

The People had a Mind to Work, Part II

Call to Worship: Psalm 133

Hymn #-

1st Scripture: Romans 12:1-13

Hymn #-

2nd Scripture: Nehemiah 4

Hymn #-

Introduction:

We have all had the experience of emotionally tapping into the drama of a well made movie, haven't we? Fine acting and a moving plot have captured our hearts for at least the duration of the movie, if not longer. We have wept. We have laughed. We have feared. We have raged, and we have sorrowed, sometimes long after the closing credits have rolled.

Why is this the case? How could we possibly become enamored and drawn into a work of fiction displayed on a digital screen? Is it not because we are able to relate to the drama that is set before us? Are not these, even fictional moving manuscripts, pictures of realities that are dear to our hearts? And do they not tamper with our dreams, though sometimes/often times unrealistically? We imagine ourselves in the shoes of the characters; we tap into their fiction with our own reality, and we relate, and this affects us. And this is evident, because our bodily expressions of emotion; tears, warm fuzzy feelings, heated anger, cold fear, a fast beating heart...etc, are produced by us. The character has died, and though we know that the actor really lives, our hearts sink and we weep with the mourning characters played by the other actors/actresses. We look for justice to take place as we are given the ability to stand and behold the bad guys committing the crime; we are speaking to the good guys in our minds, who are ignorant of what we have just seen, calling them to recognize that the person they currently trust, is a traitor and a criminal. We mentally nudge one character to take interest in another, because we know that he/she is the type of wonderful "life companion" that any bachelor would die for. Indeed, we emotionally tap into fictional motion pictures, containing fictional characters played by real actors (who are often nothing like the characters whom they are portraying). The movie is simply a fictional compilation of edited scenes, but our emotions are real and genuine, latching onto the reality presented by the fiction. And in a very real sense, you can say that we subject

out imaginations to the message of the directors, as they seek to impress our hearts with their story and their message, and if it is done well, we are indeed impacted.

You know, the Scriptures, not by means of communicated pictures, but by means of communicated words of truth, are meant to impact us in the same way, only unto a far more significant and eternal end. The Scriptures are meant to bring us not a work of fiction or a message containing the ideals and ideas of men, but rather God's divine truth, unto the purpose of laying hold of our minds, hearts, wills and emotions, so that we might be driven to live differently in accordance with what we read. The Scriptures give us *real* life history, not characters played by actors, but real people, real events and real teachings that are meant to infuse the will and Word of God into our hearts, so that we might be changed from the inside, out, being conformed into the image of the real historical Christ, so that we might be fit to live for God's glory, in accordance with His will for mankind. The central figure of all of Scripture; the One who was foreshadowed and pictured and prophesied about, all throughout the Old Testament, and the very tangible subject of the New Testament, who, being the Son of God, entered our finite world of dust through the birth canal of a woman, became One of us and died on behalf of sinners; this One, the Christ, Jesus the Christ, the Light of the world, is Himself the living Word of God, who is meant to impact, change and govern our thoughts, wills, emotions and actions. He Himself is meant to be played on the movie reel of our hearts continually, so that we might be moved and changed by His non-fiction...by His reality.

You see, what we find happening to ourselves when we tap into movies, is no small thing. It is evidence of a deeper, profound reality, wired within each and every one of us. It shows us that we were wired to be very impressionable, effected and changed by shaping influences. We were meant to be influenced. Being and image bearer of Almighty God assumes this. Our natural sinful inclination toward idolatry assumes this. And so, it should behoove us to spend much time fixing our eyes on the *reality* of Christ; His life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, His will, His purposes, His teachings and His personal love and concern for us, His people.

Brethren, we are meant to tap into the real life events, characters and teachings of Scripture. But sadly, we can find ourselves so drawn to fictional realities, full of man's ideas and ideals, on the TV or movie screen or in the music devices to which we listen. The Apostle

Paul said it so well, when he addressed the Corinthians, who were lending their ears to false teachers, "Do not be deceived. Evil communications corrupt good morals."

You see, but studying and pondering and meditating upon the Scriptures takes much work. You have to prayerfully use some mental energy, seeking to contemplate and understand what you are reading. Hollywood cannot do this for you. And the Scriptures are not given to entertain or to feed into your natural fleshly desires. No, they aim to change. They aim to tell it like it is, and to draw you away from what you naturally desire. Hollywood appeals to the emotions. It lets you be you, and it allows and compels you to live your dreams and to know that you can do and have all things, if you just believe...in yourself. It gives you ice cream over and over again, when the Word of God gives you the *naturally* less desired, but far more valuable and necessary, broccoli and spinach. Hollywood puts you at the center, but the Word of God says *you* are in the way; move over, and find true life, meaning and fulfillment in Christ...the real superhero and center of God's universe. Hollywood puts you on the middle of an island with all of the wonderful luxuries of life and unending worldly pleasure, but God's Word puts you in the middle of the church, with all of her hardships, difficulties, trials and challenges, amongst a sinful people, who, together with you, are in desperate need of growth and change in Christ. Hollywood seems to be so wonderful, but it is a lie; it is a work of fiction, it is not real. It promises everything and leaves you with nothing. The Word of God is real and true. It calls you to lose your life, but it promises that in doing so, you will find true life in Christ. Though it leads you through the pathway of suffering and trial, it gives you the true and sincere hope of a glorious eternal end, and *present* ongoing fellowship with the living God in Christ. It presents you with the eternal importance and value of the living soul, which is worth far more than everything in the world combined. It calls you out of Babylon, to build a temple and a wall, back in a destroyed and leveled Jerusalem; exchanging the luxuries of this world for fellowship with God and His people. It moves you away from the camaraderie of pagan comforts, lusts and joys, and into the camaraderie of suffering with the people of God. It carries you from the palace of King Artaxerxes to the charred ruins of Jerusalem, with all of the headaches and stresses and threats that come with rebuilding in a region surrounded by foreign enemies and invaders...only to look to the joy that comes with living in the will of God your Creator, for His glory and praise!

Indeed, at the end of the movie, when the smoke clears, you will experience the short-lived fuzzy feeling of being among the heroes, as they rise to the top together, having conquered their enemies. You will hear "job well done," as the characters part with blooded brows, bruises, scars, limping legs and gaping gashes...and you will feel good for the moment; you will enjoy their camaraderie...but then it all ends, and it's back to reality. It becomes nothing more than, "Hey, did you see that movie!" "Yeah, it was great!"

But among the people of God, in the trenches of the church, fighting unto the edification and prosperity of the body of Christ, you are working toward a real, living desired end; that final true feeling of camaraderie that exists among the people of God as they meet in heaven with Christ. A vision worth fighting for...and worth pondering until we get there! "Wow! Cal, John, Rich, Debbie, Grace, Bob, Maximo, Maria...we made it! We fought together on earth and here we are! Did you ever imagine in a million years what this moment would truly be like! Well, yes, we tried, but remaining sin, and suffering and trial and the thick of the battle, made things unclear. But here we are, rejoicing together in the presence of Christ!" Oh brethren, that day is coming! It is drawing nearer and nearer every day! Let's take it by storm! Let's work today, for the day is coming when no man can work. The sun is soon to set on our history! By faith, let's move mountains! Let's take risks! Let's get dirty, sweaty, bloody; let's exhaust ourselves now, investing in our eternal rest!

I. A Quick Review

Last time, we were considering the rebuilding efforts of Nehemiah and the Israelites, who were seeking to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, which had been destroyed several decades earlier, when the Babylonians came in, leveled the city and took the Jews into captivity some three hundred miles away. Following the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, the Jews were granted permission to return to their land, in order to rebuild the temple, the city and the wall.

However, these rebuilding efforts did not come without great challenges, trials and opposition. But the people had a mind to work, and so, they cast their confidence on God and ultimately prospered unto the rebuilding of the temple and the wall, continually praying and

making all manner of inconvenient and burdensome adjustments along the way, until they faithfully completed their God ordained task.

Last week, we were working through several applications and key principles that could be taken from the challenges that the Israelites faced and dealt with, which very much relate to how we ought to persevere unto the building of Christ's church, here in Merrick. I want to simply summarize the applications we went over, before moving into a few final applications that I was unable to get to last week.

II. Applications for us

1) First, we sought to factor the sovereignty of God into all that we had gone over, and we saw that a much greater and more significant building effort was taking place, as the Israelites labored to build the wall. God ordained to allow ongoing opposition to come against the Jews, and He ordained that they would have to do all of the rebuilding in very difficult circumstances and conditions. But He did this, all the more to build their own character, especially as they learned to trust in the invisible God in naturally impossible circumstances. And by the time they finished, both they and their enemies knew for sure, that God had prospered this great work, and the faith of His people was greatly strengthened.

2) We saw that the Israelites had to leave the comforts of a well ordered, up to date, technologically advanced Babylon, in order to rebuild in their own broken, barren, charred land. They had to leave the good life behind, in order to dwell in the Land of God's presence and blessing. Leaving Babylon took no small amount of faith, and many stayed because of this. Such a sacrifice is imperative for all who would desire to follow Christ, unto the building of His church.

3) We saw that the rebuilding efforts took much prayer and that building this church body will take much prayer as well; but only prayer that is followed up by action. In our text, Nehemiah and the Israelites continually prayed as they faced hardships and opposition and discouragement. They sought the Lord, and in doing so, they set themselves up to receive divine

strength and grace...and God met them. But they didn't just pray and sit back! No, they made adjustments; they took steps forward and fought the good fight.

And this is where we left off, last time. Moving on then,

4) Let me leave you with a general principle concerning ways that you can serve this local church body. Let me give you a general direction toward which you can exercise whatever gracious gifts God has given you, unto the edification of His church. Indeed, in our example, you find the importance of leadership, who are called to lead and direct the people of God. But you also find two primary means of gift use. There are verbal gifts; gifts of encouragement, teaching, directing, exhorting...etc, unto the end of strengthening the building of the body, and there are service gifts; gifts involving specific and very direct ways of doing the literal building. Now, all are required to encourage/exhort in some respect, and all are required to do physical labor in some respect, but some are more gifted than others in the various tasks involved in the building process.

But, herein lays the overall principle, brethren. Herein, lays the general question that we must all ask ourselves, as we seek to fix our eyes outward unto the building of Christ's church: How can *I* personally be used to build up and edify this church? How can I build up individuals and how can I build up the whole? What can I do to help move this church forward in unity, spiritual growth, outreach, ministry...etc? How am I specifically gifted unto the end of seeing this church prosper? What has God entrusted in and to me, unto the building of His church? Resources, abilities, skills, finances, services, biblical wisdom, technical wisdom, the ability to recognize and meet needs, biblical discernment, time, experience with suffering, the ability to understand and speak truth...etc? And whatever God has entrusted to me, in what specific ways can I use these gifts and abilities unto the building up of Christ's church? How can I be spent for this beloved body of Christ? How can I invest in the progress of this body? How can I be spent for Christ? Brethren, consider these things; pray fervently about them; come speak to Pastor Doug and I in these regards, and let's work together, every last one of us, side by side, building and strengthening the spiritual life of this church!

5) And lastly, brethren, let us have a mind to work! Let us have the firm and settled conviction that this work is the will of our God and Father, and let us resolve to keep building no

matter what...in spite of opposition (inward and outward), in spite of contrary feelings and emotions, in spite of various discouragements and seeming set backs, in spite of personality differences and petty offenses, in spite of everything and anything that the enemy wields at us...let us build, let us be prepared to sacrifice much--to lose our very lives, looking unto a better home whose Maker and Builder is God, trusting that God will give us the victory, and that we already have the ultimate victory in Christ! Christ has conquered, and so shall we, for we are more than conquerors in Him who died for and saved us!

Now brethren, please understand, I am not saying that everyone should just quit their jobs and become missionaries. But I am asking us to examine our priorities, and to see where we as individuals might be emphasizing the wrong things in life. We belong to Christ. He has purchased us unto the glorious end of building His church. This is His priority...should ours be anything less? Let us have the mind to work; the unending resolve to never give up, until we get to glory! Let us rise and build!

AMEN!!!

[hospitality???

Benediction: Ephesians 3:14-21