
Sermon Notes

February 25, 2018

First Congregational Church of Pomfret

Walls Between Wall Builders Nehemiah 5:1-19

Opposition

- ❖ Anyone who attempts something significant for God can expect to face resistance and opposition
 - through Nehemiah, God prepares us to face opposition of all sorts
 - 3 entire chapters (4-6) devoted to the opposition Nehemiah faces while rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem
 - chapter 4, opposition from outside the Jewish community
 - chapter 5, opposition from within the Jewish population
 - chapter 6, more "outside" opposition
- ❖ "No test of leadership is more revealing than the test of opposition." (John White in *Excellence in Leadership*)

An "Inside Job"

- ❖ Opposition from within is a serious problem for the church and the Christian community

- the greatest opposition to kingdom work comes from inside the church
- "The issue for the church today is not whether we have prayer in schools, but whether we have prayer in the church." (Jim Cymbala)
- those within the church who want a form of godliness but who ultimately deny its power (2 Tim 3:5)
- ❖ The fault lines among those who are rebuilding the wall begin to show as a result of socioeconomic differences
 - enemy opposition and difficult times in general combine to create harsh economic conditions
 - wealthy Jews are taking advantage of the situation by exploiting their unfortunate countrymen
 - such oppression and exploitation is a flagrant violation of Mosaic law (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36-37, 39-41; Deuteronomy 23:19-20)
 - God wants His people to be different from others
- ❖ Nehemiah holds up the standard of the law
 - when money, food, or anything else is loaned, Jews are forbidden from taking interest from their fellow Jews
 - God intends this kind of generosity to be characteristic of godly people

Nehemiah's Response

- ❖ Nehemiah's initial response to this kind of oppression among God's people is anger (vv. 6-7)"

- an example of righteous indignation
 - Nehemiah does not become angry with Sanballat or Tobiah (enemies from without)
 - Nehemiah's anger is directed at those who know God's law and yet still violate God's standards
- we **ought** to get angry when those who claim to walk by God's standards compromise those standards
- ❖ Nehemiah "takes counsel with himself"
 - Nehemiah exhibits self-control and "cools down"
 - only then does Nehemiah approach the nobles and officials and deliver his words of rebuke to them
- ❖ Nehemiah anticipates the pattern of Matthew 18:15-17
 - step one: confront in private
 - step two: if necessary, repeat step one in the company of two or three witnesses
 - step three: if necessary, make a public confrontation
- ❖ Making a public confrontation requires the stopping of work on the wall until this matter is dealt with
 - since this is such a threat to unity, it **MUST** be dealt with immediately
 - "What good was it to build the wall if inside the wall there were people who were exploiting one another?" (Frank Tillapaugh)
- ❖ A lesson for God's people in every age

A Positive Outcome and a Personal Example

- ❖ Nehemiah's efforts to resolve this crisis **do** pay off
 - a reversal of behavior **and** a restoration of "ill-gotten" gain
 - an oath sworn to the priests about their promise
 - a symbolic act (v. 13)
- ❖ Nehemiah's personal example
 - Nehemiah doesn't "grab hold" of what could have rightfully been thought of as his
 - Nehemiah does not tie burdens on other people's backs that he is unwilling to lift a finger to remove
- ❖ Like Jesus, Nehemiah is not among the people of Jerusalem to be served, but to serve

Personal Application

1. In your dealings with others are you more like the rich Jews of Nehemiah's day who were looking for the best ways to get ahead, get more stuff, and prosper, or are you more like Nehemiah who used his gifts, resources, time, and treasure to bless others and build them up? How can you become more like Nehemiah?
2. Nehemiah saw an injustice, and he became agitated enough to do something about it. What social concerns or injustices agitate you and how may God be moving you to get involved?