

## Nehemiah Sermon #12

Nehemiah 5

The Jews were in the midst of a building project—rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem.

We left off last time

Chapter 4 – opposition chapter

Trouble without – vs. 1-9

Trouble within – vs. 10-23

This trouble from within is going to continue in Chapter 5.

I've entitled today's message "Squeezing Turnips"

Nehemiah 5:1

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy Word

Nehemiah 5:1-13

Let us pray

You may be seated

## Squeezing Turnips

The conflict Nehemiah faced was so severe that there was a great outcry of the people.

This was no minor problem! It was complex—and had been brewing for a long time.

Their problems were so serious that even their wives joined them in their complaint  
(vs. 1).

This is unusual, because in Ezra-Nehemiah, the women stay very much in the  
background. That is the Jewish culture.

They were not crying out against the Samaritans, the Ammonites, or the Arabs, but  
against their own people!

Jew was taking advantage of Jew. We have a major conflict.

Wherever you have two or more people—disagreements are inevitable.

Some conflicts are easy to resolve. Others are complex and terribly time consuming.

We must expect problems to arise among people.

Wherever you have people, you have the potential for problems.

We must confront the problems courageously.

Abraham did this in Genesis 13:8.

Every problem that we ignore will only go underground, grow deeper roots, and bear  
bitter fruits.

Conflicts must be resolved.

If they're not, organizational efficiency and productivity can drop to zero in a business  
setting.

Churches will split or at least lose their power to minister effectively; families are left in a  
chaotic state—won't speak to each other – left divided; and marriages blow  
apart!

Conflicts **must** be resolved—and as soon as possible. If they're not, they'll get worse.

Folks, we also need to see in every problem an opportunity for the Lord to work.

Solving problems as Christians is not an intellectual exercise so much as it is a spiritual one.

All that we say and do must be motivated by love, controlled by truth, and done to the glory of God.

If we look carefully, we discover three reasons for the great cry of the Jews.

#1 – There was a famine – verse 3 – they were out of food and hungry.

#2 – There were taxes exacted from them by Artaxerxes – vs. 4

In order to get food and pay their taxes – they had to borrow money (see v. 4).

#3 – The problem was compounded by the famine and failure of the crops.

This caused them to sell their children and themselves into slavery.

Those who borrowed money were charged interest and when that couldn't be paid, the lenders moved in, confiscating and repossessing anything of value – loan sharks.

The people had no power or means to redeem their children out of bondage.

These wealthy businessmen were selfishly exploiting the poor in order to make themselves rich.

Don't ever take advantage of the poor.

All of this was going on while every one was giving their best effort to rebuild the wall.

It was too much!

**Vs. 6**

“Then I was *very angry*” – blaze up; to glow

I love this – vs. 7 – Yes, he got mad, but he thought before he spoke.

At this point, we can discover one of the most important lessons we’ll ever learn from Nehemiah.

In spite of his intense anger, he did not take immediate action.

Rather, he backed off, got control of himself, and did some very careful and serious thinking.

Nehemiah described it this way: “I consulted with myself” (v. 7).

The Hebrew word translated *consult* literally means “to give oneself advice” or to “counsel oneself.”

Nehemiah got angry because the people knowingly ignored and disobeyed God’s Word.

Leviticus 25 – the Jews were not to charge interest.

Leviticus 25 – no Jew was ever to enslave another.

Call him a hired servant, but do not make him a slave.

His anger was directed at selfishness, greed, and disobedience.

People were hurting and suffering—and those who should have been the most compassionate were the most guilty.

He was facing a conflict between social classes

This called for serious action and Nehemiah wasted no time in confronting the situation.

What was happening in Israel was widespread knowledge.

Consequently, Nehemiah had to deal with it publicly.

This is why he “held a great assembly against them” (v. 7).

This “calling into the office” by Nehemiah was based on the Word of God.

The Law of Moses forbade the Jews from charging interest on each other.

Nehemiah exposed the underhanded dealings of his brethren.

He “contended with the nobles and the rulers” – vs. 7 – he grappled with them.

Nehemiah went to the primary source of the problem, those who were responsible.

That’s key!

He lined them up in front of him and confronted them with the fact of their violations.

Nothing could have thrilled Sanballet and his crowd any more than to see the rebuilding project stopped because of internal strife.

Notice that in the first thirteen verses of Nehemiah 5 there is no mention of the wall.

Do you know who applauds the loudest when there is internal strife in your home?

In the church? When the work of God stops? And churches split?

Galatians 5:14-15, “. . . *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.*”

– destroy one another.

Psalm 133:1, “*Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.*”

In vs. 8, Nehemiah reminded them that they were robbing their own fellow Jews.

The word “brother” is used four times in this speech.

How did they respond to Nehemiah? Notice the end of vs. 8. They held their tongue – they were silent.

That is the very best response when you are under deep conviction.

Nehemiah said in vs. 9, “Look, you are causing the enemy to blaspheme because of what you are doing!”

With this question, Nehemiah showed that God’s name and reputation were at stake. He had no choice but to deal with their sin.

Nehemiah made three accusations. Mark each one:

- You are charging interest to fellow Jews. That is wrong.
- You are enforcing the permanent slavery of the Jews . . . That’s also wrong.
- You are losing your distinction in the eyes of the surrounding nations. That is tragic!

The depth of one’s reverence for God will determine one’s decisions – vs. 9.

**From vs. 10** and the context, Nehemiah was not charging interest.

“Look,” he said, “my brothers and I and our servants are actually lending them money and grain—and without interest. Won’t you do the same?”

Sometimes one can help others by lending, but at other times even that is not enough; we must be willing to give unselfishly

Deuteronomy 15:7-15 – I want to show you this spirit of loaning and giving. Instead of a loan, give it to them.

True to his convictions, Nehemiah did not ask the children of Israel to do something he was not doing himself.

This is why Nehemiah was such an outstanding spiritual leader.

He was a man of character! He modeled integrity and loathed hypocrisy!

The people had forgotten the Mosaic Law.

Deuteronomy 23, verses 19 and 20 – no interest to thy brother

Turn back to Nehemiah 5

### **Vs. 11**

He didn't allow those who were guilty of exploitation to get off the hook.

He demanded they return what they had taken—"their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses."

They were also to return the interest they were "exacting from them" (v. 11).

Nehemiah concluded his message with a sense of urgency.

He didn't ask them to go home and think about what they had done and to consider how they might rectify the situation.

He didn't even ask them to spend time in prayer.

Rather, he said – restore to them today.

Nehemiah exhorted his people to deal with their sins immediately!

They weren't even to wait another day!

Imagine the joy and relief that must have surged through Nehemiah's emotional veins when the people responded positively – vs. 12a.

Now Nehemiah took one final step at the end of vs. 12b.

He asked them to promise publicly in the presence of the spiritual leaders in Israel that they would actually do what they said they would do.

Nehemiah knew that words are cheap and easy to utter on the spur of the moment; particularly under public pressure.

This is why he asked them to take a public oath.

This meant that their promise was not only between them and their neighbors, but between them and the Lord; and this was a serious thing.

A good leader does not stop with rebuke. Nehemiah took steps to correct the problem.

The same steps can be taken by us when we have sin in our own lives.

1. Determine to stop it – vs. 10

2. Make specific plans to correct the situation as quickly as possible (vs. 11).

Nehemiah says, “Deal with it NOW!”

When we realize what we are doing wrong, **now** is the time to stop it.

3. Declare our plans for correction publicly – friends, family, our pastor.

Correcting any problem begins by facing it head-on.

Nail it down. Lay it before someone. If you don’t, operation erosion will set in.

### **Vs. 13a**

Nehemiah, called down God’s wrath upon anyone who would not follow through with his commitment to release debts.

To seal this oath, he graphically visualized for them the grave consequences that could come if they lied to God – by shaking his own garment.

If they should fail to keep the promise, they would be shaken out in the same manner and they would have nothing left.

### **Vs. 13b**

The word *amen* means “so be it”; in other words, “May the Lord do all that you said!”



Then the congregation praised the Lord.

Why? Because God had enabled Nehemiah to help them solve their problems.

Let me give some principles.

### **Principle 1 – Internal problems are inevitable.**

Everyone will experience internal problems.

There is no perfect family, no perfect church, no perfect organization.

It's God's will that internal problems be minimal.

When they arise, He wants us to solve them.

Had they obeyed God's laws in the first place, they would not have created the internal turmoil that existed.

Many of our problems are caused by not practicing Biblical principles.

### **Principle 2 – We must not ignore internal conflicts.**

The apostles immediately recognized the problem – Acts 6:2-3

The solution worked! Seven men were appointed and faithfully resolved the conflict.

As a result, “the word of God increased and the number of disciples multiplied (v. 7).

Imagine what would have happened if the apostles had not dealt with this conflict.

We would have had the first major church split.

Unresolved conflict always makes the problem worse.

Following are some very important **Biblical guidelines** that will help us to endeavor to keep and “preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:25-32).

Jesus Christ gives us another guideline – Matthew 18:15-17 – go to your brother.

These Biblical guidelines alone are an important key to conflict resolution.

If we would faithfully follow it, there would be few internal problems that could not be solved quickly, both within the family and within the church.

**Principle 3 – We must handle our emotions properly when dealing with internal conflict.**

Internal strife always causes negative emotions.

Nehemiah's anger was directly related to the deep distress that he saw among the people.

We must be prepared to handle these negative emotions constructively and Biblically. Nehemiah gives us an excellent model.

He didn't act on his anger until he got perspective.

**First**, we must understand the nature of our anger. Is it based on facts?

Have you every been angry about something, then found out the facts and realized you should not have been angry?

**Second**, we all need time to reflect and gain perspective.

Time has a way of clearing away emotional fog and helping us to think more objectively.

Even though his anger was justified, he still did not act on impulse—which usually creates more problems than solutions.

There's no quicker way to lose respect than to lose control.

**Principle 4 – In solving conflicts among people, we must lead by example.**

One of the primary reasons Nehemiah was successful in handling a very intense and difficult situation is that he exemplified with his own life what he asked others to do.

This was a trait that characterized Nehemiah's life.

When he asked them to rebuild the walls, he worked alongside them.

When he asked them to pray, he prayed.

When he asked them to trust God, he trusted God.

When he asked them to work night and day, so did he.

When he asked them to help the poor and quit taxing them, he had already helped the poor and he was not taxing them.

One final thought:

It is important to note that the building of the wall did not *create* these problems; it *revealed* them.

Often when a church enters into a building program, all sorts of problems start to surface that people didn't even know were there.

A building program is a demanding thing that tests our faith, our patience, and our priorities; and while it brings out the best in some people, it can often bring out the worst in others.

### **Squeezing Turnips**

Let us stand for closing invitation

Are we in any conflict today?

Have we let our negative emotions get the best of us?

Would you say, "Pastor, I'm willing to practice Biblical guidelines in dealing with my conflicts"?

The greatest conflict that a person has is with God.

There is a wall of partition between God and man – a major conflict – sin problem

God loved us so much, He demonstrated to us a way to solve this conflict by sending His own Son to earth – to die for our sins and pay the price of our sins – so that we could be reconciled to God.