

## Nehemiah 5:1-19

Dan 9:25 reads, “*Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times.*” and That’s what we’ve been “zeroing” in on here lately is the, turbulent, tough, and troublesome times in which the wall was being built. The enemy laughed at them, then they ridiculed and mocked them, from there they moved into open hostile opposition *towards* them. And you recall that it became so intense that Nehemiah had them building the wall with weapons girded, ready to go. They had the trowel in one hand, and they were ready to take the sword with the other. ½ the guys they had in full armor standing guard while the other ½ worked. Anyone from out of town was encouraged to not go home at night but rather stay there, serve as night watchmen, and things were so serious, and so severe that they didn’t even get undressed for bed, or for that matter ever take their clothes off except for washing. They’d prepared themselves for opposition, they would be ready in season and out of season for any attack that the enemy might bring upon them from the outside because thus far they’ve been unified on the inside. So they’ve pressed forward, radical progress has been being made, but ch 5 seems to stifle that, no real work on the wall is here mentioned. (Outside of the small mention that Nehemiah makes in vs 16, but that’s a reflection of his personal involvement in the big picture *generally*, not a direct assessment upon this situation *specifically*.) But why? What was the problem? Listen, it wasn’t the outward attacks of the *enemy* that would bring this work to a halt, but rather the inward affects of *disunity*.

It wasn’t the barrage on onslaught *externally* that stalled the work, but rather the contention and division *inwardly* that brought things to a screeching halt. And had the issues not been addressed, confronted and resolved, the enemy would’ve won this war with out so much as a single arrow slung, or a single sword swung. Nothing can arrest a work of God like contention, discord, and division in the body. It’s no wonder that God hates such schisms in the body. Perhaps you recall that there in Prov ch 6 of the 6 things the Lord hates, of the 7 that are an abomination that we read in vs 19 of, “*A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.*” Prov 6:19 Disunity creates weakness on the wall, and if not dealt with can stall out a work altogether. That’s 1 reason there’s such radical emphasis upon the unity of the body in the scriptures. Because as rough as it may get, though the enemy may rage on the *outside*, it’s not really going to injure the body of Christ as long as we’re bound in love and unity on the *inside*. But if he can turn us against one another inwardly, than we become virtually useless in our advancing of the work outwardly, if you were here last week that’s one of the things we prayed for, unity in the body. Remember these vs? “*Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace;*” 2 Cor 13:11 Of course we’re reminded of the fact that Jesus said that the blessing would lie upon the *peacemakers*, not the *peace breakers*. That it would be the *merciful* who would receive mercy, making peace, being merciful, these are the things that make for the bonds of love and unity.

Paul said in Phil 1:27, “...stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,” And then again right after that, “...if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” Phil 2:1-2 But to the contrary as James said, “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.” James 3:16-18 Or another way to understand that, if you’re walking in the wisdom that’s from above you’ll be operating in ways that are conducive to unifying the body.

But if you’re walking in worldly wisdom it’s only about me, it doesn’t matter how it impacts others *around* me, I’m looking out for #1. And that mentality creates contention, confusion, invites evil into the equation. 1 more warning regarding the need for unity and the danger found in disunity, Gal 5, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!” Gal 5:13-15 Serving one another in love creates an environment of what? Unity, but picking on each other, biting and devouring one another leads to what? Consuming one another, and when everything is consumed, there’s nothing left, translation: if there’s nothing or no one left, there’s no work being done. Contention/division...it’s a killer regarding kingdom work.

Vs1

You see, why did the work cease (even if for just a moment in time)? Because there was strife among the people of God. The enemy really couldn’t create an environment on the outside that was effective in ending the work, but once he got in there and created an environment of contention/conflict/controversy on the *inside*, once they were no longer *unified*, the work came to a stand still. They’re at a place of biting and devouring one another, arguing and fighting against each other, and anytime you’re time is being consumed in debate, or disgruntled nature towards another brother or sister in Christ, whenever God’s people are fighting one another, than they’re certainly not fighting the real enemy at hand, nor are they getting any of God’s work done.

As you look around in this building tonight, your enemy isn’t represented here in flesh and blood. The bible says, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,” 2 Cor 10:3-5 So make no mistake, though blood’s not flying and people aren’t dying, it’s warfare that’s raging on here. They’re arguing against one another, and these arguments are to be dealt *with* and cast *down*.

You see, what's the mind of Christ in this matter, it doesn't matter what I think is right, or what seems to be fair, *what* does the mind of Christ *regulate*, and *how* does the mind of Christ *equate* the issue? Because if I'm heated, or fairly irate about an issue, odds are my rationale is ½ out the window anyway, we're to bring our thoughts into the captivity of Christ, seek out biblical resolve. And again it doesn't really matter what seems right from a business perspective, or within the parameters of worldly rationale. We'll see that these were money matters primarily, and that as far as legitimate business practices according to the world's standards, there really wasn't anything going on that wouldn't be acceptable, but here's the deal, they're not dealing in the world. We're in the world, not of the world, and the Word of God has a completely different standard under which the body of Christ operates, and the way bros and sisters settle matters from the way the world deals with situations. (So we have here an inner turmoil of sorts).

### Vs2-5

Now we understand that Nehemiah isn't a book about money, it's a book about rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem, about bringing the people of God into a place of peace, security, and blessing. But notice how money problems directly affected the work (they happened to be the root of the inner turmoil). Now generally the reason money matters impact a building project is because the money runs out therefore the build stops. But this particular build seemed to have been provided for primarily by the king of Persia. So the money matters at hand here are more of a backdoor type infiltration. These were money matters in between the people themselves that ultimately drove a wedge of contention and disunity causing there to be a sterility regarding the work.

They weren't getting along, they were arguing over personal money matters which was affecting and infecting the work in a negative way. (No one was doing anything).

And we have here a few different scenarios and it boils down to the haves and the have nots and the rich getting richer at the expense of the poor. Now some of the problem seemed to have rooted in the work itself, because they were spending so much time working on the walls, they weren't out in the fields bringing in the crops like they could've been. And it's true that often times the more time you spend dedicated to ministry, the less time you have to be out making money. And should you come to the place where ministry becomes your vocation, generally speaking you need to be acclimated to not making much or else it'll be a rough transition. Now in my opinion God has taken my life and over the years He's blessed me immensely, like the rest of us my income is more than some, less than others. But for the 1<sup>st</sup> couple yrs or so by which I pastored this church on a full time basis, it's a good thing I was adjusted to lots of macaroni and Ramen noodles because I put in more hours than on any other job I'd ever worked, and made less money than on any other job I'd ever worked. My 1<sup>st</sup> job was as a dishwasher at a restaurant called Hidden Acres where the guy paid me cash somewhere to the tune of \$2.80 or maybe a little less per hr when I was 16. Well, when I started pastoring this church I was 25, and had I worked a straight 40hrs I would've been salaried at \$2.50 per hr, however 40 hrs would've been like a part time week, you get the idea.

But I'd never really made much money any way so it wasn't an impossible transition, the point here though is that because these guys were dedicated to time on the wall, they weren't bringing in what they'd perhaps been accustomed to, so they needed a way to get grain. (That was one scenario, large family, not a large income). On top of that there was apparently a famine in the land, dry times in their lives, and so in order for them to get grain they'd mortgaged their homes, their lands and their vineyards. Which is to say they'd tapped into all the equity that they had, they'd gone to some wealthy individual and said, "If you'll give me so much money, I'll put my land, or my home, or my vineyard up as collateral." There in vs 4 we see the fingerprints of captivity still hovering over them in that they had taxes to pay to the king of Persia, but they were so impoverished, they had to borrow money to pay their property tax.

But here's where the problem comes in (Vs 5) they'd gone to their own brethren (that is fellow Israelites) for help in their time of need, but because things were as they were economically for various reasons. They weren't able to really make their payment, or perhaps the time of their loan had come due, but because they were in financial dire straits, they were having to let their children become enslaved to those whom they owed in order to try and work off the debt, but they had no way to redeem their children because in the process they were losing their lands, their homes and all the rest.

So they were falling into debt to the wealthy around them, the wealthy were charging exorbitant interest rates, the poor couldn't pay the penalties and they were just caving in left and right, they were falling apart. And no doubt this was something that'd been going on, but it was just culminating now to where Nehemiah could see the problem. And this is what I was speaking about earlier when I said that for all intents and purposes, in the natural setting, business would be business. (Minus giving up your kids for slavery, that's something we can't even comprehend) But the problem is that this wasn't a standard business setting, this was brother dealing with brother, one Christian taking advantage of the desperate position of another Christian in order to make himself rich. And God's Word was very clear that they weren't to be charging each other interest on loans.

*"If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest."* Ex 22:25 Here's another one, *"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. Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you. You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit."* Lev 25:35-37 There's just something about the cause and the cry of the poor that God is drawn to, defending the defenseless, helping those who have no power to help themselves, it's that irresistible cry for mercy that God just can't turn a deaf ear to (for which we praise Him). But these people were breaking the law, taking advantage of their brothers and sisters.

God had told them to remember that they were all in bondage once, and that the only reason they weren't anymore was because He'd set them free, and even so they weren't to enslave one another, but they were to be merciful to one another even as He'd been merciful to them. It sort of parallels that parable of the unforgiving servant, he'd been forgiven all this debt, but he himself was unwilling forgive a little that was owed to him. And the King plundered him, placed him in prison and made him pay every cent that he'd stacked up debtwise. And that's the whole application for us, that in Christ we deal with one another differently than if we were in the world. We're to deal in mercy and forgiveness. Doesn't mean that we don't do the best we can to do right by one another, but we're not to take advantage of one another, turn another's pain into our gain.

Remember when Paul was rebuking the Corinthian church because they were dragging each other to court to settle personal disputes by the counsel of unbelievers. He said it was shameful, just forgive, better to be wronged than to blow a witness like that. He said, "...*it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!*" 1 Cor 6:7-8 You see there's a big picture at stake, and Nehemiah will address all that; notice.

Vs6-7

Notice that anger isn't always sinful; there *is* righteous indignation, anger apart from sin, Nehemiah was very angry when he heard their outcry. Why, well #1 because it was wrong, they should've never been in that position, the nobles, or the wealthy should've never taken advantage of their own people like that, it flew clearly in the face of God's Word. But then 2<sup>ndly</sup> because it caused the work to stop, we mentioned last time how Nehemiah must've been ready to scream from all the opposition and they made it past all that only to be blindsided by this. These money issues amidst themselves that led to a lack of unity and an ability to work together in harmony. No wonder the bible calls it "filthy lucre" it just has the tendency to do so much damage to not only us, but our relationships with one another. It can be a tremendous force for good, but just as equally it can work ruin.

By the way, a quick side note, often times we try to separate our money from ministry, or our walk with God. Don't buy the lie, that's a deception from the enemy, buying a house isn't solely a material decision, it's spiritual, deciding where to work, or to go to school isn't purely practical, it's 1<sup>st</sup> and foremost spiritual. And all of those kinds of thing have a direct affect on your walk with the Lord, both now and in the future. If I'm looking at only the right place to live as it pertains to my career, but I have no clue about the spiritual climate, and if there's not a fellowship in which I can be fed in the area, it may be the most spiritually detrimental decision I've ever made to make a good career move. If buying that house forces me into an 80hr work week, it might devastate me spiritually, and render me virtually unavailable ministerially. So don't think they're 2 different worlds, seek 1<sup>st</sup> the kingdom of God and His righteousness and then all those other things God will add to your life, He knows you have need *them*, but 1<sup>st</sup> and foremost you have need of *Him*.

In vs 7, this phrase, “After serious thought” if you have an OKJV it says, “I consulted with myself.” I like that, he got upset but he didn’t just fly off the handle, he thought things through before he approached the matter. Prov 15:28 tells us, “*The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, But the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil.*” And again, “*Whoever has no rule over his own spirit Is like a city broken down, without walls.*” Prov 25:28 Nehemiah wisely contemplates the issue carefully before he deals with it decisively.

Then what did he do? He approached the matter head on, and caused everyone involved to be brought under the sphere of accountability. He rebuked the rulers and the nobles for taxing their brethren and he called a great assembly together to witness the meeting. And it’s not that it’s always wrong to loan out money with interest, but when it comes to the essentials of life, we’re not to capitalize on the curve balls that life throws our brothers and sisters. We’re talking about the difference between wants, and needs.

#### Vs8-11

Nehemiah shuts them up, and then shuts them down, they knew they were doing wrong. Nehemiah says, “Look we’ve just been set free from being enslaved to another nation, and some of us have paid personally to have other Jewish brethren redeemed (or made free). So now we’re just going to enslave one another, what was the point in being set free?” And the idea there is the one that the Son has set free is to be free indeed, we’re not to become entangled and enslaved again into a yoke of bondage. So Nehemiah’s reasoning is #1 It’s just flat out wrong, there’s nothing redemptive about it, it’s completely diametrically opposed to the point of who we are as a nation in the 1<sup>st</sup> place and the extent that’s been taken that we might be free. #2 You ought to be walking in the fear of God, (vs 9). And this is where many business deals go wrong, they’re not implemented in wisdom because they’re not drawn up in the fear of God, but simply what’s in it for me, and do I stand to make money. But if we stayed cognizant of the fact that we’ll give an account one day for the dealings we make, our deals would be much higher on the scale of integrity and uprightness. He’s busting them for their violation of the Word of God. #3 He calls to their attention their witness before other nations, this is what we spoke of regarding what Paul was dealing with in Corinth. Doing bad business before the non-believing world, it causes Christ to become a reproach, it disgraces His name.

Now some interpret vs 10 to say that Nehemiah is confessing that he’s been apart of the same thing for which he now is repenting. I suppose that may be, but more than likely he’s pointing to himself as an example of what they should’ve been doing, lending money and grain at no profit to himself. As we read on in the ch I believe that becomes more apparent contextually. I’m of the opinion that him including himself in the # is characteristic of what we’ve seen of him so far, just like Ezra, that though they were personally guilty of nothing, they realized that they were apart of a people who were guilty. So, “Lets cut this out and do right by God.”

And verse 11 is the exhortation to bear fruits worthy of repentance, “You’ve done the wrong thing long enough, if you’re repentant, demonstrate that by the way you deal with this situation, give them back what’s theirs, and give them the interest back as well.” That “Hundredth” equals out to more than likely 1% a month meaning 12% annually worth of interest.

#### Vs12-13

So after they say they will, Nehemiah kicks up the accountability level another notch, makes them enter into a contract before the priests. Then he in essence pronounces a curse upon the person who goes back on his word saying, “May God shake *you* out of *your* house, and *your* property if you don’t perform as you’ve promised.”

If you don’t do right by these poor whom you’ve done wrong, may you become impoverished yourself. And we commend their teachable spirit, their willingness to yield, there’s not a lot of people who are willing to yield, or admit their wrong and do what’s right especially when money is involved. And I like the high atmosphere of accountability, it’s a healthy thing, it helps us. Maybe you’re having a struggle doing what’s right in a certain area of your life, make yourself accountable, so that you might have the strength to do outwardly what you’re wanting to do and know you need to do inwardly.

#### Vs14-16

What are we seeing here? That the motives behind Nehemiah’s work in the ministry was not for personal gain, there are those who seek to use godliness as a means of personal gain, the bible says we’re to withdraw from such.

Now we need to realize that Nehemiah’s not bragging on himself here, he wrote all this like a diary, these are personal records, he’s just recording his activities there in Jerusalem. But by that we know as we see here that for the 12 years that he served as their governor (which was the highest office one could hold in a particular province) he couldn’t be a king because they were under Persia’s sphere of authority, even though they weren’t enslaved to Persia personally. But he never took pay, and he always worked with the people. And it’s not that it was wrong for him to *be* paid, others had before him. But he personally (much like Paul the apostle) felt it best to not burden the people in that way.

Is it wrong for church leaders or pastors to be paid today? Not according to the scriptures, the laborer is worthy of his wage, those who preach the gospel are to live by the gospel. But I think wisdom should be exercised, if it’s to the advantage of the body for the pastor to be able to devote himself to prayer and the word, than do your best to make sure he can, pay him. If circumstances prevent that, than he shouldn’t overwhelm or be a burden to the body. If he won’t do it unless the money is right, than he’s not the man God has called to that work anyway. Something is wrong if I’ll only minister to the people of God if the price is right.

But I wanted you to notice in vs 16 where he notes that neither he, nor his servants ever bought land, profited off the people, they were there to work. And that's what helps bring light into the context to vs 10 he was there to help the people not in any way harm or profit off the people. Why? Because he feared God, he didn't worry about what was right for his own self, or what he deserved, what was owed to him, or any of that stuff, he moved in the fear of God knowing that he'd give an account to God and he just wanted to do what God had called him to do the best way he could. You see this is where personal blamelessness comes in, the need for personal integrity. If his personal life wasn't matching his what he portrayed in public it would've robbed him of his authority. If he'd been buying, selling, enslaving people for personal profit, than he'd have no leg to stand on when he exhorted the others to do the right thing. People like to differentiate what happens in their lives at home, vs what they do here at church. "My life is my business," that's not biblical, it's hypocritical. A question mark on your integrity, undermines your authority, be true through and through to the standard and ethic of God for your life, not just in the public view, but in private.

Vs17-18

*"The wicked borrows and does not repay, But the righteous shows mercy and gives."* Ps 37:21 Not only did he not take pay personally, but he provided for the meals of over 150 people on a consistent basis out of his own pocket. What's that tell you? The being the cupbearer to the king was a radically lucrative position to hold.

Vs19

And your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. He didn't do these things to be recognized by man, but to be remembered by God. What a gracious God we serve, who remembers our sin no more, but keeps record of those things you do for His name's sake and for His glory and great will be the reward of the one who does what he/she does, not for their own selfish gain but for the greatness and the glory of the Lord.

Prayer Points: God help us to be more concerned with Your name than our own gain, and may we strive to be of 1 heart and 1 mind, create greater unity in the body here Lord, and may the work of Your Kingdom carry on.