

Nehemiah Chapter 5

V: 1-5 The narrative moves from the challenge of building the wall - to the practicality of eating and providing for their families.

- Last week we spoke about the tools or the weapons of the enemy.

2 Corinthians 2:11 "... for we are not ignorant of his devices."

- 1. Ridicule.**
- 2. Intimidation.**
- 3. Discouragement.**
- 4. Fear.**

- Next we come to **#5 - Selfishness**.
- When the enemy fails in his attacks from the outside, he then begins to attack from within; and one of his favorite weapons is selfishness.
- If he can get us thinking about ourselves and what we want, then he will have the victory before we even realize that he is at work.
- Selfishness means putting myself at the center of everything and insisting on getting what I want when I want it. It means exploiting others, taking advantage of others just so we can get what we want.

"There was a great cry..."

Exodus 3:7 "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."

- God pays attention and He does hear the cry of His people.

Psalm 34:15 "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry."

- This great cry of the poor Jews wasn't because of the Samaritans, the Ammonites, or the Arabs, but against their own people!
- The poorer Jews were being taken advantage of by the richer Jews. Those with large families to feed were particularly vulnerable during the times of "dearth" or famine. Mortgaging their properties for food, selling first their children, then themselves into slavery with no hope of being able to pay back their debts or redeem either their property or themselves for that matter.

- Sounds like someone needs to hear about Jesus!
- During a time of drought or famine, there were Jews taking advantage of other Jews for “usury.” They were being charged high usury or interest rates where it became impossible to repay their debt - and in so doing the rich took all the property of the poor and enslaved their families as well.

Exodus 22:25 “If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.”

Deuteronomy 23:19-20 “¹⁹Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: ²⁰Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land wither thou goest to possess it.”

- There are 4 groups of people described here:
 1. People who owned no land, but needed food.
 2. Land owners who had mortgaged their properties to obtain food.
 3. Those that complained about the taxes / king’s tribute, who also lost their lands.
 4. The wealthy Jews who were taking advantage of the 3 groups of ordinary people.
- God put the Law in place to prevent this from happening, this was the reason for the year of Jubilee - trying to keep an even playing field, restoring balance.
- The wealthy businessmen were selfishly exploiting the poor to make themselves rich. This type of greed and avarice was condemned by the prophets before the Babylonian captivity.

Isaiah 56:11-12 “¹¹Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter. ¹²Come ye, say they I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.”

Jeremiah 22:13-19 “¹⁷But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it.”

- The sin of homosexuality has been at the forefront of the news and our legal system lately, but there is a sin behind the sin that many people are not aware of.

[Referring to why Sodom and Gomorra were judged:](#)

Ezekiel 16:49-50 “⁴⁹Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. ⁵⁰And they were haughty, and committed abomination before Me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.”

- One of the mitigating factors in the judgment of Sodom and Gomorra was their treatment of the poor.

V: 6-11 Next we move from a “great cry” to a “great assembly.”

- Nehemiah was angry to learn of this abuse and he rebuked the nobles, and the rulers for having done such a thing.

Ephesians 4:26 “**Be ye angry, and sin not....**” Not too many can pull this off, but Nehemiah is a good example of this. Righteous indignation.

- Nehemiah wasn't a politician who asked “which way is the wind blowing?” He wasn't a diplomat who asked “what is safe?” Nehemiah was a real leader who asked “what is right?”

V: 7 Before speaking out loud he had a conversation with himself - he thought it through.

Psalms 4:4 “Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah”

Proverbs 16:32 “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.”

- Perhaps like David he thought it through in light of God's Word.

1 Samuel 30:6 “And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”

- This was a public sin which Nehemiah addressed publicly. Nehemiah bases his rebuke on 6 distinct points.

1. V: 7 His rebuke was based solidly on the Word of God, the Law which strictly forbid what they were doing, exacting interest from their brethren.
2. V: 7 Based on love, he points out that they are robbing their brothers, fellow Jews.

3. V:8 Nehemiah reminded them of God's redemptive plan and that they had to take care not to be working against it by putting the people back into bondage.

V: 9 Nehemiah gave the reason for this crime against the people - because they didn't fear God!

Proverbs 9:10 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding."

- In our culture we look at fear as being an emotional expression of concern for our physical well being or some anxiety over our general well being. But fear from an Old Testament, Biblical perspective as it's often expressed in the Hebrew word "yare" which is translated as both a verb and a noun, as "fear" - but also means to "**honor**."

Leviticus 19:3 "Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father..."

- People that don't fear God don't honor His Word.

Isaiah 66:5 "Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at His word;..."

- These things are happening because people aren't honoring God or His Word.

4. V: 9 Nehemiah makes another point about their witness and the reproach of the heathen their enemies.

5. V: 10-11 He uses himself as an example to follow and points out that he's leant money and food without interest. Nehemiah wasn't a hypocrite, he practiced what he preached.

V: 11 Those that have been guilty of this are ordered to restore what they've usurped through usury.

- Just in case their memory get foggy it's spelled out for them: their lands, vineyards, oliveyards, houses and money, corn, wine, and oil.

V: 12-13 Nehemiah **6th point of rebuke** was to remind them of the judgement of the Lord. The Lord will deal with this if they don't!

- When you first read this verse it can look like Nehemiah made the priests swear an oath not to do this again, meaning the priests were doing it.
- Another way to read it, and I think the proper way to understand it is that Nehemiah didn't just take the word of the nobles and the rulers; he brought the priests into it and made the rulers and nobles swear before the priests who would hold them accountable, kind of like being accountable before God.

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 “⁴When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it (don't delay); for He hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. ⁵Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.”

- The nobles and rulers declared that they would restore all these things - Nehemiah made them to swear an oath before the priests.

Hebrews 13:5 “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

- If God would never leave us or forsake us - that means He is with us continually, we're continually in His presence - that should keep us pretty accountable!
- That means we'll be men and women of honesty and integrity, that means we'll be careful how we treat other people, that we'll be careful how we talk and what we say. That is if we fear God...
- Nehemiah also admonished them: if they failed to do so - they would be “shaken out” and “emptied” - God would see to it.
- Nehemiah shook out his robe, shook out his lap. Shaking your robe or the dust off your feet was a typically Jewish act of condemnation - like “I'm done with you...”
- They'd too soon forgotten what got them into captivity in the first place - which was the ignoring of God's Word.

V: 14-16 Nehemiah reminds them of a couple of things:

1. He is the appointed governor of Judea - he can tax it out of them if he so desires.
 2. Un-like previous governors, Zerubbabel and Ezra, he hasn't taxed them to support himself.
- He didn't come to enrich or benefit himself by taking advantage of the people.

V: 15 Nehemiah tells us why - because he feared God.

- He came to work, and to serve, and to help - not to get rich.

1 Peter 5:2-3 “²Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; ³Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples of the flock.”

Paul declared:

1 Thessalonians 2:9 “For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.”

- Basically he was saying I didn't take any money from you because I didn't want you to think that my purpose was to shake you down or that I was doing it for personal gain.
- There aren't too many tele-evangelists that can make that claim when 80% of their presentation is about money and donations.
- Nehemiah says he's not going to do that because he fears God - what does that say about the charlatans that do? I'll let you figure that out.

V: 17-18 Nehemiah then testifies that he's doing just the opposite - feeding a lot of people at his own expense. He shared what he had.

Deuteronomy 15:11 “For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.”

- I like the diversity of the 150 (500) at his table; Jews, rulers, and heathens - sounds a little like one of our pot-lucks! Although we're probably a little light on Jews and rulers....
- Nehemiah knew that the people were having a hard time and he didn't want to add to their burdens.
- He truly was a leader that served, and a servant who led.

Jesus declared to His disciples:

Luke 22:27 “... I am among you as He that serveth.”

V: 19 Postscript / prayer: “Lord, think upon me for the good that I have done.” “Lord I did it for you...”

Hebrews 6:10 “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”