

F.B. Meyer:

I was the king's cupbearer. Nehemiah 1:11

THE post was an important one. It gave its occupant the opportunity of coming into close contact with the king; it implied a character of unusual trustworthiness, since Oriental despots were very afraid of poison. But no one expected a royal cupbearer to do anything very heroic. He lived in the inner part of the palace, and was necessarily excluded from the great deeds of the stirring outward world. Nehemiah also was evidently a humble and retiring man. His response to the story of the ruined condition of Jerusalem was just a flood of tears and prayer to the God of heaven. And had you seen those tears and heard that prayer, you might have thought that just another flower was drooping, another seed falling into the ground to die.

But this was not all. These prayers and tears were supplemented by an earnest purpose, which was maturing with every hour. He gave himself to God to be used, if God would have it so, as an instrument in the execution of his recorded purpose. He was a man of faith. It mattered little enough that he was only a cupbearer, for that was no barrier to God; indeed, God might work more efficiently through a frail, weak man, than through the prince, the soldier, or the orator, since He cannot give his glory to another. What a glorious faith was his, which dared to believe that through his yielded life God could pour his mighty rivers! Why do we not yield ourselves in our helplessness to God, and ask Him to work through us, to fulfill his mighty purposes?

"We kneel, how weak! We rise, how full of power!

Why therefore should we do ourselves this wrong,

Or others â€ˆâ€ˆ that we are not always strong!"

So I prayed to the God of Heaven. Nehemiah 2:4

ALL around the apartment in which this interview took place were effigies of idol gods: perhaps incense was burning before a shrine, and filling the air with its aroma. But Nehemiah, though standing amid these heathen emblems, and in the presence of the greatest king on earth, thought little of either one or the other, and prostrated himself in spirit before the throne of heaven. Remember that thou hast within thee a shrine, a temple into which at any moment, even amid the excitement of an earthly court, thou mayest retire and ask direction of thy King and Friend.

He had been sorely startled by the king's question; he did not know that his face had betrayed him. He had, doubtless, intended to seek an interview with the king, and formally state the whole case (see i. 11). But to be taken thus at unawares, to have to state his case on the spur of the moment, appeared to take him at a great disadvantage; and he instinctively turned to prayer.

How little the king knew what was transpiring, or what had happened between his question and the reply which was given, apparently, without the loss of a moment. But how beautiful is the example for ourselves! You cannot acquire this habit of ejaculatory prayer unless you spend prolonged periods in holy fellowship. But when you are much with God in private, you will not find it difficult at any moment to step aside to ask Him a question. The busy mart or the crowded street may at any time become the place of prayer.

"A touch divine

And the sealed eyeball owns the mystic rod;

Visibly through His garden walketh God."

Every one over against his house. Nehemiah 3:28

THIS is the way to deal with the evil of this world. We are all fonder of starting schemes, forming committees, and discussing methods of work, than in setting definitely to work for ourselves. There is a lack of definiteness, and we hardly know where to begin. But this verse suggests that every one should begin over against his own house. Try and make your own neighborhood a little more like what God would have it. It may be that you have gone too far afield in search of work; you are applying to the Foreign Missionary Society, or are waiting for a sphere of service; yet, all the time, there is that wretched neighborhood, like a piece of ruined wall before you.

Arise and repair it!

Meshullam repaired over against his chamber (ver. 30). Perhaps he was not rich enough to have a whole house; he lived in a single room, but he discovered that there was a little bit of the wall just opposite his window, which would not be built unless he set to it. Is not that a hint for college students, and for those who live in flats, or industrial dwellings?

The best way is not immediately to begin giving tracts, good though that is in its place. Ask God to give you an opportunity of showing kindness to your neighbors, so that they get to understand and trust you; and wait upon God until the answer comes 'until He shall show you what step He would have you take next. This is the foundation of your bit of wall. Then plod on step-by-step, tier-by-tier. God will show you how. You may be unpracticed in wall-building; but He is the Architect and Builder, and you are but a bricklayer's laborer at the best. Do as He tells you.

Remember the Lord. Nehemiah 4:14

IT was uncommonly good advice. Amid all the wise precautions taken by this man of sanctified common-sense, he kept bringing the people back to God. God was amongst them. God would fight for them. God was going to bring the counsel of their enemies to nought.

This would make a good motto for daily living. If in all circumstances we would remember the Lord, the way would be brightened; the burdens would fall; our spirits would never droop; and songs of joy would take the place of sadness. Whenever enemies assail and difficulties gather like storm-clouds, look away from them and remember the Lord. When hemmed in on every side, be sure that He can help you from his holy heaven; remember the Lord. When heart and flesh fail, and you do not know what to do for the best, be sure to remember the Lord, and act as in his most holy presence. What a comfort and strength it is to see a friend, when standing amid a crowd of adversaries intent on your destruction, and to know that he will act and speak for you! But remember that Jesus is always like that.

You say that you forget so soon; that you would remember, though at the critical moment you are betrayed into forgetfulness. But you must recall His precious promise, that the Holy Spirit will bring all to remembrance. If only you will trust the difficulty into his hands, you will find that He will gladly undertake it; and as long as you leave it with Him, you will hear his voice rising in your heart, and saying, "Remember the Lord."

"Watch with me, Jesus, in my loneliness,

Though others say me Nay, yet say Thou, Yea;

Though others pass me by, stop Thou to bless.

So did not I, because of the fear of God. Nehemiah 5:15

THESE were great words. Nehemiah had a perfect right to take this money. Not a word could be said even by his critics, if he did. He was doing a priceless work, and might justly claim his maintenance. On the other hand, the people were very poor, and he would have a larger influence over them if he were prepared to stand on their level, and to share with them. It was just so that the Apostle argued in 1 Cor. ix. And from both we learn that often we must forego our evident rights and liberties in order to influence others for Christ. Do not always stand on your rights; but live for others, making any sacrifice in order to save some 'even as Christ loved us, and gave Himself for us.

If Nehemiah did so much for the holy fear of God, what ought not we to do for love? Love is more inexorable than law. Its exactions are more stringent and searching. Are we doing as much for love of Jesus as generations before did simply on the score of duty? It is much to be questioned if Jesus does not get less, of outward service at least, out of his followers, than Mehomet or Buddha does. But what He does get is infinitely sweet to Him, in so far as love prompts it.

All around you people are doing things that they say are perfectly legitimate; they call you narrow and bigoted because you do not join with them; they are always arguing with you to prove you are wrong. But your supreme law is your attitude to your Master. "I cannot do otherwise for the love of Jesus."

"Not I, because of the fear of God."

"Not I, but the grace of God that was with me."

"Not I, but Christ liveth in me."

I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Nehemiah 6:3

IT was a sublime answer. Below was the Plain of Ono, where Nehemiah's foes awaited him. Let him once descend into it and he would become their easy prey; but he withstood their fourfold solicitation by considering the greatness of the work he was doing and the responsible position he was called to fill. Otherworldliness is the best cure for worldliness. Those whose affections are set on things above, will have no difficulty in refusing the appeals of sense. Get your heart and hands deeply engaged in the great work of building God's Temple, and you will be proof to the most flattering proposals ever made by Madam Bubble.

Oh, children of the Great King, let us pray that we may know the grandeur of our position before Him; the high calling with which we have been called; the vast responsibilities with which we are entrusted; the great work of co-operating with God in erecting the city of God. Heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ! Called to sit with Christ in the Heavenlies! Risen, ascended, crowned in Him! Sitting with Christ, far above all principality and power! How can we go down down to the world that rejected Him; down to the level of the first Adam, from which, at so great cost, we have been raised; down to the quarry from which we were hewn, and the hole of the pit whence we were digged! No, it cannot be; and as we make our choice, let us look to the living and ascended Christ to make it good. Put your will on his side, and expect that the energy of the power that raised Him from the dead will raise and maintain you in union with Him. For "your life is hid with Christ in God."

It was not found. Nehemiah 7:64

CERTAIN claimed the maintenance of the priests, and were challenged to show their name in the register of the priestly line. In all likelihood they were descended from the sons of Aaron, but through marriage outside the priestly clan, and through the fact also of the name of the mother's father being adopted, their names were not reckoned in the priestly genealogy; consequently, their claim for priestly maintenance and service could not be established.

Is there not something like this still? Men, who were called to be God's priests, drop out of the register of those who serve before Him. It may be they are not sure of their genealogy, and have lost the assurance of sonship; their spirit is no longer filled with the blessed co-witness of the Holy Ghost. God is afar from them; and, being out of harmony with Him, they are out of sympathy with their fellows. They are, therefore, rightly put out of the priesthood.

Now trace this matter back to its beginning. As likely as not you will find it originated in some worldly alliance. He that will be a friend of the world is necessarily an enemy with God. For a mess of pottage Esau loses his birthright.

But all this can be put right. There has arisen a Priest, who holds the Urim and Thummim in his hand: God's own Priest after the order of Melchizedek. "Wherefore it behooved Him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God." He waits to reinstate the erring soul, restore it to the priestly office, and give it priestly food and maintenance.

The joy of the Lord is your strength. Nehemiah 8:10

"THE sad heart tires in a mile," is a frequent proverb. What a difference there is between the energy of the healthy, joyous heart and the forced activity of the morbid and depressed one! The one leaps to its task, the other creeps to it. The one discovers its meat and drink in self-sacrifice, the other limps, and stoops, and crawls. If you want to be strong for life's work, be sure to keep a glad heart. But, be equally sure to be glad with the joy of Lord. There is a counterfeit of it in the world, of which we must beware an outward merry-making, jesting, and mad laughter, which hides an aching and miserable heart. Solomon compares the joy of the world to the crackling of thorns under a pot, which flare up with great speed, but burn out before the water in the pot is warm.

Ours must be the joy of the Lord. It begins with the assurance of forgiveness and acceptance in the Beloved. It is nourished in trial and tribulation, which veil outward sources of consolation, and lead us to rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus. It is independent of circumstances, so that its possessors can sing in the stocks. It

lives not in the gifts of God, but in God Himself. It is the fruit of the Spirit, who begets in us love, joy, peace, long suffering. Get the Lord Himself to fill your soul, and joy will be as natural as the murmur of a brook to its flow.

And such joy will always reveal itself to others. You will desire to send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared. Your joy will be contagious; it will shed its kindly light on sad and weary hearts. As Rutherford said, we have a new heaven in the heaven of every soul we bring there.

The seed of Israel separated themselves. Nehemiah 9:12

THIS is the beginning of the true life. Turn to the story of creation, and you learn, first, that God divided the light from the darkness; next, the waters of the clouds from those on the earth; and next, the seas from the land. It was only thus that He could effect his purpose of substituting kosmos for chaos. So, in the development of the inner life, there must be separation and judgment; the discrimination of the false from the true, the evil from the good." Separate Me . . . for the work whereunto I have called them."

When God put his hand to man's highest culture, He separated Shem from his brethren; Terah's house from other kindred clans; and Abraham from his people. What weight this gave to those solemn words, "I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people. And ye shall be holy unto Me; for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people that ye should be mine" (Lev. xx. 24, 26). It was not that God had no care for the great world; but that He desired to concentrate his attention on a few, that when they had fully caught his thought they might pass it on to mankind.

This accounts for the cry of the Holy Ghost through the Apostle, "Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing." We must be separate in our practices, cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; in our pursuits, going with Christ without the camp; in our pleasures; and in our alliances. "Follow the Christ â€" the King! Live pure! Speak true! Right wrong! Follow the King! Else, wherefore born! "

The children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering. Nehemiah 10:39

IT was about this time that Malachi wrote the memorable words, "Bring ye all the tithes into my storehouse, that there may be meat in my house; and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord, if I will not pour you out a blessing." When a people has separated itself to God, there will be no lack in its house, no failure in its supplies, no lack for its ministers. So with the individual. All they that had separated themselves entered into an oath to charge themselves yearly for the service of the house of God. Separation is the negative side of consecration.

How does this touch you, my friend? What proportion of your income are you setting apart for the service of God? The amount that a man gives in proportion to his income is a sure gauge of the genuineness and depth of his religious life. The Jew gave about a third of his yearly income to God; do we come up to this standard? Yet we speak of the Jews with contempt, as hard fisted and miserly. These old Jews might set an example to us newer Christians. How often we reverse our position from God's ideal! He puts us over his estate that we should send Him all the produce, after deducting what is necessary for our maintenance, and that of our families. But we engross the entire proceeds for ourselves, sending Him an odd guinea, or half a crown, when we can easily spare it. Let us see that we give at least a fixed proportion of our income, and as much more as we can. Do not forsake the House of your God; so shall the heavens be opened in blessing. "There is that giveth and yet increaseth; there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it sendeth to poverty."

A certain portion should be for the singers. Nehemiah 11:23

IT was the king's command, and it was very right and sensible, because they enlivened and quickened the life of the entire community. A mere utilitarian spirit might have refused to maintain them, because they did not contribute to the handicrafts of the community. They only sang the praises of God; but they fulfilled a very important part in the life of the city, and they deserved the portion which was regularly contributed to them.

You sometimes feel your life to be comparatively useless. You can only say a kind word to those who are doing the main business of the world. When the brothers had wrought all day at the clearing for the farm, their sister Hope sang through the evening hours to cheer them and drive away their sense of fatigue. That was all she could do; but was she not deserving of maintenance? You can only sing your song of hope, and keep the heart of the toilers sweet and fresh. You can only get inspiration from God's heart and pass it on. You can do little but

learn to detect, and translate into music that men love, the deep undertones of God's creation. But it is well. You are needed in God's world.

There are invalids, who lie on their back through weary months and years, that are the inspiration of their homes, and to their side the elders and the children come for counsel and comfort. Sing on, ye sweet choristers, that alleviate our depressions and start our hearts to high endeavor! Ye that by night, in sleepless hours, stand in the house of the Lord, praise ye the Lord when all the busy life of men is hushed! The King will see to it that ye do not miss your maintenance, your portion day by day.

David, the man of God. Nehemiah 12:24,36,37,45,46

HOW long the influence of David has lingered over the world, like the afterglow of a sunset! Mark the characteristic in him which laid the foundation of his supremacy over the hearts of his countrymen. He was preëminently "a man of God." Notwithstanding his terrible fall, his people recognized that his salient characteristic was Godward. Would you be one of God's men?

(1) Give all to God. 'Too many live lives of piecemeal consecration, giving a bit here and a bit there, but never all. David surrendered himself to do God's will utterly, and in all, and so became a man after God's own heart. With what joy God's voice seems to quiver, as He says, "I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, who shall fulfill all my will" (Acts xiii. 22). Without reserve, holding nothing back, yield yourself to God, to be, and do, and suffer his will, whatever it may be.

(2) Take all from God. "It is not what we give to Jesus, but what we take from Him, that makes us strong, helpful, and victorious day by day." Accept this as a fact, that in Jesus God has made all his fullness dwell. There is nothing we require, for life or godliness, that is not stored in Him; but the terrible loss of our lives is that we take so little. We have ourselves to blame if we are poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked.

(3) Use all for God. It sometimes appears as though Christian people were urged to yield themselves to God, only that their lives might be more comfortable. But the supreme and final end in all surrender must be that his will be done, his glory promoted, and Himself magnified whether in life or death.

Remember me, O my God! Nehemiah 13:14,22,31.

THRICE in this chapter this humble man asks to be remembered. We cannot think that he expected to purchase God's favor because of his sacrifices and endeavors. Of this he was already assured. But being a redeemed soul, he desired that his works might come up in remembrance before God, and secure a reward. There is no harm in keeping the eye fixed on the reward for faithful toil in the Lord's service. It was a constant incentive in the life, of the great Apostle that he might so run as to obtain; so finish his work that he might win the crown.

Note the three departments of service mentioned in this chapter, in connection with which Nehemiah breathed this petition. He had turned all Tobia's household stuff out of the temple, so that the whole structure should be given up to the service of God. He had secured the Sabbath from desecration, so that its holy rest and calm were preserved intact. And he insisted on the purity of the holy seed being untainted by foreign alliances. Consecration to God, the Rest of Faith in the inner life, and the separation of God's children from the world, are the counterparts of these in our own time.

Shall we not humbly set ourselves to seek them for the professing Church? Nehemiah was an ungifted, simple-hearted man, but he was able to secure them as the instrument and channel of God's purposes. Why should not God work through us for the same ends. But, first, let us see to it that each of these particulars is being realized in our own personal character and life. Let every room of the heart be for God; let no voice break the inner peace. Then what God has done for us, we may confidently plead as within his scheme for others.