

PRAY AND WATCH LIKE NEHEMIAH!

Neh 4:9 Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.

There is an enemy who does not want us to succeed in the work of the Lord. The Devil knew that seventy years were determined for the children of Israel to live in exile in Babylon after which the Lord would bring them back to the holy land. “In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem” (Daniel 9:2). We must expect the Devil to try to stir up many troubles and frustrations for the people of God when they embark on important spiritual missions. If the Temple and walls of Jerusalem would be rebuilt, people would repent, pray, and keep the commands of God. This was something the Devil was determined to stop although he knew the word of God cannot be stopped. Indeed, knowledge of the word of God and the futility of blocking its fulfilment has never deterred Satan from trying.

Mat 4:8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

Mat 4:9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

In other words, be assured the Devil will pop up and seek to intimidate us when we determine to accomplish the commands of the Lord Jesus. Now, notice what Nehemiah’s first course of action was – “Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God” (Neh 4:9). Let prayer precede everything else we do when the enemy stirs up trouble around us. It is tempting to pick up a sword and swing at the enemy but give priority to prayer first. Remember that Nehemiah had a letter from King Artaxerxes to rebuild the Temple and walls of Jerusalem. Anyone who hurt him risked the wrath of the King, and yet Nehemiah trusted only in the King of Kings, the God of Israel. “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God” (Psalm 20:7). Aren’t we quick to look for an aspirin, cough mixture or a doctor when we are sick? Let us learn from Nehemiah today – “Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God” (Neh 4:9). When we pray, the Devil cannot keep his focus on us alone, he must constantly look towards heaven from where the Lord Jesus will send deliverance through angels, for instance. The Prince of Persia was in trouble the moment Daniel began a 21-day fast. There was war in the heavens because Michael was unleashed to fight against him.

Dan 10:12 Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words.

When we pray the Devil cannot accomplish his purposes with us. Don't let the Devil work in peace! Pray and he will be interrupted, confused and chased away in Jesus' name. Notice that it was not just Nehemiah who prayed (we made our prayers); all Israelites who desired to see the Temple and walls of Jerusalem rebuilt prayed. Let us remember that all of Israel cried unto the Lord for deliverance after 430 years of slavery. "And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows" (Exodus 3:7). All the saints gathered in the house of Mary to pray for the release of Peter. "And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying" (Acts 12:12). I pray that our churches will not rely on one or two individuals' prayers – God loves to hear his whole congregation pray.

2Ch 7:14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Next, Nehemiah set a watch. "...and set a watch against them day and night, because of them" (Neh 4:9). Once again, everyone in the church is needed for this job. One person cannot watch day and night – guards must be changed at regular intervals to stay sharp and warn of the danger. The two enemies of Nehemiah, Tobiah and Sanballat, did not give advance warning of when they would attack so Nehemiah had to set guards round the clock. Guards are always placed in the weakest and most vulnerable areas of the city. We must place a watch where we are weakest. Whatever our weaknesses are is where we must place a watch. Place a watch near our tongues, our eyes, our hands and our minds, among others. In fact, the longer you have been in the Lord, the higher the risk of becoming careless and going to sleep spiritually. Set a watch! One preacher observed that most of the people of God who sinned were not young, but older and more experienced. Moses was close to 120 years when he struck the rock in his anger and sinned against the Lord. It was a different matter when he was 40 and killed an Egyptian officer. After serving the Lord for 80 years and being described as the humblest man on earth, he should have known better. And, yet, are we any better than Moses? Set a guard on our temper as we get older in the Lord! Praying and watching cannot be separated – they are partners in achieving the purposes of God.

1Ki 18:43 And said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea. And he went up, and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Go again seven times.

1Ki 18:44 And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not.

Elijah prayed fervently while his servant acted as the watch. Each problem or task requires this partnership. Moses prayed fervently while Aaron and Hur supported his arms and told him about the battle against Amalek. “But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun” (Exodus 17:12). It was through praying and watching that Nehemiah defeated Sanballat and Tobiah, and rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. These two partners always combine successfully to accomplish the work of the Lord. The Lord Jesus appeared to reverse the order in the Gethsemane. “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt 26:41). While nothing is normally more important than prayer, watching and praying are equal partners – they should be seen together as one rather than two separate events in a hierarchy. “And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). We are commanded to watch events as they unfold in the world in these last days and recognize the time we are living in and lift up our heads to pray to be delivered. We watch the world and we lift up our heads to pray, and we lift up our heads to pray and watch the world.