

Greed  
Nehemiah 5

Nehemiah 4 talks about opposition from without

- Chapter 5 is about opposition also, but what's different is that in chapter 5, the opposition is from within.

- It's not unusual for a group to have to deal with problems outside the walls and then turn right around and face problems inside the walls.

- Act 20:28-32 - "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."

- Warren Wiersbe said of these verses, "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 only about ourselves and what we want, then he will win the victory before we realize that he is even 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 so I can be happy and taking advantage of them just so I can have my own way. It is not only wanting my own way but expecting everybody else to want my way too. Why are selfish people so miserable? I think Thomas Merton put it best: `To consider persons and events and situations only in the light of their effect upon myself is to live on the doorstep of hell."

- so chapter 5 is similar to chapter 4 in that we're still looking at opposition, but unfortunately, the source of the opposition is now God's people themselves.

- READ Nehemiah 5:1-13

- When you think about it, its interesting how much material is devoted to certain parts of this story, while others that might appear to be more significant are glossed over rather quickly.

- The story of how Nehemiah got the news only received one chapter.

- His discussions with the king was covered in half a chapter.

- The survey of the walls and the planning received one chapter.

- Yet, when it came to discussing the project, an entire chapter was taken to list everyone's names.

- Now, three chapters are going to be devoted to the matter of opposition and how to handle it.

- it shouldn't surprise us that in a book on leadership and working with people, that the subject of money comes up.
- Most projects that are undertaken for God involve money in some way, and this can be an area of life in which God's people either shine, or they fail.

- let's begin this morning by trying to get a better handle on exactly what the problem was;

## I. The Problem -- Opposition From Within

### A. Important background

1. Many of the Israelites who returned under Ezra were wealthy.

- What's surprising about what we've read in Nehemiah 5 is how bad things have gotten compared to the situation when many of these people would have returned under Ezra.

- cf. Ezra 1:11

- Also, the Scriptures tell us that King Cyrus, the man who allowed Ezra to return, had opened the treasury and contributed "the articles belonging to the temple of the Lord, which Nebuchazzar had carried away from Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:7, cf. II Chron. 36:18, Daniel 1:1, 2).

- You can take these verses more than one way:

1) On the one hand, it's surprising that the people in Nehemiah 5 were in such dire financial straights.

2) On the other hand, the argument could be made that the wealth that was brought back from Babylon put certain persons in a position to misuse their brethren financially.

- Regardless, something terrible has happened from the Ezra 1 to Nehemiah 5.

2. Greed was one of the sins denounced before the Babylonian Captivity.

a. Isa. 56:9-12

b. Jer. 22:13-19

c. Amos 2:6-7, 5:11-12

- these verses are especially upsetting because to some degree, the Israelites did not learn the lessons God wanted them to during the 70 year captivity.

- The verses we read in Nehemiah 5 give us some indication of the various causes that were contributing to the problem:

### B. Factors contributing to the problem

1. Draught and famine - vs. 3

2. Taxes - vs. 4

3. High interest rates - vs. 5-6

- Most Bible students agree that its the last component, the high interest rates charged by brothers, is what is really causing the problem.

- When you look at that list, its amazing how relevant the Bible is!

C. Sequence of events.

- James Montgomery Boice suggests a four-fold sequence:

1. Hunger, lack of adequate food

2. Mortgaging of fields for short-term cash to pay taxes and buy grain.

3. Loss of the fields because of an inability to repay what was borrowed.

4. Selling of sons or daughters into indentured service or outright slavery for the sake of survival.

- Imagine that!

- As a result of all of this, we have verse 1:

Neh 5:1 - Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers.

- Now when you think about this situation, is there any question that what's needed right now is godly leadership?

- John White said: "No test of leadership is more revealing than the test of opposition. Christian leaders can go to pieces under such pressure. Some grow too discouraged to continue. Others build walls around themselves and shoot murderously from behind them. They become embattled, embittered and vindictive. Not so Nehemiah. Nowhere does his leadership shine more brilliantly than in his handling of opposition."

- James Montgomery Boice added: "The distribution of material shows how important a leader's approach to opposition is. To succeed at a task where there is no opposition requires only a technocrat, a task specialist, or a bean counter. It takes a leader to succeed at other times."

## II. Nehemiah's Response

A. Anger - v. 6

- The Scripture is very clear about how this information affects Nehemiah.

- This injustice makes him angry.

- Several years ago Franky Schaeffer (Francis Schaeffer's son) wrote a book entitled "A Time for Anger: The Myth of Neutrality."

- He introduced the book by saying; "There are times in which anyone with a shred of moral principle should be profoundly angry. We live in such times."

- of course what he's saying could get out of balance, but the point is that some believers have no place in their life for the right use of anger.

- James Montgomery Boice was commenting on the humorous way that many commentators handled this passage because they didn't seem to have a place in their minds for the fact that Nehemiah was angry.

- The truth is -- there was nothing wrong with Nehemiah's anger...in fact if Nehemiah hadn't gotten angry over this news, that would have been wrong.

- The next "stage" of his reaction is very important for us to note:

B. Self-control.

- v. 7 - "I consulted with myself"

- Chuck Swindoll calls this "getting your heads together."

- he also wrote -- "Self-control is a virtue that a leader can't afford to be without."

INPUT - Why is this true?

- There's an obvious question that flows out of this, isn't there?

- When you get angry, do you practice self-control so the anger can be used in constructive ways to get the problem solved?

C. Asked "What is Biblical? / What is Right?"

- (cf. Exodus 22:25, Lev. 25:35-37, 39-41, Deut. 23:19)

- Nehemiah was in a very precarious position here.

- Someone was right and someone was wrong.

- Someone was going to have to be confronted, and rebuked.

- Someone was going to have to ask forgiveness.

- and there very well could be a price to pay regardless of how Nehemiah responded.

- have you ever been in a similar situation...where you knew that it was very likely that whichever way you went, someone was likely to be offended?

- INPUT - Wrong questions Nehemiah could have been asking about now?

- Warren Wiersbe said, "Nehemiah was not a politician who asked 'What is popular?' nor was he a diplomat who asked 'What is safe?' but a true leader who asked 'What is right?'

INPUT - Similar situation in which you might have to "stand in these shoes?"

#### D. Confronted people in stages

- What I wanted to point out this morning is that Nehemiah took steps that are very similar to Matt. 18 in that he confronted the men who were wrong in a small group first. The text doesn't tell us exactly how the group responded to that first meeting.
- But he did not take it public first.

### III. The People's Response

- The people who were confronted responded in a very admirable way.
- Let's conclude our time by looking at five steps to take when convicted of sin:  
(Several of these are taken from Chuck Swindoll)

#### A. Be silent.

- verse 8

- INPUT - Why is this so important, and what might we do instead of "being silent" that would take us in the wrong direction?

#### B. Determine to stop it.

- verse 10 - "Let us leave off this usury."

#### C. Make specific plans to correct the situation as quickly as possible.

- verse 11 - "Please, give back to them this very day their fields..."

- Swindoll - "When God shows his people a particular sin that we are guilty of, He doesn't tell us to take our time dealing with it. No, He says, 'Deal with it now.' When we realize we are doing wrong, now is the time to stop it. Making long range plans to correct a problem allows the sands of time to hone off the raw edges of God's reproof in our lives. We end up tolerating that sin and maybe even protecting it. Such laxity greatly concerns our Lord. A prompt and thorough dealing with wrong in our lives is essential."

#### D. Declare your plans for correction in promise before God.

- Verse 12

E. Realize the serious nature of your vow to God.

- Verse 13