

“ATTITUDE! ATTITUDE! ATTITUDE!”

(Nehemiah 4:1-6)

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[PROP NEEDED: Glass of Water, filled halfway with dark liquid]

[Joint East Cobb U.M.C. / Marietta Campmeeting Service, 7-25-10]

–I–

1. Read Text: Nehemiah 4:1-6 and Pray.
2. I have here a glass of liquid that I want you to examine carefully... **[SHOW GLASS OF DARK LIQUID FILLED TO HALFWAY POINT]**

A–Let me ask: What is it that you see?

1--...A glass with liquid in it, for sure.

2--But is it half-full? or is it half-empty?

B–Well, our perspective/attitude plays a large part in how we deal with life, doesn't it?

1–For example, some people wake up each day saying, "*Good morning, Lord!*"

Other people wake up each day saying, "*Good Lord, it's morning!*"

2–In one sense, you could say that *our attitude* is like a set of glasses that we put on which “color” (or filter) everything that we take in or give out, whether for life, in general, or for ministry in and through the church, in particular. ¹

C–You know, the theme of this year's Camp Meeting has been “BE the Church,” in which we've been challenged to remember that church isn't just a civic club or organization that we *participate in*, but that it should be the very heart of who we ARE – that we (as God's “church”) are to BE the hands and feet of Jesus to and with the world around us.

1–And yet, if we're to do this *effectively*, it'll require us to have a certain kind of perspective/attitude in and towards life.

2–So, here in today's scripture from Nehemiah 4, we find illustrated for us several of these – *one* of which is what we need in order to “BE the Church.”

3. Now, I realize that Nehemiah is probably not exactly on the top-ten list of favorite books of the Bible, so it may be helpful for me to remind us of the context of this story to see the relevance of these attitudes/perspectives.

A–The year was 446 B.C., in the once-great city of Jerusalem, in the Persian Empire's province of Judah.

1--80 years earlier, the leaders and key people of Judah had been taken captive and carted off into exile by the great Babylonian Emperor Nebuchadnezzar.

2--But the Babylonians themselves had fallen to a new military power: the Persians, led by King Cyrus II.

3--And Cyrus, in his legendary tolerance for religions besides his own, allowed the exiled people of Judah to return to their homeland led by the prophet Ezra.

B--One of those who returned with Ezra was a man named Nehemiah, a servant in Cyrus' own court.

1--But when Nehemiah returned home to Jerusalem, he found it devastated: the Temple destroyed; the city walls in ruins; the social and religious life non-existent.

2--And so God gave Nehemiah a vision -- a vision of a *renewed and restored Jerusalem* -- a Jerusalem with walls standing strong and firm.

C--Now, we've got to understand that in ancient times, a wall around a city was considered absolutely essential if that city was going to claim any greatness whatsoever.

1--You see, walls provided protection and boundaries for political rule.

2--And without a wall, an ancient city was a political "non-entity" (perhaps today kind of like if you don't have a SuperWal-Mart in your town, you may not be considered a very "major" city/town! Or when Atlanta got the Olympics back in 1996).

4. And so, God has given Nehemiah a vision of a Jerusalem with rebuilt city walls.

A--Now, let me pause here and remind us that God is still in the vision-giving business today.

1--Perhaps it's a vision for us as individuals to have a relationship with someone who we feel God has directed us towards.

2--Maybe it's a vision for a new home, a new job, way of doing business, or school.

3--Perhaps it's a vision for what you want your family to be, or what you yourself want to be.

4--Maybe it's a new vision for our church, or Sunday School class or small group, or for Camp Meeting itself.

B--But whatever it is, my experience is that whenever we're trying to follow God's will about something, like Nehemiah, inevitably we're often confronted with **at least three attitudes** with which we have to deal if we're to "BE the Church" and carry out God's vision.

7. The First Attitude is that of a man named Sanballet, described in Verses 1-2 (NRSV):

A–“*Now when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he mocked the Jews, [saying...] ‘What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore things? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish [the wall] in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish -- and burned ones at that?’*”

1–You see, this is the attitude which says:

“You’ll NEVER be able to do that! Look at your past -- look at how you’ve been defeated and decimated time and time again. You’re a loser -- why even try?!”

2–It’s the attitude of the **eternal pessimist** – that says “I Can’t” (or perhaps even “You can’t”) -- it says, “we’ve never done things that way before.”

B--And you and I both know that there's lot of people in the world (and in the church, too) that are like this – you know the type:

1–“*Oh, that person or church will never change!*”

2–“*They’re all just a bunch of hypocrites down there!*”

3--Over and over and over with the same pessimism.

4–Several years ago, the former Bishop of North GA Methodism Lindsey Davis talked about the “C.A.V.E.” dwellers of life and the church – people who are “*Constantly Against Virtually Everything*” (and we all know folks like this!)

5– These are people who seem to choose to nearly always be part of the **problem**, rather than part of the **solution**.

C–And yet, it’s interesting that, with people who wear the “glasses” of an eternal pessimist that the very thing they fear often ends up happening *simply because* they expect it to.

1–Benedict Spinozo once said, “*As long as a [person] imagines that [they] cannot do a certain thing, it [will be] impossible for [them] to do it.*”

2–You see, we’ll never BE the Church – and we’ll never get very far in life, either – with the attitude of Sanballet which says, “*I can’t/You can’t!*”

8. But there's a Second Attitude found in this passage, as well – it’s the attitude of Tobiah, the Ammonite:

A–In Verse 3 (NRSV), we find him saying, “*That stone wall they are building -- any fox going up on it would break it down!*”

1–In other words, “*Even if you accomplish what you set out to do, it won’t amount to much – it’ll be flimsy and useless, and nobody will want to bother with it!*”

2--It's *not* the attitude which says, “*I can’t/You can’t.*” Instead, it's the attitude which says “*I Won’t, even if I could*” (or maybe “*You shouldn’t, even if you could*”).

3–It’s *not* the attitude which says, “*we never done things that way before,*” but “*We’ve done things that way before and it didn’t work.*”

B–I’m sure you know a few of these types at your work place, in church, Campmeeting, or perhaps even in our own families:

1–It’s the type of person that says they have to “*see it to believe it,*” and then when they *do* see, they *still* don’t believe it!

2--[Story of Robert Fulton]

When Robert Fulton gave the first public demonstration of the steamboat in the early 1800s, one man stood up in the grandstands and began shouting “*He’ll never start it*” [Repeat over and over]. And then, when Fulton *did* get it started, the man simply changed his pitch, “*He’ll never stop it*” [Repeat].

C–This is the type of person that sees a ***problem*** in every ***answer...***
...and sees ***trouble*** in every ***solution.***

D–They don’t say “*I can’t*”--but instead, like Tobiah, they say, “*I won’t, even if I could!*”

9. Thank goodness, however, that there is a Final Attitude present in this story – the attitude that truly helps us “BE the Church” – the attitude of Nehemiah.

A–Now, back in Chapter 2, Nehemiah had answered the taunts of these pessimists by saying that...

1–... “*The God of heaven is the one who will give us success, and we his servants are going to start building*” (Vs.20, NRSV) – ...

2--And then in Verse 6 (NRSV) of today’s reading from Chapter 4, Nehemiah says, “*and so we rebuilt the wall... for the people had a mind to work*”

B–Now, this is basically the attitude which says, “*by the grace of God, I can and I will, ***in spite of the obstacles!***”*

1–It’s the attitude which says, “*we’ve tried it this way before, but we’ll try it again; or we’ll try it a different way, but we’ll keep on trying until we get something done!*”

2–You see, *this* is the attitude that get things accomplished, and makes a difference in the world in which we live.

C--Rather than getting discouraged by looking at all the negative obstacles that stand in the way of success, people that have the attitude of Nehemiah are able to concentrate on the power and strength *of God* in helping to accomplish their goals.

1--Remember Jesus calling to Peter to walk on the water: he was able to do it as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus (the solution to his problems).

2--But as soon as he started focusing upon the problem (the waves), he began to sink.

3--Or consider another example: when the *soldiers of Israel* saw Goliath, they probably thought to themselves, “**He's so big, we'll never kill him!**”

4--But when *David* saw Goliath, *he* probably thought to himself, “**He's so big, I can't miss him!**”

5--Do you hear the difference? While the soldiers may have concentrated on the *problem*, David concentrated on God's *solution*.²

–III–

10. The bottom line, you see, is that the people of Jerusalem achieved their goal of rebuilding the walls because they had the attitude of Nehemiah that believed that GOD (not them) would give success.

A--You know, all around us today, there are Sanballats and Tobiahs who in so many words and so many ways very often share the same taunts and resistance when you and I try to follow the will and the ways of God.

1--Sometimes they're well-intended family members or work-mates (or even our own inner conscience) who, like Sanballat, try to tell us “*You can't.*”

2--Sometimes they're people who simply don't understand our faith in Christ, and at other times they're even our *own* feelings of inadequacy and insecurity, who like Tobiah, try to say, “*You shouldn't, even if you could.*”

11. Well, I won't deny that we face challenges and obstacles in today's world that often seem insurmountable, both as individuals, as God's church, and even as a Campmeeting.

A--Yet, I can guarantee: GOD is bigger than our challenges and obstacles (whatever they might be)! It may take time and persistence and effort, and it *will* take lots of prayer.

B--But we WILL be able to face and get through and have victory over them *together* if we'll but learn to practice the attitude of Nehemiah – the attitude that equips us to “BE the Church” for and in the world – an attitude that believes “*By the grace of God, we CAN, and we WILL, in spite of the obstacles!*”

12. [PRAY]
 13. [HOLY COMMUNION]
 14. [HYMN: UMH#374, “*Standing on the Promises*”]

ENDNOTES:

1. The poet Emerson said, “A [person] is [precisely] what [they] think about all day long.” Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius once said that, “[One's] life is what [their] thoughts make of it.”

2. It's important to note here that this NOT advocating the “power of positive thinking” or the “American Work Ethic” which leads us to believe that if we simply think or work hard enough, success will automatically happen. No. Here, Nehemiah recognizes that in his own strength and striving he will fail. He recognizes that success in the end comes only by the power & grace of God.