

## A Testimony of Compassionate Character # 13

Nehemiah 5: 14-19

As we come to the closing verses of the fifth chapter of Nehemiah we are reminded of the capability man has for sin and often his lack of concern for those around him. There was a great and noble work being accomplished in Jerusalem, but the efforts were in danger of being derailed due to the greed and unconcern of the elite.

Certainly this was a tragedy that brought reproach to the inhabitants of the city, but in the midst of the despair stood a man called of God to lead the reconstruction efforts. Nehemiah was not the average man. Coming from a life of ease and plenty, it would have been tempting for him to become involved in similar actions, but Nehemiah was a man of integrity; he was a man of character. He had not come to Jerusalem to make a name for himself or generate a personal fortune. He was there to carry out the mission that God had sent him to perform.

Every generation and society has faced situations similar to those in Jerusalem at this time. There are always those who seek to gain advantage at the expense of others, but in the midst of corruption there always seems to be a few who have determined to live a life of character and honor.

People of character are needed in our day. It is a trait that is lacking in our modern society. The great preacher, D.L. Moody said this regarding character, "Character is what a man or woman is in the dark, when there's no one looking, no one listening. It is the thought, the desire, the intention that counts in the sight of God." <sup>1</sup> I want to conclude this chapter by looking at the [character traits](#) that Nehemiah possessed as we consider: [A Testimony of Compassionate Character](#).

**I. The Commission of Nehemiah (14)** – Here Nehemiah rehearses his commission for the work, and in so doing he reveals his character. Consider:

**A. His Appointment** – [Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even unto the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve years, I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor.](#) It is important to note that Nehemiah was not there necessarily of his own choosing. He had developed a burden for the needs of Jerusalem, but he did not possess the ability or the means to orchestrate all that had taken place. He knew that God had burdened his heart for the work, and He had met every need Nehemiah had regarding the work. Through the hand of God, Nehemiah was there as governor of the land, appointed by king Artaxerxes.

- Much can be discovered about the character of an individual when you consider their motivation and even their authority. Many today are laboring in particular causes, but often their motivation is not right. Nehemiah had gone to Jerusalem to fulfill the plan of God, not for personal recognition or profit. People of character are engaged in a cause for the right reasons. I pray that we will seek the wisdom and blessing of God in all that we do. We must ensure that we are engaged only in efforts that are appointed of Him and pleasing to Him.

**B. His Abstinence** – [I and my brethren have not eaten the bread of the governor](#). Nehemiah is speaking of the provisions that were available for the governor and those who worked alongside him. He had the authority to make certain demands of the people because of his position. This was permissible and even expected. Nehemiah refrained from certain activities even though society proclaimed he had every right to do so.

- This is a great truth that we need to consider. There is much within our modern society that is permissible, and in many ways expected, but that is no indication that we as God's children ought to engage in those activities. People of character are concerned with more than social acceptance and whether particular things are permissible. Our society has embraced many things that are not pleasing to God. There are many activities and occupations that are legal according to the law, but are not becoming to a Christian. Christians of character are willing to refrain from things that may be permissible among society for the good of the church and the work of the Lord.

## **I. The Commission of Nehemiah (14)**

**II. The Contrast of Nehemiah (15)** – This verse offers the great contrast between Nehemiah and those who had preceded him as governor. He offers a difference in:

**A. Their Extravagance (15a)** – [But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver](#); Nehemiah was different than most who had ruled before. They had demanded the people provide bread and wine in addition to monetary compensation. His focus was not on financial gain, particularly at the expense of those less fortunate. He could have demanded to receive that which he was allotted, but Nehemiah chose to be a man of character and integrity.

- You will have to agree that great harm has come to the church due to the extravagance of many Christian ministries. Far too many today are more concerned with money than they

are the actual work. They present themselves as caring for those in need, but are quick to take advantage of those who are willing to send in a check. We have not been called to develop large bank accounts and live extravagant lives; we have been called to fulfill the Great Commission, reaching the lost and dying for Christ.

**B. Their Empathy (15b)** – *yea, even their servants bear rule over the people*. The former administrations in power had little concern for the well being of the people. The servants of the governor were even expected to receive lavish compensation at the expense of the people. Nehemiah stood in stark contrast to those. He actually cared for the people; he had their interests at heart. He did not want to be a burden on the people, but rather a help and encouragement.

- We need a healthy dose of empathy in our day. We have enjoyed the abundance of God for so long that I fear we are unsympathetic to the needs of others. I pray that we will learn to see others as God does. I pray that we will seek to give of ourselves rather than expecting to always receive.

**C. Their Employment (15c)** – *but so did not I, because of the fear of God*. This reveals the fundamental difference in Nehemiah and many of the others. They were there for their own gain. They were there to benefit as much as they could regardless of the impact on others. Nehemiah was there to serve the Lord in fear and holiness. Nehemiah proclaimed that he could not behave as the others because he feared the Lord.

- What motivates and drives us today? Why do we do the things we do? Are we here tonight out of love for the Lord and a desire to serve Him, or are we here for other motives? We need to develop a reverent fear for the Lord. We need to judge our lives, thoughts and deeds, by the holy standard of God. There are enough in society who live to please the flesh, caring only for themselves. We need people of character who will fear God and live for Him!

## **I. The Commission of Nehemiah (14)**

## **II. The Contrast of Nehemiah (15)**

**III. The Character of Nehemiah (16-19)** – Here Nehemiah offers his personal testimony, and by doing so he reveals the character he possesses. Notice:

**A. His Commitment** (16) – *Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land: and all my servants were gathered thither unto the work.* Rather than seeking a lavish lifestyle in Jerusalem, Nehemiah kept his focus and remained committed to rebuilding the wall. He was determined not to allow distractions and obstacles stand in his way of success. He even encouraged his servants to maintain their commitment. Nehemiah was surrendered to the task at hand.

- There is so much in our world today that distracts and hinders good people from living their lives for the Lord. We need the resolve that Nehemiah possessed. We need those who have determined that the Lord and His work is always the priority. We desperately need those who are sold out to the cause of Christ!

**B. His Credibility** (16) – It is evident to see that Nehemiah was not like most of the rest. He had risen above the temptations and challenges presented by the world and pressed on for the glory of God. We also find something interesting in this verse that surely gained respect and credibility for Nehemiah: *neither bought we any land.* On the surface that may seem insignificant, but it revealed to the people the heart of Nehemiah. By his actions, not just idle words, Nehemiah proved his commitment to the work. He was not there to gain all that he could at the expense of others. He was not concerned with houses and land. He genuinely sought to serve the Lord and desired to restore the city walls.

- I am not implying that we don't have obligations and needs in our day. I know we must work in order to provide for our families. We have to have food on the table and a place to live. However, are we practicing what we preach? Are we portraying one goal at the house of God while our lives reveal something totally different? The world is watching how we live. They know that we profess to be a Christian. How do they perceive us? Do we have any credibility among society regarding spiritual matters? Many today profess Christ as Lord and Savior and yet service to Him and others receives only a fraction of their time. We must be genuine and sincere before those we are trying to reach.

**C. His Compassion** (17-18a) – *Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us. [18] Now that which was prepared for me daily was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine:* Nehemiah was well provided for by virtue of his position, but he was not greedy or insensitive. He assumed responsibility for feeding 150 Jews beside those who showed up desiring a meal. Nehemiah was a man of compassion, one who genuinely cared for those around him. He gave of his abundance for the good of others.

- Have we not been blessed beyond measure? I don't know any of us who are really wealthy, but we have been blessed of the Lord. He daily supplies our needs. We have the privilege and opportunity to share our abundance with those who are lacking. We have the good news of the glorious Gospel. Are we sharing it with those in need or do we keep it locked away within our hearts? I pray that we will become a people of compassion, sensing the needs of others and doing all we can to be of help to them.

**D. His Compensation** (18b-19) – yet for all this required not I the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people. [19] Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people. There was a large group that depended upon Nehemiah for their survival and yet he refused to require bread of the people because he did not want to be a greater burden on them. He refused to claim all that he could have and chose to depend upon the Lord. He knew that God had sent him to Jerusalem and He would provide all he needed while he was there.

- We live in a society that is driven by desire. We have all that we could possibly need, and yet many are never satisfied. I don't know how you feel, but I would rather have the approval and blessing of my Lord than all this world has to offer. It may appear to the world that we are lacking, but we are rich beyond measure in Christ the Lord. **Matt.6:19-21 – Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: [20] But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: [21] For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.**

Nehemiah left us a challenging example. Clearly he was a man of character who sought to please the Lord rather than enjoy the pleasures of life. Remember that character is defined by who you are when no one else is around or watching. It is who you are on the inside. God knows who we are the desires we have. I want to be more like Him. I want to be pleasing to Him in all that I do. Is that your desire also? If not it should be. May we submit ourselves to the cause of Christ and yield to Him in every aspect of life.

<sup>1</sup> Encyclopedia of 15,000 Illustrations: Signs of the Times.