

I. Introduction:

- A. On four occasions the Samaritan, Sanballat, tried to take Nehemiah away from his work on the wall.
1. Apparently in a most friendly fashion he said, *“Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono.”*
 2. Maybe the first time it was an invitation to the Starbucks in Cedarville, but after than it was to lunch at the diner in the city of Ono.
 3. Perhaps the venue and destination changed each time until it was the fanciest restaurant in Benjamin.
 4. Each time, Nehemiah replied with some form of – *“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?”*
 5. Nehemiah could see that *“they thought to do me mischief”* – some evil – some sort of wickedness.
 6. Ultimately they wanted to stop Nehemiah from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.
- B. For our message this afternoon, I'd like to briefly consider the subject of *“doing a great work.”*
1. This is, of course, history – ancient Hebrew history.
 2. One of the reasons some people take no interest in history is that they fail to see how it pertains to them.
 - a. They think to themselves, *“So Nehemiah was doing a great work. I think I can see that.”*
 - b. *But that was 2,500 years ago and 6,670 miles from Post Falls. What has that got to do with me?”*
 3. Well, the whole point of studying history, and specifically, in this case, the history of Nehemiah, is to see how **this DOES pertain to us.**
 4. As I quoted last week, when it comes to the Word of God, *“Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning...”*
 5. Later Paul said, *“Now all these things happened unto them for **ensamples**: and they are written for our **admonition...**”*
 6. **ALL** history is instructive, but the histories found in the Word of God are especially helpful.
 7. *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is **PROFITABLE** for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.”*
- C. In this case, Nehemiah replied to Sanballat, *“I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.”*
1. What can we learn about *“great works”* by looking at this event in the life of Nehemiah?

II. We learn that the greatness of a work doesn't depend on the greatness of the worker.

- A. Seventy years before Nehemiah left the palace of Shushan to go to Jerusalem, Ezra made the same trip, and before him Zerubbabel did the same.
1. Each of those men were different in nature and position, and each of them had a different objective.
 2. We hardly know anything about Zerubbabel, except that he lead a column of Jews back to Jerusalem.
 3. But who was the greater man between Nehemiah and Ezra – one was a priest and other the cup-bearer to the king?
 4. Does it matter who had the more honored religious position or who was more politically prominent?
 5. Men, with their tunnel vision and worldly eyes, may say, *“Yes, the priest was the more important man.”*
- B. But it needs to be kept in mind that the Lord Jesus took up this theme 500 years after Ezra and Nehemiah.
1. And the people He used when talking about their *“great work”* were **NOT** folk of **great stature.**
 2. Turn to **Mark 12:41** – *“And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much.”*
 - a. *And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.*
 - b. *And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:*
 - c. *For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.”*

3. We will return to this event in a moment but at this point notice the people involved.
 - a. People from every economic strata came dropping their coins into the treasury box, and among them were the very rich.
 - b. Christ Jesus – the Messiah – for whom the Temple should have been used – was in a sense the recipient of all those offerings.
 - c. And the gift which was the greatest to Him came from a person who was considered least among the givers – a poor widow.
 - d. She wasn't rich; she wasn't the mother of a powerful rabbi; she didn't have political power.
 - e. She was most likely a widow indeed – without any family to support her – but she gave from out of her penury – with a heart filled with love and worship of the Lord.
 - f. And that caught the Saviour's attention.
 - g. **II Corinthians 8:12** says, *“For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.”*
 4. Great works are not necessarily the products of people deemed great by the world.
- C. Two of the gospels record the Lord's comments about **a cup of water**.
1. **Matthew 10:42** – *“And **whosoever** shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.”*
 2. **Mark 12:43** – *“For **whosoever** shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.”*
 3. What limits are placed on the word **“whosoever”**? How is the word defined?
 4. Are the **“whosoever”** of this verse – priests, or members of the Sanhedrin, or bank owners?
 5. Doesn't **“whosoever”** mean **“whoever without limits or restraints”**?
 6. A cup of water, whether cold or only wet, given to one of the Lord's children may be a service great enough to be rewarded by the Lord – no matter how large, small, steady or unsteady that hand may be.
 7. *“Verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward,”* because it is great enough to be recognized by the God who knows all things.
- D. The lesson is that no saint is **too small** or **unimportant** to do a great work for the Lord.
1. So don't think that because you are **young** you cannot be of service to the Saviour, because it is not true.
 2. Find something to do in the name of the Lord and do it.
 3. Sing a song; memorize a Bible verse and share it; be kind to someone who needs help.
 4. Help build a wall, or in some cases help tear down an evil wall.
 5. **James 1:27** – *“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”*
 6. I recently read the biography of a paraplegic Christian woman of the 18th century who had a ministry of visiting the fatherless and widows.
- E. Don't think that because you are a **woman**, you can't bring as much glory to the Lord as a man.
1. You don't have to preach a sermon or put the capstone on the wall to be doing a **“great work”** for the Lord.
 2. There once was a **meal at Lazarus' house** – a man who was called **“Jesus' friend.”**
 - a. On that occasion, of the three hosts, Lazarus, Mary and Martha, it appears to me that Lazarus was (pardon my grammar) doing the least greatest service to the Saviour that day.
 - b. Martha was doing a good work, and Mary was doing a great work.
 3. Think of all the other meals to which Christ Jesus was invited – some were hosted by wealthy and powerful people.
 4. But the Lord Jesus was filled and blessed in the house of the least as much as He was at the house of the highest.
 5. The work of a hostess – hospitality and generosity – can be **“a great work”** – but I'm getting ahead of myself.

III. The greatness of a work doesn't depend on the size of the work in the sight of men.

- A. Does anyone think that Nehemiah was wrong when he said that wall-building was “a great work?”
1. Is someone going to say that in comparison to the rebuilding of the temple the wall was insignificant?
 2. Why can't they both be important?
- B. What is more beautiful – a sunset, an owl in flight through trees, a rose, a cut diamond, or a tropical butterfly?
1. Despite our particular preferences, why can't they all be equally beautiful?
 2. If the Lord says they are all beautiful, then that they are?
 3. And if He would say they are all “great works” then that is what they are.
- C. Digressing just a bit, let's try to think of some **characteristics** of godly work-greatness.
1. In no particular order – when the work of the Lord is **hated** and **opposed by wicked men**, and yet it is carried out to completion, that is “a great work.”
 2. Nehemiah did a great job fighting through the obstacles and persecution of Sanballat and Tobiah.
 - a. He saturated his labor with prayer, sanctifying a temporal task, making it great.
 - b. And he did it with earnestness, willing to sacrifice his own blood if necessary.
 - c. Then in order to get the work done, Nehemiah ignored Sanballat's threat to destroy his reputation.
 - d. He had temptations which he had to resist in order to build the wall.
 3. Isn't there a sense in which these sorts of things make any work done for the Lord “great”?
- D. And when our little bit of work encourages the work of others, what we do becomes exponentially greater.
1. Nehemiah could not have built that wall all by himself.
 2. He didn't have the money to hire enough workers to get the job done.
 3. But he stirred up the hearts of others to the work, and he kept up the morale of the many volunteers.
 4. He seems to say to Sanballat, “If I leave my post, the work won't get done. Together, we have a great work to do here.”
- E. The Hebrew word “great” isn't special in any way; it doesn't talk about eternity or beauty or value.
1. It means simply “big” – a few times it is translated “high.”
 2. The work which Nehemiah was doing had a few higher characteristics.
 3. For example, it was built on a **foundation of pure principles**.
 4. The enemy spread rumors that he was building a wall in order to lead the Jews in a revolt against the Persian King, but that was not true.
 5. He told us in the very beginning that he was ashamed to hear of the disreputable condition of his beloved city.
 6. His only desire was to beautify the city and thus to bring glory to God.
- F. Going through a logical back door or maybe an illogical side door – this was a great work because **it didn't disagree** with the principles of **the Word of God**.
1. St. Paul's Cathedral in London may be a beautiful building; it may be “great” in the eyes of millions; but it isn't great in the eyes of the Lord.
 2. And when a church congregation is built on entertainment, on rock music and pyrotechnics, on philosophy and psychology, no matter how large the congregation, it is not a “great work.”
 3. But as long as a church is preaching the gospel of Christ and the rest of the Bible, **it IS** a “great work” – no matter what its size and power in the community.
- G. And this reminds us that the greatness of any “great work” doesn't depend on the greatness of the results.

IV. The true measure of any work's greatness is its relationship to the Lord.

- A. Again – what made the widow's tiny mites important in the sight of the Saviour? ‘
1. Wasn't it her faith, love and sacrifice?
 2. Jesus said, the wealthy *“did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.”*
 3. I imagine this woman listening intently as her rabbi expounded the lessons of **I Kings 17** and the **widow of Zarephath**.
 - a. Finding herself in much the same predicament, I think she might have assimilated and emulated that earlier woman's work and faith.
 - b. *“And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son.*
 - c. *For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth.”*
 4. I see the woman in the temple, giving her last bit of meal to the Lord, trusting Him to send just a little bit of refreshing rain upon her life.
 5. Her two mites were great in the sight of the Saviour, because of their relationship to Him, and because of the faith with which they were given.
 6. Also, while the faith of the Zarephathite may have encouraged this woman, her *“great work”* has been a blessing to thousands of others over the last 2,000 years.
- B. And going back to the cup of cold water, **Mark 12:43** says – *“For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in MY name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.”*
1. When you sent that \$20 to Rodney Spears to forward on to the starving saints in Peru, that was a *“great work”* not because of its size, but because it was all that you could give at the time and because it was given in Christ's name and for His people.
 2. When you sent that note of encouragement to Dean Robinson, Bert Craft, or Sergey Mocholav, it was a *“great work”* because it ultimately had a spiritual nature to it.
- C. Please turn to **II Corinthians 9:6**.
1. This speaks of one specific kind of *“great work”* but the principles it teaches applies much more widely.
 2. *“But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.*
 - a. *Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:*
 - b. *(As it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;)*
 - c. *Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God.*
 - d. *For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God;*
 - e. *Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men;*
 - f. *And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you.*
 - g. *Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”*
- D. I will close with **Hebrews 6:10** – *“God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”*
1. In these last days we still have work to do for the Lord.
 2. Let's make sure the Lord will one day say, *“Bless you – brother, sister – for your great work in my name.”*