

- This morning we're going to move into chapter 5 of the book of Nehemiah.
 - As you recall, we've spent the last week looking at the matter of opposition from outside the walls.
 - 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. **The Problem -- Opposition From Within** The victory is they made the adjustments necessary and continued Building

NE 4:21 So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. ²² At that time I also said to the people, "Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day." ²³ Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water.

All of us returned to the wall, everyone to his work: This was the victory.

- **Defending against the attack was not the victory; the people of God would not be at peace and security until the wall was rebuilt. Getting on with the work was the victory.**
- **When we are under spiritual attack it is easy to feel that just enduring the storm is the victory. It isn't.**

Remember... Your level of commitment to accomplish a goal is determined by that which would make you quit!

And nothing is more dangerous to the work of rebuilding a life or building something new than attacks from the inside...

The saying goes, "If it isn't one thing, it's another." Here in chapter five, it's another. It is difficult and discouraging enough to have to face the many external oppositions placed before us in God's work, but when the enemy is within the ranks the damage that can be done may be irreparable.

They withstood the attacks from outside the walls...and were victois by continuing to build...but it is a whole nother battles when the challenges come from inside the walls...

The strife among the workers ch. 5

we come to chapter 5 of Nehemiah and in a nutshell, here is what is going on:

As we come to chapter 5, this same community is starting to self-destruct because of some festering grievances.

The workers now face a new enemy who is harder to conquer than the previous ones...***their own people***. Before it was external forces...now it's Internal...really internal...like right next to them.

The timing could not have been worse too because the walls are half way done!

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.

While their external enemies helped to rally the people, internal conflict threatened to divide and destroy them.

***Key Truth: It's much easier to conquer and subdue an enemy who attacks us than it is to forgive and restore a friend who hurts us.**

Here's the deal...In this life we are going to get Hurt...and those hurts are usually done by people...people we know and care about...that makes it stink even more.

David knew this feeling very well...look at what he said:

Psalm 55:12 *If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were rising against me, I could hide. ¹³ But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, ¹⁴ with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship at the house of God, as we walked about among the worshipers*

Whereas earlier the attack of the enemy was designed to intimidate to get them to quit building, now the misbehavior of their friends and family toward them literally Hurts them and they actually stop the work.... (Explain how this works in life)

Strife was brewing, tension was mounting, and horns were locked. Let's look at the complaints Nehemiah heard in Nehemiah 5:1-5:

Chapter five is certainly not the highlight of the book. For There is no building in this chapter!

This chapter evidently describes a situation that prevailed for more than the 52 days the wall was under construction (cf. v. 14).

it was another situation that threatened to block the fulfillment of God's will.

There were great economic burdens placed upon the Jews, The people were about to go on strike. "this is not right!", we have no way to support ourselves and there is no remedy in

sight...we are out of resources...and our families are being broken up ... Nehemiah was a wise man he listened to their complaint...

We pick up the narrative in chapter 5

Neh 5:1 Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. ² Some were saying, “We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain.”

³ Others were saying, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine.”

⁴ Still others were saying, “We have had to borrow money to pay the king’s tax on our fields and vineyards. ⁵ Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others.”

- the causes that were contributing to the problem:

1. Draught and famine - vs. 3...outside the walls they had no control over

2. Taxes - vs. 4...by the King they had no control over...and did not seem to complain about them...as being too high

3. High interest rates - vs. 5-6...this they were doing to themselves... The Jews were being robbed by their own people, usury was common place, and the people were complaining about how much it had cost them to enter into the work.

A. Important background

1. 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 90 years earlier.. Many of the Israelites who returned under Ezra were wealthy.

Ezra 1:5 Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites—everyone whose heart God had moved—prepared to go up and build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem. ⁶ All their neighbors assisted them with articles of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with valuable gifts, in addition to all the freewill offerings.

⁷ Moreover, King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and had placed in the temple of his god

Verse 11 In all, there were 5,400 articles of gold and of silver. Sheshbazzar brought all these along with the exiles when they came up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

- It appears...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.

So here is the sequences of the situation...inside the walls during the rebuild...

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.

They had disobeyed the great commandments love God Love others

- Instead of putting God's interests first and seeking the welfare of their brethren, the Jews were putting their own interests first and taking advantage of their brethren (cf. Matt. 22:37-39). The
- Mosaic Law forbade Israelites from charging interest when they made loans to fellow.

Helping a fellow Israelite in a time of great need was to be an act of mercy...not a business opportunity

(Exod. 22:25-27;

EX 22:25 25 “If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal; charge no interest. 26 If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, 27 because that cloak is the only covering your neighbor has. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.

Lev. 25:35-38).

LEV 25: 35 “‘If any of your fellow Israelites become poor and are unable to support themselves among you, help them as you would a foreigner and stranger, so they can continue to live among you. 36 Do not take interest or any profit from them, but fear your God, so that they may continue to live among you. 37 You must not lend them money at interest or sell them food at a profit. 38 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.

so this comes to Nehemiah’s ears...**morale was low. He saw that many were beginning to wonder why they had committed themselves to the work in the first place. what they were**

going through in the present overshadowed the prospects of the completed project and their future

NE 5:6 ⁶ When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. ⁷ I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, “You are charging your own people interest!” So I called together a large meeting to deal with them ⁸ and said: “As far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!” They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.

⁹ So I continued, “What you are doing is not right. Shouldn’t you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? ¹⁰ I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest! ¹¹ Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them—one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil.”

¹² “We will give it back,” they said. “And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.”.....

THE LEADER'S RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS (5:6 13)

NE 5:6 ⁶ When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. ⁷ I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, “You are charging your own people interest!” So I called together a large meeting to deal with them

- **. Nehemiah got angry. (6) He talked it over with himself before he spoke. (7) "Look before you leap."** There's a time to get angry, but the leader cannot afford to react...he must respond...the difference is when you respond you consider all the repercussions.
- Nehemiah weighed the "pros" and "cons", devised a plan, and went to work. He didn't penalize everyone, he went to the "hot spot" of the controversy.

⁸ and said: “As far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!” They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say. ⁹ So I continued, “What you are doing is not right. Shouldn’t you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?”

- Problem one....We bought back many of our brothers who were slaves from the gentiles...and now were rein-slaving them to ourselves?
- He waited for a response...they were quiet...convicted.. The nobles "held their peace." They were smart enough to accept the rebuke and admit their exploitation So onto Problem two... you're a rotten testimony to those around us (vs. 9). **Fear God"..."guit"..."restore."**

¹⁰ *I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest!*

- Problem 3... You are charging interest to fellow Jews (Ex. 22:25 - against Levitical law);
- Now here is what you need to do... Nehemiah tells them: Stop; make specific plans to correct the situation as quickly as possible

¹¹ Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them—one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil.”

- The response...

¹² “We will give it back,” they said. “And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.”.....

D. They did! "We will" (vs. 12) "Amen, and praised the Lord" ...",The people did."
Another crisis had been "handled."

But That is not enough to say it...do it! He held them accountable...and used himself as an example!

12.....Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. ¹³ I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, “In this way may God shake out of their house and possessions anyone who does not keep this promise. So may such a person be shaken out and emptied!”

At this the whole assembly said, “Amen,” and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

¹⁴ Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. ¹⁵ But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels^[a] of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. ¹⁶ Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we^[b] did not acquire any land.

¹⁷ Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. ¹⁸ Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds.

In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.

¹⁹ Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people.

A. He denied himself his deserved wage. (14)

B. He feared God; God gave him the job, He would provide. (15)

C. He continued in the work. (16)

D. He relinquished some of his rights. (16)

E. He didn't want to overburden an already burdened people. (18)

F. He asked God to bless him for his work. (19) and knew that God doesn't hand his paychecks out on Friday afternoon. He asked but one thing, "Think upon me, my God, for good."

So what do we learn here?

[1]. Any real work of God will cost a great price.

[2]. God expects the work to continue even amidst unfavorable economic circumstances.

[3]. There are always those who will try to make a buck off someone else's misfortune.

[4]. The leader is an example, either a good one or a bad one.

[5]. Correcting any problem begins by facing it head on.

[6]. Correction is carried out most effectively when we make a promise, preferably publicly.

[7]. Maybe there was some building accomplished in chapter five after all was said and done.

"One cannot be certain that Nehemiah was originally given a twelve-year appointment as governor by Artaxerxes (2:6). Perhaps his original appointment was for a briefer period, but was extended to twelve years."⁵⁰

The people the governor ruled would have provided his food allowance (v. 14). Rather than taking advantage of his opportunity to acquire real estate, Nehemiah gave his attention to rebuilding the wall (v. 16). He also provided for the needs of over 150 Jews who worked on the wall out of his own pocket (vv. 17-18)

end

