

Boldness in the Face of Iniquity # 12

Nehemiah 5: 6-13

This evening we continue to consider the turmoil that had arisen among the Jews that dwelt within Jerusalem. In our last study we discovered that the root of the problem was greed. Many of the more wealthy and influential Jews were taking advantage of those who were less fortunate. This caused great distress and the cries of the disadvantaged filled the city. Nehemiah was making progress with the reconstruction efforts, but he was forced to stop and deal with this situation in order for the work to continue. (The enemy will do whatever he can to hinder the work of the Lord, even creating internal problems.)

As we continue to move through this passage we come to the portion that reveals how Nehemiah handled this particular disruption. I am certain that he would rather the situation had not come up, but it had and it fell his lot to handle it. It is evident that Nehemiah confronted the iniquity and injustice that was occurring. He realized that it would do no good to avoid the situation; it had to be confronted in order to be resolved.

I think it would be safe to say that the majority of us would rather avoid confrontation. I know that there are some who seem to thrive on and even enjoy conflict, but most of us enjoy peace and harmony. There are times when we must deal with situations that arise. It is not sinful or wrong to confront iniquity and injustice. In fact, we have several biblical examples where confrontation was warranted and carried out. As you study the life of Jesus you find Him confronting the Pharisees, Sadducees, those who were filled with unbelief, and the money changers in the temple, just to name a few. Paul confronted Peter in regard to discrimination of the gentiles. [Gal.2:11-12 – But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. \[12\] For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.](#) Let's take a few moments to consider the [steps revealed](#) in Nehemiah's confrontation as we think on: [Boldness in the Face of Iniquity](#).

I. The Reaction of Nehemiah (6) – This single verse reveals much about the reaction of Nehemiah to the actions of the greedy Jews. Notice:

A. His Anger (6a) – [And I was very angry](#). This was not a mere aggravation to Nehemiah; he was literally angry with them because of their actions. In fact, he was very angry. Just as with confrontation, it is not sinful to become angry as long as we don't let our anger consume us and get into a rage. Our Lord was filled with a righteous anger with the moneychangers. He drove them out of the temple with a whip He had made.

- I fear that many today have become too docile in regard to the sin and iniquity of our day. It ought to anger us when we consider much that is happening around us. Our faith is being attacked on every hand; our children are under enormous pressure to abandon their faith and conform to the world; the liberal agenda is taking more of our religious liberty each year. That ought to anger us and it ought to move us to action. We don't have to allow our anger to become sin, but there is nothing wrong with a righteous anger.

B. His Assessment (6) – [And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words](#). Nehemiah had not become angry without a cause. He had heard the cries of the people; he had listened as they told of the many injustices they faced at the hands of their own countrymen. Nehemiah had every right to be angry. He had observed the situation and come to the conclusion that the people had been treated unfairly and he was determined to confront the wrongdoing.

- Nehemiah acted with integrity and wisdom. He had truth on his side. He knew that God was not pleased with the actions of the greedy. He had considered the facts and chose to act. We need that same wisdom and integrity. Every battle is not worth fighting, but if we have a clear mandate in Scripture, we must be willing to stand our ground and confront sin.

I. The Reaction of Nehemiah (6)

II. The Rebuke of Nehemiah (7-11) – Here we find the rebuke that Nehemiah gave those who had taken advantage of their brethren. He addresses several issues that were wrong. He rebuked them for:

A. Their Usury (7, 10) – [Then I consulted with myself, and I rebuked the nobles, and the rulers, and said unto them, Ye exact usury, every one of his brother. And I set a great assembly against them. \[10\] I likewise, and my brethren, and my servants, might exact of them money and corn: I pray you, let us leave off this usury](#). I want to mention first of all that Nehemiah did not act in haste. He [consulted with himself](#); he took a moment to consider the accusations and how he would respond. It is always better to take a moment to reflect before we speak. Then he rebuked them for their usury, for taking advantage of the poor by charging unnecessary interest on the loan. That might have been acceptable to strangers or foreigners, but not among their own. [Deut.23:19 – Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury](#): This involved more than interest; it also involved collateral, and if the loan was not paid off, their land and personal property was seized as payment.

- We have an obligation to do good toward all men, especially those of the household of faith. The Lord is never pleased when we benefit from the misfortune or difficulty of others.

B. Their Integrity (8) – *And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer.* The Jews in Jerusalem had paid sums of money to the Persians in order to redeem their brethren from bondage there, and yet they were enslaving others within their own city. On the surface they appeared to be genuinely concerned for the well being of the people, but deep down they were corrupt and sinful.

- The world around us is looking for something that is real. They expect us, and rightfully so, to practice what we preach. We preach and teach the Great Commission. We talk of loving others as God does. We portray a sense of concern and commitment for our communities, but deep down do we really care. Are we concerned enough about the lost, those enslaved to sin, to welcome them within our congregation regardless of who or what they are? Are we willing to give sacrificially in order to reach the lost and help the oppressed? Many are happy to contribute to programs or activities that help their cause, but have little interest otherwise.

C. Their Hypocrisy (9) – *Also I said, It is not good that ye do: ought ye not to walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the heathen our enemies?* These had heard the truth; they knew the God of heaven and what He expects of those who follow Him. Their lives were lived in hypocrisy. This was troubling to Nehemiah because he had boldly stood in faith against the opposition of Sanballat, Tobiah, and the others. No doubt they were watching and laughing. The hypocrisy of the greedy Jews had become a reproach on God.

- The world around us is aware of the lives we live. They know the message we preach, and they also know the lives we live. We have an obligation to the Lord and His church to walk in a way that pleases Him. We are no longer our own, to live as we please. I pray that all we do will bring glory and honor to our Lord rather than reproach!

D. Their Responsibility (11) – *Restore, I pray you, to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their oliveyards, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the corn, the wine, and the oil, that ye exact of them.* Nehemiah offered only one option: do the right thing. He urged them to restore that which had been taken from the people and even the interest that had been collected. He reminded them of their responsibility to the Lord and to those of like faith. This was simply what was expected of them as God's people.

- The same is true for each of us. We only have one option that will please the Lord. We must do the right thing and live for Him. Most of us have been in church long enough to know what our responsibilities are, and even if you are a new believer, you have the Spirit to guide you. We need to assume the responsibilities we have and begin to live as God's people should. We should never expect or be satisfied with anything less.
- I don't know about you, but I grow tired of professing Christians living like the world. It burdens me to see those who attend church when they want and stay away at other times. Many Christians today are only interested in what they can receive and not willing to give of themselves. May we live lives that honor the Lord and meet our responsibilities as His children!

I. The Reaction of Nehemiah (6)

II. The Rebuke of Nehemiah (7-11)

III. The Response of the People (12-13) – Here we find how the people responded to Nehemiah's rebuke. Notice:

A. The Agreement (12a) – *Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest.* It doesn't get much simpler than that. They heard the words of Nehemiah and were convicted of their iniquity, so they agreed to do what He had requested.

- That is how the Lord expects us to respond as well. He simply wants us to agree to follow Him and live according to His commands. *Deut.10:12 – And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul,* God just wants us to agree with all that He has given us in His Word.

B. The Accountability (12b) – *Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise.* There would be a certain accountability to the priests, but the greatest accountability was to God. They had sworn an oath before the Lord that they would live according to His Word.

- To me that is a very sobering thought. We all ought to have a compelling desire to live for God because we have trusted Him in salvation. He purchased our redemption upon the cross. When we received Christ we made a commitment to live for Him. When you joined this church you made a commitment to support it. God is watching the lives we live and we are accountable to Him. *2 Cor.5:10 – For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that*

every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Rev. 22:12 – And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

C. The Admonition (13a) – Also I shook my lap, and said, So God shake out every man from his house, and from his labour, that performeth not this promise, even thus be he shaken out, and emptied. Nehemiah offered a stirring reminder of the oath they had just taken. He warned that God would judge those who failed to keep their promise. He reminded them of the seriousness of what they had just done.

- We need reminded that this is not a game. It isn't something we do when we feel like it. As God's people, we have an obligation to live for Him on a daily basis. Much of the trouble we face today can be attributed to disobedience. America has turned her back of God and we are reaping what we have sown. Gal.6:7 – Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

D. The Alteration (13b) – And all the congregation said, Amen, and praised the Lord. And the people did according to this promise. The rebuke of Nehemiah and conviction of the Lord brought a change of heart to the people. They altered the way they were living. The people did according to the promise; they kept their word.

- We desperately need a spiritual and social alteration in our day. We need those who will sense their need, repent of their sin, and turn from their wicked ways unto the Lord. That is revival: abandoning sin and returning to God. That is the only hope for our generation and it must begin at the house of God.

These verses have challenged me in my walk with the Lord. I am not guilty of taking advantage of others financially, but there are areas in my life that are not totally surrendered to God. There are areas that need attention. I am hungry for a move of God in our midst, but I am aware that that will never happen unless we get earnest and sincere with God.

What about your spiritual life? Are there areas in your life that need attention? I am sure there are. The question for all of us is this: What are we going to do about it? If we earnestly desire a move of God, we must be willing to move toward Him!