

Nehemiah 5:1-19

The Problem Within

Back in 1958 a small community in northeastern Pennsylvania built a little red brick building that was to be their **police department, their fire department, and their city hall. They were proud of that building**; it was a result of sacrificial giving and careful planning. When the building was completed, they had a ribbon-cutting ceremony, and more than six thousand people were there—**nearly all the town's residents**. It was the biggest event of the year!”

“Within less than two months, however, they began to notice some **ominous cracks on the side of this red brick building**.

Sometime later, it was noticed that the windows would not shut all the way. Then it was discovered the doors wouldn't close correctly. Eventually, **the floor shifted and left ugly gaps in the floor covering and corners**. The roof began to leak. Within a few more months, the building had to be evacuated, to the embarrassment of the builder and the **disgust of the taxpayers**.

A firm did an analysis shortly thereafter and found that the blasts from a nearby mining area were slowly but effectively destroying the building. **Down beneath the foundation, there were small shifts and changes taking place that caused the whole foundation to crack**. You couldn't feel it or even see it from the surface, but down deep there was a weakening. A city official finally had to write across the door of that building, **"Condemned. Not fit for public use."** Ultimately, **the building had to be demolished.**”

In our study of the book of Nehemiah we have seen the people of Israel rallying under the leadership of Nehemiah – to rebuild the broken walls of Jerusalem

A)They have successfully faced several types of external opposition – none of which stopped work on the wall even for a day.

B)IN the face of this outside opposition – they have pressed through to the point in Ch. 4 – THE WALL WAS HALF BUILT

C)AS WE COME TO CH. 5 HOWEVER – THINGS CHANGE – the work on the wall comes to a screeching halt –

1)Not because of external opposition but because of INTERNAL strife and division.

D)A Problem brewing beneath the surface that – overlooked for quite some time – that suddenly comes to the surface.

And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren. 2 For there were those who said, “We, our sons, and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live.”

3 There were also some who said, “We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain because of the famine.”

4 There were also those who said, “We have borrowed money for the king’s tax on our lands and vineyards. 5 Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and indeed we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been brought into slavery. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards.”

3 FOLD PROBLEM:

#1 A Famine

#2 Heavy taxation from the King

#3 High interest payment on their loans.

Who says the Bible is not relevant.

A)It speaks here of overpopulation, famine, and high taxes.

B)Interest rates were higher than ever with no relief in sight.

C)Heavy taxation was coming down from the King – the Persians were ruling at this time

1) And all the regions were taxed

D) So in order to get food and to pay their taxes – the people were borrowing against their farms and their homes

Now one of the things that you need to understand is that there wasn't banks at this time –

A) So they were borrowing from the wealthy Jews – the rulers & the nobles

B) But there were two problems associated with what was happening

1) The first is that the rulers and the nobles were charging interest

C) The second problem was that when someone couldn't pay back their loan the lenders were taking their homes, their land, and in some cases their children for slaves

D) Because of this: A great work being done for a great God – came to a screeching halt because of a Great Cry!

Nehemiah has to put down his hard hat and turn his attention from the construction of the wall to the walls that were being put up between his workers.

A) Now God had clearly outlined rules for lending & borrowing in his word – they were allowed to lend – but they were not to charge interest

Exodus 22:25: "If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall not charge him interest."

OUR Church - BANK – should be like that
Deut 23:19-20 "You shall not charge interest to your brother -- interest on money or food or anything that is lent out at interest. 20 To a foreigner you may charge interest, but to your brother you shall not charge interest, that the LORD your God may bless you in all to which you set your hand in the land which you are entering to possess.

Lev 25:35-38 'If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you.36 Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you.37 You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit.

A) This practice of making your brethren your slave because he couldn't pay a debt - was

forbidden by the Lord – even though common in the pagan cultures.

Lev 25:39-41 'And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave.40 As a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you, and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee.41 And then he shall depart from you -- he and his children with him -- and shall return to his own family. He shall return to the possession of his fathers

B) SO God forbade his people to treat one another as slaves – and he provided a way to balance the economic system

In the 50th year which was called the year of Jubilee – A) All debts had to be forgiven and all land restored to its original owners, and all servants set free.

B) So these rulers and nobles were clearly acting in a way that was contrary to God's word in their EXPLOITATION OF their brethren

So this whole situation was causing great strife and division amongst the people of God and was threatening to kill the work that God wanted to do.

A) Strife and Division are two things that have through the ages of the church caused the work of God to cease in a Church.

B) Strife and Division has been used to kill the work that God is seeking to do in a Family
1) Amongst friends.

C) All too common today: We live in this culture – speak your mind – being opinionated is praised – in the media – and other aspects of our culture
1) So many CRITICS today – Everyone is a critic.

D) Often times that Critical spirit can be used to tear down someone or something that God is wanting to build up.

Christians too often forget – that in Proverbs 6:16-19 we are given a list of 6 things that the Lord hates –
7 that are an abomination.

A) That is about as strong of language as you can get – from God – I hate these things – they are an abomination to Me –

B) #7 on the list of seven abominations is “**he who sows discord among the brethren.**”

C) Here because of Discord – Strife and Division – this amazing work of RECONSTRUCTION that God was wanting to do – was stopped.

Notice Nehemiah’s reaction: V.6 **And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.**

A) Anger is not always a BAD THING – Jesus was filled with Righteous indignation – usury and injustice in the temple – whip – turned tables...

B) Injustice in our world and in the body of Christ should make us ANGRY

C) Nehemiah’s first reaction is one of ANGER!

We can all learn from his 2nd reaction: V.7a **After serious thought...**

A) I love this: Literally “**And I consulted with myself**”

B) (v. 7). Aren't you glad that's in there? Yes, he got mad, but he thought before he spoke.

He did what Proverbs 16:32 challenges us to do: “**It is better to be slow-tempered than famous; it is better to have self-control than to control an army.**”

C) In those moments of self-consultation, God was able to speak to Nehemiah about what to say next.

1) Self-control is a virtue the leader cannot afford to be without.

After thinking it through Nehemiah decides to confront the Problem head on.

V.7 says he rebuked the Nobles and rulers –

A) Why did he speak to the ruling elite? They were the men with the money, the ones who were exacting interest from those who didn't have it.

B) They were responsible for the oppression of the laborers.

C) This is something worth noting: Nehemiah went right to the source of the Problem.

1) He didn't go to other people to talk about what these guys were doing. – Build up a case or support for his cause. – He went right to them.

D) I get so upset when someone comes to me to complain about someone else in the body –

E) First question: Have you talked to them about this? – No

1) End of conversation – Not talking about this. – Go to them.

Nehemiah is going to appeal to them in 5 areas – that are so good for us to make note of – **Dealing with conflict – ending strife.**

#1 He appeals to their Family connection. V.7 **After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, “Each of you is exacting usury from his brother.”**

A) He uses the word, “brother” four different times in his speech.

Ps 133:1 *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity!*

A) We are brothers and sisters in Christ – CONNECTED BY BLOOD – BLOOD OF JESUS.

B) Paul the apostle said something haunting – always made me really think about my dealings with others.

1) 1 Corinthians 8:12 – **When we sin against our brother – in reality we are sinning against Jesus – HIS BODY**

C) That is heavy – to think about – Your wife – His daughter – your husband His son – Strife and Division – Gossip – weakens the body!

A Father came upon his sons who had been fighting w/ each other

A) He took the strongest of the boys and handed him a stick – he told him to snap it – The boy did so with contempt

B) Then he handed him **two sticks & said again snap these** – the boy had to strain a little but he was able to break the sticks

C) Then it was 3 sticks – the boy had to strain a little harder to snap them – Next it was 4 sticks – He had to admit defeat

1) Then the father cautioned his sons – *A house divided cannot stand.*

Anyone can over throw you one by one But Stand together in unity and your united strength will give your enemies second thoughts

D)So #1 Nehemiah appealed to their family connection

#2 He reminded them of God's redemptive plan:

V.7b- 8 So I called a great assembly against them. ⁸And I said to them, "According to our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?" Then they were silenced and found nothing to say.

A)He reminded them - They were a redeemed people – rescued by God –

1)Babylon – Egypt - redeemed by the blood of the Passover lamb –

B)Nehemiah's question is simple – how can you put your brothers & sisters back into bondage?

C)We are a redeemed people! – Set free –

Colossians 3:15 – Paul writes that the context is definitely interpersonal relationships – Let the peace of God rule (referee/umpire) in your hearts.

A)The Key phrase is the peace of God – the idea behind that statement is look at everything – God did to make peace with you.

B) Love/sacrifice: He took the initiative – to make peace with us.

C)We need to let that example be our umpire in dealing with each other.

1)Forgive each other because He has forgiven us.

Side note: We in the body of Christ also need to be careful because – we can put people that God has redeemed and set free back into bondage in other ways too.

A)How do we do that ? Through Guilt – Some people are really good at making others constantly feel guilty.

B) Nehemiah's question is a good one for us to ponder and consider –

1)Are we going to put those that God has set free into bondage.

#3 He appealed to their fear of the Lord. V.9a

Then I said, "What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?"

A)The idea of the fear of the Lord – speaks of a Reverence and a respect for the Lord – His glory – His name – DESIRE TO PLEASE HIM.

B)Ephesians 5:21 Submitting to one another in the fear of the Lord

1)Two people who's lives are yielded to Jesus – want to please Him.

C)Walking in the fear of the Lord means that I am Not looking at for what is best for me but what is best in God's eyes

1)God's will – God's way – God's glory is going to be my MOTIVATOR.

D)Another motivator is that there is a world that doesn't know our God that is LOOKING ON.

4th Appeal – Appeals to their witness: v.9 -

A)What you are doing is a reproach – a bad witness to the nations around us.

Aa)What these Nobles and rulers were doing was very common in the gentile nations around them.

B)Nehemiah's point – Gentiles look on and say: They are just like us – they are no different.

C)You know who applauds the loudest when churches split and Divorces happen in the body of Christ – and Church members can't get along?

1)The enemies of God.

Listen Church – Bigger picture: You don't exist for you – You exist for Him

A)YOU ARE Light of the world – A city set on a hill. – YOU ARE, not YOU CAN BE - YOU ARE Light of the world.

B)Some cities on a hill are down right UGLY

1)Others are beautiful and inviting – **which are You?**

C)THE WORLD IS WATCHING – how we deal with each other.

D) SO #4 He appealed to their witness –

#5 He appealed to his own example. V.10-11

¹⁰ I also, *with my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury!* ¹¹ Restore now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil, that you have charged them.”

Nehemiah appeals to his example - he and his brothers were lending them money and grain.

A)More than lending them were giving stuff away.

B)Look at v. 14 -19 Nehemiah – gives us a look ahead – when he would become Governor – reside – for many years

C)This is how he took care of the people.

Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor’s provisions. ¹⁵ But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God. ¹⁶ Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land. All my servants were gathered there for the work. ¹⁷ And at my table were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us. ¹⁸ Now that which was prepared daily was one ox and six choice sheep. Also fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine. Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor’s provisions, because the bondage was heavy on this people. ¹⁹ Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

In this example – Nehemiah is reminding us of a very important Biblical truth –

A)those who have been blessed with Resources have been blessed to be givers.

Aa)If God has given you means – it’s not so you can get Richer – Blessed you to be a giver.

B)Spiritual gift – Romans 12 – Giving – Those blessed to give – **Make lots of money – so they can give lots of money.**

1)Help others – Support the work of God – support Missions – etc.

C)Great is your reward –

So Nehemiah appealed to his own example – Added weight to his words.

A)Now Rebuking people is never Fun – IF YOU ENJOY it – Weird – something wrong – probably Proudful.

B)I absolutely Hate it – too often people get mad and bail – say horrible things – It’s a DRAG

C)In this case it turned out good – CONVICTED!

So they said, “We will restore *it*, and will require nothing from them; we will do as you say.”

D)Blessing – Repentance –

Then I called the priests, and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. ¹³ Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, “So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied.”

And all the assembly said, “Amen!” and praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise.

So This problem from within **that stopped the work** – didn’t kill the work!

As we close tonight – I would like you to consider two things.

A)1st We are connected – Brothers and sisters – family – Blood bought

**B)In a family there are going to be disagreements and disputes – you are going to get your feelings hurt at times
1)Dysfunctional – WE ARE SINNERS –**

C)But that is not an excuse for letting – bitterness and strife and jealousy and contention – sit below the surface and eat you up.

Remember – Connected – Redeemed/Forgiven – Remember – God’s glory and Name are at Stake Remember – Jesus’ example.

Another thing that I want you to consider tonight.

A)Perhaps you are involved right now in the beginning of foundational cracks.

B)An area of Compromise that is causing your integrity to crack

C)It is easy to rationalize the truth and to ignore the painful realities of compromise.

1)You may slap on a heavy coat of cover-up paint after filling in the cracks with lots of putty, but before long all you will be is an empty shell, a miserable mask of phony veneer.

D)“There is a better way. It calls for absolute honesty and a refusal to excuse or ignore reality any longer.

1)It means being sensitive and obedient to the Father's instructions.

E)Deal with the Sin – Head on – and do it TODAY!