

In whatever capacity #1: The Dung Gate**980318**

In the book of Nehemiah we read the story of where Nehemiah returned from Babylonia to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. One of the major tasks was to rebuild the city wall so that the people could defend themselves. There were several gates around the perimeter of the wall, and each one of them had a special name, like the Fountain Gate, the East Gate, and the Sheep Gate. But the most interesting gate, in a way, was called the Dung Gate. It was through this gate that the filth of the city passed.

This part of the city also had to be repaired. Nehemiah had to split the work up among the people; how would you have felt if you had been chosen to repair the Dung Gate? Were there any eager to take on this job, urgently waving their hand when Nehemiah came to this particular job? The man who got picked was named Malkijah. In Nehejiah 3:14 we find that he was the ruler of a certain district in the land. So he wasn't some no-name, but an important man. I wonder what his attitude was like, having to work near where the garbage was taken out everyday. We don't know much more beyond the fact that the Dung Gate was indeed repaired and made whole again. Evidently Malkijah was able to perform his work with honor.

We might think of the way we feel about our own work. Do we like our job? Do we do our best no matter how insignificant the task we are assigned? People generally want the prestige jobs. But there is a great deal of honor in the details. We must do the lowly work and be proud to glorify God through it. The question is, would we have done a good job on the Dung Gate?

Malkijah must have been able to see his work as a vital piece in the whole picture. I believe he saw the glory of the complete job. His work involved a part of the estate, the city of David. The entire wall needed to be finished, to provide a ring of defense around the city. Any gap would have been extremely important. He was working for the glory of the city, his people, and for God. This is a very important concept that needs to be understood.

When I first rented an apartment, the landlord was a hands-on kind of manager. Once when the sewer line was backed up, I called him to fix the problem. Imagine my surprise when he knocked on the door with a sewer snake expecting me to help him fix the problem. I was shocked that he would do this kind of dirty work himself, and I was more than a little disappointed that I would have to participate. The real question, though, was whether I wanted the sewer to keep bubbling up in my bathtub every time I flushed the toilet! And to solve that problem I was more than glad to try to help.

But this taught me a great lesson. There is a major difference between thinking that we are performing a menial task and thinking that we are contributing to the management of the estate. The landlord didn't worry about whether the job was beneath his station; he was concerned with the maintenance of his property. Every contribution to the improvement of it helped the value of it.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12 about the analogy of the different parts of the body. Even the smallest part is important to the welfare of the whole. If we considered some of the parts as non-essential, and had them removed, the body would not function properly. Each job is as important as any other. We must realize that the body of Christ has suffered enough. We must find our work and do it, no matter if it doesn't seem that important. We must see also the glory of the unity of the body of Christ, and work however we can towards that goal. We must "serve in whatever capacity." We will continue this discussion in the next article as we examine the story of the Prodigal Son.

© Copyright 1998, Heard Lowry