

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



Internet Edition 178 issued March 2025

Index

1. "I Am Doing a Great Work": Nehemiah's Refusal to Abandon the Work of God.
2. Bars and Things. Churches using non-traditional buildings.
3. The Lost Sheep and the Good Shepherd. Mrs Seaton's Letter.
4. Psalm 106 (concluded) Gleanings in the Psalms.
5. Robert Murray McCheyne Speaks to Christless Persons who are at Ease.
6. A Public House Bar. (A Warning Poem).



At the Web Site of the Wicket Gate magazine www.wicketgate.co.uk you will also find the following recordings:

- Through the Bible with the Children – Bible Stories told by Mr Seaton.
- Congregational Praise – the singing of our Church during Worship Services
- Sermons preached by Dr N. Needham, W. J. Seaton and Pastor G. S. Marley
- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham
- Podcasts on Various Subjects
- Archive of Audio Sermons.

"I Am Doing a Great Work": Nehemiah's Refusal to Abandon the Work of God

“Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;) That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. And I sent messengers unto them, saying, 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? Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner.”

Dear Friends,

The above words are found in the Book of Nehemiah, chapter 6, and they contain what is probably the best-known statement Nehemiah the Lord's servant ever uttered, viz – “I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down.” The statement has been often used, and rightly so, to express a determination on the part of the Lord's people to be about the Lord's business. But the total setting of the statement ought to be appreciated, and the application of it imp-lamented in our lives where appropriate.

Nehemiah chapter six sits in the context of a whole series of plots and devices on the part of the enemies of the Children of Israel, to put them off the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem with all her defences once more. Sanballat and company have used ridicule, derision, and scorn in an effort to sow misgivings and doubts in the minds of the people engaged in that work. They have also used open force, and confrontation,

and threats. Each of these “devices” of the previous chapters has had some measure of success for Israel’s enemies, but for all that, the work has managed to proceed and come very near a point of conclusion. In the light of this, Sanballat and the others begin to resort to some other tactics as well; and in the above words, the first of these tactics is brought before us, with Nehemiah’s response to that tactic in that famous statement of his. What is the tactic? What is the reasoning behind the statement?

The tactic is a very simple one: Sanballat and co. aim to lure Nehemiah away from the work on Jerusalem's defences in order to delay that work, and impede that work on hand. When they suggest a meeting for *dialogue* “in some one of the villages of the plains of Ono,” we are to bear in mind that such a journey, with the meeting included, would have occupied about a week of Nehemiah’s precious time. Nothing was more certain than the urgency of getting those defences of Jerusalem established once again. If Sanballat and the other “adversaries” of Israel hadn’t been able to completely *halt* the work up to this point, at least they could now maybe *hinder* it for a given period of time, and that would always be something.

Now, it’s that device behind the tactic that the shrewd eye of Nehemiah sees; “I am doing a great work,” he tells them in the message he sends back, “so that I cannot come down; *why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?*” It was the delay of the work that was intended in the invitation to “enter into dialogue” regarding the things of Jerusalem in that day; Nehemiah saw that, and so issued his reply in the well-known statement that he uttered.

The application of that should not be missed. We live in the days of “dialogue,” and of great discussion concerning the things of our Jerusalem – the Church of Jesus Christ. Much of this is carried on with those who are nothing other than the “adversaries” of the church and the gospel, rightly understood. Not a few of the “good brethren” who enter into such discussion would assure us that they would never “give way” in the issues of the church or the gospel. That is not the point; in the light of Nehemiah’s action, they have already given way in the dissipation of precious “working hours” that are meant to be devoted to the strengthening of Jerusalem’s bulwarks.

You see, Nehemiah had long-since settled Sanballat and Tobiah’s position. As soon as Nehemiah had appeared on the scene to build the walls of Jerusalem, he made the position of those two men quite apparent; chapter 2:20 – “But ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.” Like the leadership of Ezra’s day, “Ye have nothing to do with us, to build a house unto our God.” Nehemiah knew their position, therefore, there was nothing to talk about; and any such time of talking would be a waste of precious time on the “great work” that the Lord had called him to. “They thought to do me mischief,” says Nehemiah in the course of those verses. And we may rest assured that the devil is always up to mischief when it comes to the work of the Lord that has been given into our hands to do; and it serves his purpose well enough to send us off on wild goose chases with those who have “no portion, nor right, nor memorial in Jerusalem.” The *value* of the ploy in Sanballat’s estimation, had it worked, is evidenced in the fact that they sent “four times after this sort;” Those involved in endless ecumenical dialogue and so forth, take note; and may the Lord grant Nehemiah’s spirit to us all, as, four times over, he tells us, “I answered them after the same manner.” Very simply, he said

no to the invitation. There was nothing to discuss, therefore there was no point in wasting time in discussion, when that time was precious for Jerusalem's good.

It is interesting to note Nehemiah's description of that work on the walls of Jerusalem, which is part and parcel of that famous statement. "I am doing a great work," he says, "a *great* work."

No doubt there were many who would have looked on the work of Jerusalem of those days and considered it a very small work, or a very insignificant work, that the Lord's servants were engaged in. That only sets before us a very vital fact of the Word of God, viz, that those things are "great" that are counted so in God's sight, not in man's sight. Even at the best of times, the city of Jerusalem, as far as size, and outward splendour, and magnificence were concerned, didn't rank with some of the other cities of her day. She was no Babylon such as Nebuchadnezzar had built, with its hanging gardens, as one of the seven wonders of the world. And at that present time, she was most-assuredly in a bedraggled state, when all was said and done. But she was God's city now being refurbished once again; and if that wasn't a "great work," then nothing was.

My friends, never let us be intimidated by the estimations of men. If God has called us to the work of the Church, of the Word of God, then that is a "great work." It has never appeared great in the eyes of men anyway; "we are counted as the offscouring of the earth," says Paul. If it is the Lord's church, however, as revealed in the Lord's Word, then to be engaged in the work of it is to be engaged in a great work. The more we are convinced of that the better.

W. J. Seaton (March 1985)

Bars and Things

In our last edition of the Wicket Gate, we gave a brief outline of how we had renovated the premises that we now occupy for worship and work, and recommended that any small church looking for accommodation should have their eyes open towards buildings that seem to be somewhat less than traditional.

A piece of news from a brother on the “Mission Field” in Brazil fits very well into the general drift of that article. He has just purchased a Bar and converted it into a church building; and what’s more is now negotiating the purchase of another Bar next door to use as Sunday School accommodation and a manse! Before any one rushes to conclude that that is all right for the “Mission Field,” let me remind you that the same thing happened in Scotland itself over a century and a half ago.

At the time of the “Disruption,” when the Free Church of Scotland came into being, in 1843, many congregations of the Lord’s people found themselves without church accommodation. As with any initial movement, zeal and non-conformity were very much the order of the day, and manys an ingenious arrangement was arrived at for the gatherings of the church.

The one we have in mind took place at Symington, in Ayrshire, and is recorded in the Annals of the Disruption, as follows: - “The very day after I left the old church,” says Mr Orr, “the elders and others set to work to find a temporary place of worship, and they fortunately procured for that purpose an *old public house*, which was then empty. They took down all the partitions, threw all its rooms into one, had it all seated by the following Sabbath, and it was sufficiently large to hold a good congregation. I preached there for nine months with great

comfort and satisfaction. My pulpit was an old door laid across two small tressles, and upon it a table and a chair and it was the finest pulpit I ever occupied.” We are not bound to follow any “rules” where no rules exist.



Mrs Seaton's Letter to the Boys and Girls

Dear Boys and Girls,

Here is another of the Parables Jesus told. Remember, a Parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.

This story is about a lost sheep and of Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

Supposing there was a shepherd who kept a flock of a hundred sheep in the wilderness, and counted them at night, to see that none had strayed. If he should find one lost, some little lamb, that he had watched, and loved, and carried in his arms, would he not go at once in search of it? He would leave the ninety-nine other sheep in the wilderness and all night long he would go after the lost sheep, until he found it.

Although he would be cold, and maybe wet with rain his feet torn and bruised with the rough stoney ground, and his hands torn with the thorns and prickles, that good shepherd would give himself no rest until he could find the sheep. He would put it on his shoulder, and carry it home rejoicing. He would then call out to everyone, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

Boys and girls, we should be so glad to know that Jesus is like that. He came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost.” Like the shepherd in the parable, Jesus had to suffer to find His lost sheep. This He did a million times more, of course, for the Bible tell us that no one ever suffered like Jesus did, when He suffered and died on the cross for men and women, and boys and girls.

Perhaps you know this old hymn:-

“Jesus, the gentle Shepherd, stands,
And calls His sheep by name;
He leads them with His mighty hands,
And feeds each tender lamb.

He loved them in the ages past,
And died that they might be
His portion while the ages last –
To all eternity.”

Love,
Mrs Seaton.



Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 106 (Concluded)

Verse 25. “**But murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the Lord.**” Murmuring! It may have been a malady characteristic of the Hebrew people, or a disease peculiar to that desert! As we proceed with this narrative we are constantly meeting it – creaking along in a discord harsh and

chronic, or amazing earth and heaven with its shrill, ear-piercing paroxysm.

They lift up their eyes, and as the Egyptians pursue, the people murmur. They come to a fountain, the water is bitter, and once more, they murmur. Then, no bread; murmurings redoubled. Moses is no longer in the mount; murmurs. He takes too much upon him; more murmurs. When shall we reach that promised land? – murmurs extraordinary, loud murmurs. We are close to the land, but its inhabitants are giants and the towns walled up to heaven. A hurricane of reproach and remonstrance – a perfect storm of murmurs.

James Hamilton

Verse 29. “**Thus, they provoked him to anger with their inventions**” Note, it is not said, with their *deeds*, but with their “inventions” – with their *pursuits*. It is one thing simply to do a thing; it is quite another to pursue it earnestly night and day. The first may take place by chance or through ignorance, or on account of some temptation, and that without the consent of, and against the inclination of the mind. But the latter is brought about in pursuance of a fixed purpose, and by effort and forethought. We see, therefore, in this passage that the patience of God was at length provoked to anger and fury when the people sinned not merely once, and again, but when the pursuit of sin grew and strengthened.

Musculus

Verses 34-38. We see from these verses that the miracles and mercies which settled them in Canaan made no more deep and durable impressions upon them than those that fetched them out of Egypt. Observe the steps of their apostacy.

Verse 34. They spared the nations which God had doomed to destruction. Once they had got the good land God had promised them, they had no zeal against the wicked inhabitants, whom the Lord commanded them to drive out. They pretended pity; but God is merciful, and no man needs to think himself more compassionate than God is.

Verse 35. When they spared them, they promised themselves, that for all that, they would not join in any dangerous affinity with them. But the way of sin is downhill. Omissions make way for commissions. When they neglect to destroy the heathen, the next news we hear is, they “were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works.”

Verse 36. When they mingled with them, and learned *some of their works* that appeared to be only innocent diversions and entertainments, yet they thought they would never join with them in their worship. But by degrees, they learned that, too – “They served their idols... .”

Verses 37-38. When they joined with them in *some* of their idolatrous services, they never thought that they should ever be guilty of that barbarous and inhuman piece of idolatry – the sacrificing of their living children to their dead god. But they came to that at last. One cannot think of it without horror; they “shed innocent blood,” the most innocent, for it was infant blood – nay, it was “the blood of their sons and their daughters.”

Matthew Henry

Verse 48. “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting; and let all the people say, *Amen. Praise ye the Lord.*” Martin Luther said once of the Lord’s Prayer that it was “the greatest martyr on earth,” because it was

so ill-used and badly treated, without thought, feeling, reverence, or faith.” This quaint remark applies perhaps with still greater force to the word, “Amen.” The literal meaning – “So be it.” – is known to all; yet few consider the deep significance, the great solemnity, and the abundant consolation treasured up in this word which, for centuries, has formed the conclusion of the prayers and praises of the Lord’s people. A word which is frequently used without due thoughtfulness, can lose its power from this very familiarity and though constantly on our lips, lies bedridden in the dormitory of our soul. But it is a great word this word, “Amen;” and Luther has truly said, “As your Amen is, so has your prayer been.” Amen, and Amen.

A Saphir

***Robert Murray McCheyne
speaks to Christless persons who are at ease.***

Let me speak to Christless persons who are at ease.

Many of you hearing me know that you are in a Christless state and yet you know that you are at ease and happy. Why is this? It is because you hope to be brought to Christ before you die. You say, another day will do as well, and I will hear you again on this matter: and therefore, you take your ease now.

But this is very unreasonable. It is not worthy of a rational being to act in this way. God has nowhere promised to bring you to Christ before you die. God has laid himself under no manner of obligation to you. He has nowhere promised that you will see tomorrow, or that you shall hear another sermon. There is a day near at hand when you shall not see a tomorrow. There is a sermon yet to be preached that will be the last you will ever hear.

The Public House Bar
(A Warning Poem)

"A BAR to heaven, a door to Hell,
Whoever named it named it well.

A BAR to manliness and wealth,
A door to want and broken health.

A BAR to honour, pride, and fame,
A door to sin and grief and shame.

A BAR to hope, a bar to prayer,
A door to darkness and despair.

A BAR to honoured useful life,
A door to brawling senseless strife.

A BAR to all that's true and brave,
A door to every drunkard's grave.

A BAR to joy that home imparts,
A door to tears and broken hearts.

A BAR to Heaven, a door to Hell,
Whoever named it, named it well."

Author Unknown.