

Nickels and Noses

By Milburn Cockrell

Through pride King Hezekiah showed all his wealth to the ambassadors of Babylon. II Kings 20:13 says: **"And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and skewed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his Armour, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah skewed them not."** For this act of pride he was divinely judged (II Kings 14:14-19). The sin of Hezekiah led to the Babylonian Captivity. Hezekiah's problem, in a manner of speaking, was that he wanted to impress the people from Babylon with how many nickels he had.

King David was moved by Satan to number Israel: **"And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel from Beer-sheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it"** (I Chron. 21:1-2). This was done through the pride of David's heart to impress other nations with his great army. It showed he was trusting the arm of the flesh more than God. In a manner of speaking, David wanted to know how many noses he had. For his folly and vain glory a plague was sent on Israel which resulted in the death of seventy thousand people (I Chron. 21 14).

One would glean from these two passages of Scripture that God does not care as much about nickels and noses as men do. Carnal men glory in such things as nickels and noses. We live in a time of big meetings, big churches, big church buildings, big preachers, and big church budgets. The failure or success of a church and its pastor is judged by the number of nickels and

noses that they have. In all too many cases, there is seen in this more Satanic pride than spiritual piety.

WHAT PEOPLE WANT TO SEE

The first thing most religious folks look for when they visit a church is the record board, which reveals how many nickels and noses that a church has. If they fail to see a record board, they are frustrated and confused. They may assume that the church has gone hardshell or into apostasy. Much distressed, they will cry out, "What is your attendance and offering in this church?"

As a pastor for over thirty years I have many times been asked this question, and, no doubt, I will be asked it many more times if I live. Never has anyone ever asked me such questions as the following: "Are your services spiritual?" "Is Christ real to your people?" "Are your members hearing the whole counsel of God?" "Are your people growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ?" "Is there a spirit of unity and love in your church?" Evidently, these things are not important to modern-day religionists, who judge religious success by worldly standards--nickels and noses. I just wish one single time that a person would ask about something other than nickels and noses!

When you have a revival in your church and people ask about your services they will always ask: "How many additions did you have?" Never do they ask; "Did the evangelist preach the truth?" or "Was Christ glorified?" Evangelists for revivals are usually chosen by the crowds they can draw and the number of additions they can get by nook or crook. Today everything centers around nickels and noses. Pastors are hired and fired on this basis. Missionaries are supported or not supported by this criterion. Sunday school teachers are put in or out on this standard. People seem to forget that it was Satan who invented nickels and noses in the days of King David.

NICKELS, NOSES, AND GOD

The God of Heaven is independent of nickels and noses. Consider Acts 17:24-25: **"God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things."** God does not need any thing or any person. He is perfectly happy in and of Himself. He is not dependent upon men or angels to accomplish His sovereign will.

God may accomplish His work with few or many, according to His sovereign pleasure. Jonathan told a young man in Israel: **". . .for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few"** (I Sam. 14:6). Omnipotence can accomplish His will by the few and feeble. The Almighty can make a thousand **"flee at the rebuke of one"** (Isa. 30:17).

It would seem that the Lord takes pleasure in using the feeble and few in the Bible. When Gideon went out to fight against the Midianites, the Lord said to him: **"The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me"** (Judg. 7:2). Gideon started out with 32,000 men and ended up with 300! Jehovah intended to have all the praise for the victory of Israel over the Midianites.

The Prophet Elijah went up against 850 prophets of Baal and the groves (I Kings 18:19). Look what God did with the Israelites who **"were the fewest of all people"** (Deut. 7:7). Jesus Christ took **"a few small fishes"** (Mark 8:9) and fed 4,000 people. Even in the matter of eternal salvation **"many are called, but few are chosen"** (Matt. 22:14). This is so **"no**

flesh shall glory in his presence" (I Cor. 1:29) and that all might **"glory in the Lord"** (I Cor. 1:31).

THE EFFECT OF THIS ON OUR CHURCHES

1. The philosophy of nickels and noses has drastically changed our churches for the worse. In the craze for nickels and noses churches have replaced preachers and pastors with puppeteers and pranksters. The gospel of Christ has been superseded by gimmicks, gum, gadgets, and games. Psychology has taken the place of Holy Spirit conviction. The faith has been displaced for finance, fun, and foolishness. Church discipline has been relegated to the background in order to swell the size of the church with religious hypocrites who might give a little money to the church now and then.

2. This syndrome has filled our churches with unconverted persons. We have far more churchianity than Christianity. The only change some church members made since joining the church was from wet to dry clothes following their baptism. Many church members are white-washed, but they are not blood washed. Their names are upon the church roll, but they are not found in the Lamb's book of life. Many have been reformed, but they have not been re-born. Many have been confirmed, but they have not been converted to Christ. There are so many lost people in our churches until you cannot tell the difference between a church member and the unconverted. The reason is because there is no difference. Both are headed to Hell as fast as time can carry them!

3. It has produced icy services and cold, callous, complacent church members. Look at the average church! They have their robed choir, their cut and dried program, and their intellectual preaching. They have a beautiful edifice. They have all the organization and rituals one could ask for, but in

most cases it is Spiritless! We have never faced such in our generation. We have form without reality; we have organization without power; profession without possession. We have a form of godliness without the power of it. We have religion without life.

4. It has caused pastors to spend more time worrying with goats than feeding the sheep. The pastor nowadays must provide a spiritual diet for people who have no spiritual appetite. Like Ezekiel of old (Ezek. 37:1-10), he must preach to dead, dry bones, but without the blessings which Ezekiel experienced. These dry, dead bones can't hear, yet the pastor must keep preaching and pretend someone is listening. These dry, dead bones do not grow in grace, for the dead do not grow. These baptized bones are in no way sensitive to the appeals made to them from the Scriptures by the pastor. Deep down each pastor knows most members do not enjoy Bible preaching. They merely pretend to enjoy what they really detest. They watch the clock on Sunday morning, hoping the pastor will preach a short sermon so they can soon go home and do what they really enjoy. In the average church there is constant wrangling, gossiping, backbiting, lying about each other, and a constant uproar among the members. One might well get the impression that about the only place people can't get along is in the church. It takes nine-tenths of the pastor's time trying to keep them pacified and trying to keep the church together. He is busy running from one church member to the other trying to soothe people whose "feelings have been hurt." The pastor is no longer a powerful, plain preacher but a polite, polished politician! This is because our churches are cursed with contentious cliques, fighting factions, and petty partisanism.

5. The nickels and noses racket has made some habitual hypocrites in our churches. Church members say they enjoy going to church, but a large percentage can't get to church services on time. It is almost impossible to get up in time to come to Sunday school. They hate their job with its hard work and long hours. But, strange as it may seem, they have no problem

going to work at 7:00 a.m. five days a week, but they can't bring themselves to make it to church at 10:00 a.m. Supposedly, it is possible to consistently get up and do what is disliked, but it is impossible to get up and do what is liked!

6. This idea has given us the gimmick gospel. Most church members want to be entertained instead of instructed in the Word of God. They have far more delight in the gospel of amusement than the gospel of the atonement. Gospel celebrities must be brought in to entertain these worldly church members. These members love to hear these clerical comedians who mix a few verses of Scripture with a large amount of humor. Special singing groups must be brought in too. These have the same dress, music, hair style, and manners of any rock and roll group. Our church services nowadays have become a carefully produced theatrical production for the delight of carnal Christians and religious rascals. The only difference between this entertainment and that in the local nightclub is that it has a religious flavor! But they say it must be done to get nickels and noses!

7. The vain thinking has killed the spirit of revival in our churches. Our revivals have been turned into campaigns to get members into the church who will help with the church budget so the older members can waste more of their money on worldly things. Near the end of the church year the pastor begins to think about his annual report, and as a result, he puts on a week or two of special services. I say special services for it has been so long since most churches have had real revivals until they don't even know what one is like.

We do not have time to wait upon the Lord to send a revival any more. Most of the time a church announces that it is going to have a revival beginning one Sunday and closing on Friday night. The evangelist comes and tries to imitate some big evangelist in his methods to induce people to come into the church. From what goes on one might think that Christ is only where

the preacher is, and that responding to his proposition is part of the process of becoming a Christian. Multitudes are being deceived by this method. Children, when very young, are being led by this practice to think such is the way of salvation.

Churches ignore the scriptural way to have a revival. They plan a series of meetings. The evangelist comes. The meeting is well advertised in the community. But we neglect the most important thing, the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The results--sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. We can plan our big meetings, get our big crowds, get our big preacher, organize our members, but unless the Spirit of God is present, it will be in vain!

In the average revival meeting there may be emotions stirred up, a confession of a few sins, a cleaning up of lives, and folks coming to some great religious experience. But, as a rule, sinners are not broken and brought to repentance. Generally speaking, the emotions of people are aroused by intellectual oratory, but as soon as the emotions die away, they settle down in a worse condition than they were in before. It seems that the evangelist took the revival and the converts home with him!

8. It has made people look down on small churches. Preachers politic for the large churches which have a lot of nickels and noses. They will compromise their principles and preach almost any heresy to get a big church. Whenever a preacher is called to one he says to his wife: "Dear, you pack while I pray about the matter." This proves that we have more faithless mercenaries than faithful ministers. Some preachers will not even consider a small church which has a few nickels and noses. They look down on little churches and despise them as being feeble and few.

Church members like big churches so they can hide out in the crowd and have no responsibilities. They like the upper class in society. Such churches

have skilled politicians as pastors who do not offend their many nickels and noses. With such a large crowd on Sunday morning a family can miss to go fishing almost without being noticed. After all, they reason, God blesses big in big churches!

While there are some exceptions, most big churches are worldly churches. They have high carnality and low spirituality. Truth is very scarce in such fashionable churches because the Word of God has been compromised to keep nickels and noses. These churches are more like social clubs than spiritual centers. Christ has departed from these Laodicean churches (Rev. 3:14-22). All that keeps the people in such liberal organizations is their love for social prestige.

When we speak about big and little churches we speak after the manner of men. We are viewing churches from the standpoint of nickels and noses. With God there are no big and little churches. To Him they are all **"the churches of Christ"** (Rom. 16:16), **"the churches of God"** (I Cor. 11:16), and **"the body of Christ"** (I Cor. 12:27). The biggest religious thing on earth is a local church, regardless of its size. Men and ministers would do well not to despise **"the church of God"** (I Cor. 11:22) because it does not have 25,000 members and cover a city block.

9. It has discouraged many God-called men. Often young preachers, and some who are older, try to judge their ministry by Billy Graham, or Jerry Falwell, or some other big-time preacher. Since they can't measure up to these men they think they are failures, and they go through life grieved due to their little success. This robs them of much of their usefulness and tends to hinder their ministry. Preacher brethren, God does not require that we be successful. He does not require that we pastor a church with 10,000 members which has 3,000 additions each year. The Lord requires only that we be faithful (I Cor. 4:2). He demands that we "preach the word" (II Tim. 4:2) and be faithful to declare "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

RESULTS NOT OUR BUSINESS

Preaching the gospel to every creature is our business. Making disciples is our business. But we can't save sinners. Salvation is of the Lord (Jon. 2:9). Only God can regenerate a dead sinner (John 1:13). We can plant and water, but God must give the increase.

In I Corinthians 3:5-7 Paul wrote: **"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."** Paul had planted the Lord's vineyard at Corinth, and Apollos followed him and watered it. The increase in both cases came from God.

The idea in these verses is taken from a farmer who grows a crop from seed sown in his field. It is vain for a farmer to sow his seed and irrigate his fields unless God shall give it life. There is no living principle in the seed, nor in the water, nor in the soil. God only can quicken the germ in the seed and make it live. Surely God does use the seed, the water, and the soil, but the life is still from God. But let us remember that God made the seed, the water, and the soil, and the farmer used only what he had received from God.

The same is true with those who sow gospel seeds in the hearts of men. The power is not in the naked Word, nor in the preacher, nor in the heart which hears it. The power to save sinners resides in God. The gospel is the power of God, but it has no power without God. The sower of gospel seeds uses only what God has made and given to him. His success or failure is determined by God. Even Paul and Apollos could have had no success unless

God gave them the increase. Don't deify ministers or put them in the place of God. The human instrument is nothing in comparison with God.

God is sovereign in adding to His churches: "**And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved**" (Acts 2:47). "**But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body as it hath pleased him**" (I Cor. 12:18). Our business is to be a planter or a waterer. It is God's business to add to His church. Concern for nickels and noses must not cause us to use unlawful means to add to the Lord's church. We do not need to get the Lord out of an embarrassing situation as some suppose. But some like Abraham cannot wait upon God to add to His church, so they help Him out a bit. The result is Ishmaelites in our churches!

Please do not take this truth too far. God does not make seed germinate and grow unless it is sown and watered. The Lord of the harvest blesses the faithful use of the means of grace. Some today are afraid to preach to sinners lest they get some of the non-elect saved--as if such were possible. They are so opposed to the false philosophy of nickels and noses that they fear to have any nickels and noses. They are afraid if someone is saved that their friends will think they have embraced Arminianism! To these do-nothing preachers and churches I would point out that where there is faithful sowing and watering God gives the increase. The Lord does add the saved to His church. The Lord does not add the saved to dead churches--just to living ones!

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