach to the battle.
2. David declared to Goliath "the battle is the LORD's" (1 Sam. 17:47)

III. The Alertness of the People (Vs. 21-23)

A. The Division of Labor (Vs. 21)

1. Half of Nehemiah's servants worked
2. Half of Nehemiah's servants watched
3. Commenced in dawn and ended in darkness

B. The Decision for Lodging (Vs. 22)

1. Workers were to sleep at night within the walls of Jerusalem for safety so they could benefit from the protection of guards which were a part of Nehemiah's leadership team (Vs. 23)
2. Godly leadership a protection for God's people. Important that you seek to have your family under the oversight of a local church and pastor.
3. Wiersbe: "Leaders are often awake when others are asleep, and working when others are resting."
4. Staying in the company of God's people would also help to overcome the problem of those living near the enemy becoming carriers of evil tidings (Vs. 12)

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C. The Dedication of Leadership (Vs. 23)

1. Due to the dual responsibilities of Nehemiah and his team to labor in the day and watch at night, they didn't even have time to change their clothes.
2. This statement not made of anyone else. "He thus set a blessed example, in the circle of his own responsibility of personal devotedness."
3. Nehemiah did not require sacrifice of others without setting an example himself. They were willing to sacrifice personal comfort for the sake of God's work.
4. Illustration: Paul's "night and day" labors

Conclusion:

1. Which side of the battle are you on? Will you take a stand? Are you standing in unity with your brethren in the spiritual battle or are you an inside sympathizer that the enemy can use to accomplish his subversive work?
2. What is our attitude to the ministry of warning?