

Articles and Sermons :: Outward Hostility, Inward Lethargy, Spiritual Victory â€” by Richard A. Bennett

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This is an excellent article by a dear old saint who was mentored by Stephen Olford. He and his wife are still ministering together in their late eighties.

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A grievous shock awaited the remnant upon their return to Jerusalem. After seventy long years of captivity in Babylon, the huge building blocks of Solomonâ€™s Temple had been ruthlessly dismantled; the religious artifacts and ornate furbishingâ€™s had been plundered, which together with charred remains of the magnificent Lebanon cedar beams presented a desolate scene.

However, God gave His clear encouragement to the sad remnant: â€œThus sayeth the Lord of hosts, I am jealous for Jerusalem . . . My house shall be built in Zionâ€• Zechariah 1:14,16.

Even with the spiritual and political leadership of Joshua, the high priest, and Zerubbabel, the prince of the people, much more was needed to complete the task. The same provision God gave to Zerubbabel is available today when, like Zerubbabel, we come to the end of our own resources and, â€œ. . . rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the fleshâ€• Philippians 3:3. George Duffield, in his hymn, â€œStand Up, Stand Up for Jesusâ€• included the line: â€œThe arm of flesh will fail you, you dare not trust your own!â€•

Yes, the flesh will readily volunteer to engage in religious activity, but as many a discouraged Christian worker has found, function without unction will lead to spiritual dysfunction!

Outward Hostility

Joshua and Zerubbabel faced obstacles and difficulties to fulfill their commission to rebuild the Temple. Likewise, when we obey the â€”Great Commissionâ€™ of our Lord Jesus Christ, we can expect: â€œThe Reaction of the World,â€• â€œThe Resistance of Satanâ€• and, â€œThe Reluctance of the Believer.â€• These are roadblocks planned to daunt todayâ€™s believer in their life of faith and expectancy!

The Reaction of the World.

Upon their return to Jerusalem the remnant found no security walls to protect the ancient city and a hostile army which was determined to frustrate Godâ€™s purpose of reconstructing the Temple. Likewise, any believer will encounter similar obstacles when committed to obey the â€”Great Commissionâ€™ of the risen Christ. This is to evangelize â€œTeach all nationsâ€•; to enlist â€œbaptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spiritâ€•; and to educate â€œteaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have told you.â€• However, in this mission the Lord Jesus gives the assurance of His enabling presence and protection. He promised, â€œLo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the worldâ€• Matthew 28:18-20. Todayâ€™s enemies are a vast array of atheistic, humanistic and others who are determined to remove the Christian faith from the contemporary scene.

The Resistance of Satan.

Joshua knew the task before him was greater than any administrative skill or architectural ability could accomplish. Accordingly, he turned to the Lord in humble prayer: â€œJoshua stood before The Angel of the Lord.â€• - â€”The Angelâ€™ distinguishes this angel from â€”an angel.â€™ Yes, Joshua encountered none other than the Lord Himself! Even in the presence of God, Satan was there to resist him, so: â€œThe Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan, even the Lord who hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee. Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?â€• Zechariah 3:2. Notice, it was the Lord who rebuked Satan and not Joshua. In our spiritual warfare, let us put the Lord Jesus between ourselves and the adversary.

After His rebuke to Satan, the Lord extended His grace to Joshua who, in the presence of Eternal Holiness, became shamefully conscious of his filthy garments: â€œ. . . take away his filthy garments from him . . . behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee and I will clothe

thee with a change of raimentâ€” Zechariah 3:4. Robes for rags! Wonderful!

In Revelation 12:11, God still gives the same assurance of victory over Satan: "They overcame him by the blood of the Lambâ€” â€” ; â€”by the word of their testimony" â€” ; â€”and, they loved not their lives unto the death" .

As I write, news reached us of Christians living in an atheist controlled country who have just been martyred. They had been publically executed because of the â€”crimeâ€” of possessing a Bible or listening to a Christian radio program from another country. Sacks were placed over their heads and they were riddled with a salvo of bullets before an enforced crowd of 10,000 spectators. This demonic act was designed to instigate fear in fellow citizens to prevent them from becoming Christians. However, the assassins were ignorant of the fact that these precious believers were immediately ushered into the presence of their beloved Lord and Savior to receive a martyrâ€”s crown! Revelation 2:10. The Lord Jesus said: â€”Ye shall be witnesses unto Meâ€” Acts 1:8. The word â€”witnessâ€” is derived from the Greek word â€”martyr.â€” We can deny the Lord by our speech; we can also deny the Lord by our silence! If we are intimidated to speak of Jesus so as to maintain family harmony; workplace security; political expediency or neighborhood tranquility, then what makes us think that we will speak up for Christ in a life and death crises? No, it is not a soul-winning technique, nor is it a salesmanship approach that is the secret of our being a living witness for Christ. It is a deep-rooted humility that is willing to line up with Him Who was: â€”despised, and rejected of menâ€” Isaiah 53:3.

â€”Am I a soldier of the Cross, a follower of the Lamb, and shall I fear to own His cause; or blush to speak His name? Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?â€” Isaac Watts 1674-1748.

Inward Lethargy

The Reluctance of the Believer. Probably one of the most difficult roadblocks Zerubbabel faced was the reluctance of the weary remnant who, in their new comfort zone, had wrong priorities; wrong pursuits, and misused provision. Wrong Priorities. â€”Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your waysâ€” Haggai 1:4,5. Let us also consider our ways: Do I delay or ignore the work of the Lord because of my self-pleasing interests? Do I think that after my devotions and Christian service the rest of the time is my own to do as I please? Do I readily acknowledge that the Lord purchased my life with His precious Blood and that His plan for each day must be my top priority? I remember as World War II ended, prisoners of war had been released from a nearby prison camp and were free to walk the streets of our English town. As three of these ex-prisoners walked by our home we were just commencing our evening meal. Mother suggested: â€”letâ€”s invite them in!â€” Gladly, we all agreed to share our post-war meager rations of food. However, not only did we share our food, but I used the opportunity to share my testimony as I had recently been born-again! My testimony so impressed the three ex-prisoners that they opened an opportunity for a friend to preach the Gospel in their prison camp. Twelve ex-prisoners were saved! Hanging in our home, today, is a beautiful oil painting of monuments of Kingâ€”s Lynn, my boyhood town. This small picture is most unusual as it was painted on a burlap sack with sticks stretching the burlap for a frame â€” all improvised at the prison camp. It is a precious memory! Surely, a home is a good gift of great blessing from the Lord: â€”Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights . . .â€” James 1:17. At home we can entertain family and friends of like-mind, but if home is solely used for our comfort, convenience, companionship, and compliments, then, at the end of the day, as Solomon wisely said: â€”Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.â€” God intended our home, whether it be small and frugal, or spacious and beautiful, to be the churchâ€”s outpost of prayerful witness to both neighbors and strangers.

Wrong Pursuits.

â€”Ye have sown much, and bring in little . . .and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put in a bag with holesâ€” Haggai 1:6. This verse brings to mind a Christian lady who attended a prestigious church on the East Coast. She was an avid collector of extremely valuable antique furniture. One day, when she returned home, she discovered that both her house and all its contents had burned and were reduced to a pile of ashes. Sadly, because of her loss, this lady no longer attended church and reportedly became very bitter. In the glow and joy of our new life in Christ, we desire Christ and nothing else; soon we can become contaminated with the prevailing worldly atmosphere and desire Christ and something else; then the â€”something elseâ€” takes over and we want something else but not Christ. How very sad!

Misused Provision.

“Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? Saith the Lord of hosts. Because of Mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house” Haggai 1:9. Soon after we were married, Dorothy and I conducted a series of meetings in a small New England church. At that time the church was without a pastor and the elders were very excited to welcome a prospective pastor and his wife to shepherd the flock. However, upon viewing the church parsonage, the wife exclaimed: “I could never live here.” The pastor refused the call! In vivid contrast, let us compare the response of C.T. Studd and his beloved wife, Priscilla. As a young man, Studd was famous for being the captain of the British cricket team. He lived in luxury in a mansion on the family country estate and was greatly used by God as this national hero was welcomed in colleges and universities to preach the gospel. He was bequeathed a huge fortune - enough for him to live in luxury for the rest of his life. However, C.T. knew God was calling him to undertake pioneer missionary ministry. Accordingly, he sold his mansion, divided his inheritance and gave equal portions to Moody Bible Institute, China Inland Mission, London City Mission and other ministries that were concerned for the salvation of the souls of men. One portion he gave to his, then fiancée, Priscilla. She, being gripped with the same concern for perishing souls, immediately dispersed her portion to like-minded ministries.

After their marriage, without any appeals for money, they proved the faithfulness of God’s promises to meet the needs of their ever-expanding pioneer missionary ministries. Studd’s motto was: “If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice I make can be too great for Him.” In July, 1916, after a visit to England, C.T. returned to the heart of Africa leaving his beloved wife, Priscilla, at home. Because of a serious heart condition, under doctors’ orders, she was forbidden to accompany her husband. From board ship he wrote: “Good-bye, my darling Priscilla. We began risking all for God and we will end as we began, loving each other utterly and only less than we love Jesus.” It was in Africa that literally thousands of nationals, many of whom had been cannibals and previously untouched with the Gospel were born again. The Holy Spirit had already prepared them to gladly receive the Lord Jesus Christ. Surrounding his frail and dying body, many nationals heard him weakly exclaim his last words: “Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!” C.T. Studd then entered his heavenly mansion!

Spiritual Victory!

For fifteen years Zerubbabel failed to rebuild the Temple. The foundations had been laid but they remained a sad monument of people who had begun well but wearied in their labors and had become distracted with self-centered pursuits. It is not enough to find God’s will for our lives, nor even to follow God’s will; surely the triumph of a living faith is to finish God’s perfect will. So what did God do when the building program failed? Did He choose another man and pass over Zerubbabel? No! Likewise, in today’s context, a new pastor or a new program will not revive a state of spiritual inertia. God still uses the man who has been humbled in the valley of brokenness by the outpouring of His enabling grace that the explanation of success might be all of Him! In Zechariah 4:6 we read: “This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” The word, “might,” speaks of collective strength, or the strength of an army, the word, “power,” speaks of cultural strength or the strength of mind and will. In the building of the first Temple, Solomon had both; but in the rebuilding of this Temple, Zerubbabel had neither! When Solomon built his magnificent Temple, he had unlimited money and utilized the services of 150,000 men and 3,000 superintendents. But, when Zerubbabel responded to God’s commission to rebuild the derelict Temple, his workers were weary and despondent. However, God gave Zerubbabel a vision of a golden bowl filled with olive oil. From this golden bowl a constant supply of olive oil flowed to seven lamps. The context shows us that this oil is a type of the Holy Spirit. But what of the golden bowl? This is the symbol of the One, Who in the book of Revelation, is the glorified Christ standing in the middle of the seven lamp-stands. Today, because of the “Finished Work” of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, a constant supply of the Holy Spirit is available to the believer. “Wanted, wicks to burn for God, oil provided free.” So, under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the Temple reconstruction was completed: “Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things? Zech. 4: 8-10. “Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, Grace, unto it.” (vs. 7).