Doing a Great Work: Integrity, Sacrifice, and Steadfastness

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References: Nehemiah 5-6, Nehemiah 4:21-22; Nehemiah 5:1-19; James 3:16; Galatians 5:14-15; Philippians 1:27; Acts 4:32-33; Acts 3:6; 2 Corinthians 11:6-11; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Nehemiah 6:1-9; Acts 13:1-2; 2 Kings 17:33

Internal Strife and the Outcry of the Poor

Well, very good. So we were in chapter 5 last week. I suggested this morning that it was chapters 6 and 7, but really it's chapters 5 and 6 we'll get to this evening. Nehemiah chapter 5. Last week we got down to the end of verse 13. And we were talking about the need to depart, I guess, depart from usury so that the work of God could continue and that people would not be burdened with unreasonable debt. And so we dealt with that. We're going to carry on now in verse 14. But I think Eric probably has something to say on those first thirteen verses, or whatever you think you should say, Eric.

Yes, thank you. So this section deals here with chapter 15—or chapter 5, rather. It deals with internal strife within the people of God, among the people of God. Previous to that, there had been a lot of external opposition that had tried to stop, to hinder through threats and fears and so on, to try to stop the work of God in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. And so now, though, the enemy has failed and failed to stop the work. It says that they continued. They worked at the construction with one held weapon in his hand. The builders had their swords girded at their side as they built, and they continued on. And it says, "So we labored," verse 21 of chapter 4:

> [Nehemiah 4:21-22 NKJV] 21 So we labored in the work, and half of the men held the spears from daybreak until the stars appeared. 22 At the same time I also said to the people, "Let each man and his servant stay at night in Jerusalem, that they may be our guard by night and a working party by day."

So they continued then to work. They were watchful, they were prayerful, and they continued the work. But now something else happens. The outward opposition was

unsuccessful. The enemy now tries something else. And at a time especially that required unity in the face of all this outward opposition, instead we read of internal oppression and strife among the people of God that threatened the work, the continuing of the work. That's very serious. If the people of God are not unified, then the work would cease. A great warning that comes by this.

And we see how Nehemiah handled this very delicate problem that arose. Now, so we read there in verse 1 of chapter 5:

> [Nehemiah 5:1 NKJV] And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren.

It was a great outcry. They were working—the pressures of the work—and having to leave their ordinary work to concentrate on building the wall, it brought to light perhaps long-standing problems among the people, and that was that the rich were oppressing the poor. This had been going on for some time, but now the pressures that required the ordinary people—they couldn't work for themselves to supply their own needs as well because of the demands of the work on the wall. So as well as these injustices, which we'll read in verses 2 through 4:

> [Nehemiah 5:2 NKJV] For there were those who said, "We, our sons, and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live."

So there were some there that—yeah—that didn't have land, or their daily needs were not even being met: "Where are we going to get food for our families?" Some of them. And these were workers on the wall; they couldn't even feed their families. And then verse 3, we read that there were others. There were others also who said:

> [Nehemiah 5:3 NKJV] There were also some who said, "We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain because of the famine."

And so now we see that there's, in addition to the difficulties of building the wall, there was a famine. And the famine always affects the poor first. The rich can afford to purchase what supplies are left. But the poor, during a time of famine, there's inflation of which then they

would be left out. They would not be able to afford to buy food even for their families. And some then—this famine then, usually when we read of a famine in Israel, it's because of God's displeasure. God has brought a famine for a reason. And probably it was sent by the Lord to expose this problem that was there, to make the situation even worse, to bring it all to a head so that the thing could be dealt with. They could find out where the problem was. So building a wall and then the famine had brought this—probably this long-standing practice whereby the rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer.

So and also in verses 4 and 5, we read:

> [Nehemiah 5:4-5 NKJV] 4 There were also those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our lands and vineyards. 5 Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and indeed we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been brought into slavery. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards."

They couldn't even redeem their own children. They had to sell their own children into slavery, which of course was wrong. God had made provision for the poor in the land, and the rich were taking advantage of the situation to line their own pockets and oppress their brethren. All at the time when unity was needed to enable the people to build this wall. It was a great opposition. There was a lot of debris to be moved. There was enemies day and night. And so the whole work of building the wall now came almost to a standstill. This great outcry came. And now, so the work was in danger then of collapsing, and what the outward opposition did not do, inward conflict threatened to halt the work.

And are we not warned about this in the Scriptures, of the unity of the Spirit, the unity of the body of Christ? If one suffers, we all suffer. And so through selfishness, self-seeking, pride, and so on, the unity of the Spirit of God can be destroyed in a church and even among the churches of God themselves. Now James speaks of that. James chapter 3 speaks of the results of this, of conflict within. James chapter 3 and verse 16, he says:

> [James 3:16 NKJV] For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

Now James is a New Testament writer, and he's speaking about the condition among the people of God. If there's envy, if one is envying another, and where there is self-seeking rather than thinking others better than themselves, looking after our brethren—we should be watching over our brethren, encouraging them, helping them. But he says where that's lacking, he says there's confusion. And the last thing needed to build the walls, for the work of God to progress, there cannot be confusion. There must be a single-mindedness, single purpose.

Paul, writing to the Galatians in chapter 5, verse 15, he writes—he says that, verse 14, he set it up. He says:

> [Galatians 5:14-15 NKJV] 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

This attitude would not only affect the poor, it would affect the rich. The rich would be consumed as well in the reproach of their enemies.

But see Philippians chapter 1, verse 27. So Paul's advice then to the Philippians, the encouragement that he gives for them to be unified:

> [Philippians 1:27 NKJV] Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,

And where there is not that striving together in one mind and one spirit, there is confusion and every evil work.

Again, Acts chapter 4: the history of the progress of the gospel, especially in the early days, hinged on the fact that they were all one. Amen. And chapter 4, verse 32, now the multitude, Luke records:

> [Acts 4:32 NKJV] 32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

And with great power—there's a result:

> [Acts 4:33 NKJV] 33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all.

Great power unified; there was great power. Now those conditions were conditions that existed in one particular time and place in Jerusalem in those very early days, but the example should continue on that the saints should have care for one another. And the apostles make very plain that we should endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace continually. That means that we care for our brothers and sisters.

So the example of these rich people there—and they were the leaders, they were the princes, they were the priests—were the ones that were guilty of this. Those most responsible for caring for the people of God were the ones that were leading the nation to separation, to destruction, and the wall that they were building to separate themselves from the nations and from idolatry to the worship of the true God was being threatened.

Nehemiah's Wise Rebuke and the Assembly's Repentance

So, what was Nehemiah's response? There, verse 6, we read that he was really angry. And I like that. I like the fact that he was so incensed at this. His reaction was the right action: **anger**. But he didn't act out of his anger. Notice what he said:

> [Nehemiah 5:6 NKJV] And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

But he took that anger, I believe, to the Lord. Because he thought now, verse 7—he didn't act rashly, but after very serious thought: "How then shall I act?" He wasn't a man that jumped to conclusions, that shot off his mouth right at the beginning. He was very careful and considered what words that he might use to sway the people. His purpose was not to chastise the people of God, but to bring them back to unity again. So that he gave very serious thought. He says:

> [Nehemiah 5:7 NKJV] After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, "Each of you is exacting usury from his brother." So I called a great assembly against them.

So he would have had a private interview with them. He first of all went to them privately and spoke to them and said, "What you're doing is not right." That's a good, very sound way of reacting to something like that. And he said to them, "Each of you is exacting usury from his brother." That was forbidden by the law of God. And we may have looked at that last week, the scriptures that detail that information. But there are scriptures where God said you shouldn't exact usury from your brothers. If a poor brother, you give to him, lend to him without any interest expected in return. And if he can't repay, give it to him as a gift. The Lord will be your reward. He will bless you abundantly for doing so.

So then he calls the great assembly. After he had spoken to them privately, he didn't embarrass them, as it were, by pointing them out singly in the great assembly. You see his wisdom here? Now he had spoken to them individually; they knew their wrongs. He had pointed them out, and he knew who was wrong. And so it was no surprise to them when in the great assembly he said to them—"And I said to them," verse 8, he says:

> [Nehemiah 5:8 NKJV] And I said to them, "According to our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?" Then they were silenced and found nothing to say.

Now that sentence we might need a little explanation for, because those captives that were taken to Babylon, they had been taken as slaves. They were sold as slaves on the markets probably. However, during the time of the Babylonian reign and during the Persian Empire, their brethren had been purchased back from their slavery. They had been redeemed from their masters. They hadn't run away; they had been purchased legally. And this had been done by men like Nehemiah and Ezra and others who were wealthy and maybe were able to purchase their poorer brethren and give them their freedom. And so he explains to them exactly what has taken place in the past: we've already redeemed them. And now, he says, and now indeed will you even sell your brethren now? Or should they be sold to us? That must have convicted them greatly—the great injustice. And verse 8, then they were silenced and found nothing to say. Their guilt was so obvious. They had no excuses. Those Israelites

who were slaves had been redeemed from the heathen, and now they were sold to Jews again. How terrible that was!

Then I said, what you're doing is not good. Verse 9:

> [Nehemiah 5:9 NKJV] Then I said, "What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?

What do the nations around us think? Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and all the rest of the people that are around us that are watching us so carefully—what are they going to say about that? "These Jews are buying and selling their own men and women and children, taking advantage of them. What kind of people are they? Even the heathen don't want to do things like that." A Persian wouldn't sell a Persian, I don't think.

And so in verse 10, he says:

> [Nehemiah 5:10 NKJV] I also, with my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury!

What an example! He had already, to the best of his ability, which was considerable, and his servants as well—those that were close to him, that were his servants, they also were doing this. They were also lending money and grain to the poor, the poorest of the poor. But they couldn't do it all. They didn't have the resources to be able to look after everyone, and it wouldn't solve the problem. The main problem was the Jews were taking advantage of the Jews, the rich ones against the poor. And so he says, please, please, stop this usury! Using his own example and his servants' example, he convicts them now.

And he says in verse 11:

> [Nehemiah 5:11 NKJV] Restore now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil, that you have charged them."

So they really had no other alternative. In the face of this godly man and the wise way in which he approached them, he led them to repentance. So they said—verse 12:

> [Nehemiah 5:12 NKJV] So they said, "We will restore it, and will require nothing from them; we will do as you say." Then I called the priests, and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise.

Even the priests—the priests and the nobles, they were the ones that were taking advantage. And he extracted a promise from them as well.

And then verse 13:

> [Nehemiah 5:13 NKJV] Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen!" and praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise.

He urges them to give up their rights to recompense for the evil way in which they acquired these lands and fields and houses from the people in their need. And he pronounces then a curse upon them. That's what the shaking out—in effect, he's telling them that if you don't do this, a curse will be on you from the Lord. And they took that pretty seriously. Then all the assembly said, "Amen," and praised the Lord.

So from a great outcry and a very thorny problem, Nehemiah, so wisely and astutely, he brings the whole assembly to the point of praise. What a wonderful reconciliation this man made! He was certainly a man of grace and action, but he was also this great, wise administrator and a comforter for the nation. Then the people did, it says, according to this promise. They had promised, and they did the repentance, and they did it.

So I think of this whole section here as being one that could have gone wrong; it could have gone the other way. But instead, the whole assembly now was united, including the lords, the priests, the nobles, and the rich. Now they could get down to work. The people had been relieved. Their needs had been met, and now they could get to work again. Because during this time that the assembly was called and Nehemiah had to deal with this problem, no work could have been done, or very, very little work would be done. The people would be too discouraged, some too hungry, others perhaps without a real mind for the work, more interested in their own things. And so the work then is able to continue because of the wise counsel and actions of this man, Nehemiah.

The Example of Nehemiah: Leadership Without Self-Aggrandizement

Very good. Thank you. So what could you use to summarize that story? And one of the summaries could be: money could be a big issue in thwarting the work of God. Is that possible even in our day? And you'll remember that in Acts chapter 5, everything is roaring along just marvelously until we hit Ananias and Sapphira. And what was their problem? Well, they were zealous Christians, but they didn't mind getting a little bit of glory out of their money, and a little lie wouldn't do any harm. So they said, "We sold it for so much," when they really sold it for more and kept some of the money themselves. Now, is that a really serious problem? Well, the Lord thought so: Ananias and Sapphira died.

And so you've got all these people in the first half of Nehemiah 5, and they're taking advantage of one another. And they probably were pretty good people other than that; they were rulers and the rich and so on. Have you noticed the rich usually get a lot of respect? And so they were doing quite fine, and Nehemiah said, "We've got to put a stop to this."

And then you go from verse 14 to 19, and you get the next movement. And so what is the next movement? Well, it's a movement where you get the example of Nehemiah regarding money. Okay. Money is very important. We're not at the end of the story yet, but let's read verses 14 through 19:

> [Nehemiah 5:14-19 NKJV]
> 14 Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions. 15 But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God. 16 Indeed, I also continued the work on this wall, and we did not buy any land. All my servants were gathered there for the work.
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> 17 And at my table were one hundred and fifty Jews and rulers, besides those who came to us from the nations around us. 18 Now that which was prepared daily was one ox and six choice sheep. Also fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine. Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor's provisions, because the bondage was heavy on this people. 19 Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

What kind of an example was Nehemiah to all these people rebuked in the first half of the chapter? He says, "Listen, you're extorting money, you're putting your brothers into slavery. It's all contrary to the law of God, and we've heard all about that. You're doing that; I want you to know what I didn't do. I didn't act like all the other governors that have been here in Judea. I could have. Remember now, I am the representative of the king. When was the last time you heard of a poor king?" No, that's not really the point. If you're going to be king, you not only get rich like a king, you live like a king after all. Who's the king of North Korea? North Korea sunk in poverty, except the king. And so Nehemiah says, "I'm not going to be like the ordinary king. I'm not going to be taking money from you."

Now, number one, that means—back to verse 15—saying former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people; they had taken of them bread, wine, and forty shekels of silver. So they had taxed all the people who were there. And then they went one step farther: and their servants got rich too. What's the point of being a servant of the king? You get to have your hand in the same pocket. And so Nehemiah's servants, instead of ruling it over the people and taxing them, getting money from them, Nehemiah's servants were working with Nehemiah in the work of building the wall, in the work of the other things. Nehemiah, don't you realize who you are? You're a political appointee. You got your hand in the pocket of the king; you can get rich in this job! Nehemiah says, "I won't do that."

Verse 16: "Yea, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land." What did he mean by "neither bought we any land"? Well, what if he had done when he first got there, and before he took his ride around Jerusalem, knowing what he was planning to do? He was planning to build the wall and to put the gates on, fortify the city, and ultimately build the city. What could he have done? Well, he could have gone out and bought some land. In spite of what Rob said—Brendan talked about this morning—the land was for sale in the city; it could be sold, wasn't subject to the year of release, it could be sold. And if he had bought it before he told them that he was going to redevelop the city, do you think he could have bought it for a low price, and then after the city was redeveloped all around, he could have sold it for a higher price? Do you think that's possible?

And some of you, apart from Eric and Johanna and myself, wouldn't remember as far back as this in British Columbia, but Mr. So-and-so was the Minister of Transportation. Now, what's the Minister of Transportation know? Well, he knows that if you build a road to somewhere, that the property that's near the road is going to go up in value. If you've got a really nice property that's forty miles away from nowhere, it's not worth very much. But if you build a road to that property, you could build a hotel there, and it would be worth a lot of money. What do you think happened to this particular Minister of Transportation in British

Columbia? Well, his sons just bought a lot of property near where the roads were going, and the son was a very rich man. That happened in British Columbia.

And Nehemiah says, very astutely—you'd think he was an economist—Nehemiah says, "We didn't buy any land." We said, "We're not going to take advantage of that. We have inside knowledge as to what's going to happen." Do you think it's possible that Donald Trump's son-in-law might have known what was going to happen and he just might have bought something in advance of everybody else knowing it? And frankly, I think he's under scrutiny right now for doing that very thing. Nehemiah says, "This is the work of God. I am not going to buy low, sell high, and make some money on the side." He could have done all the other things and still done this, and if he'd done it, he would have ended up being a richer man than when he started. Good man, Nehemiah!

Any parallels today? Have you ever heard of a church leader who got into trouble because of money? Yeah, you read about it in the newspaper. You won't read about it in other places, but you'll read about it in the newspaper. This man did this and he made money, and this man did that. And they all say, "You give money to me and we'll pass it on." And they pass it on—I mean, they keep a percentage of it for themselves and they get rich. Have you ever heard of a pastor in a church who leaves Church A and goes to Church B, and it just so happens that Church B paid him more than the people paid him in Church A? Is that possible? Yeah. So is that the way the assembly should be run? Answer: we've got to be very, very careful in that, in the assembly, that money doesn't have a loud voice, and we don't do things in order that people get money.

I've told you repeatedly about my friend sitting right here across the table from me several years ago. I said to him, "Why are you a Christian?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Why did you become a Christian?" He said, "Because my father became a Christian." "Why did your father become a Christian?" "Because he felt it would be good for business." Now, not everybody is as honest as that, but right across this table from me, that's what he told me. Now, the Bible says if you become a Christian, you might give up your fishing business, and you might become as poor as Peter. And the lame man said to him, "Peter, can you give me any money?" And Peter said:

> [Acts 3:6 NKJV] Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."

What? You become a Christian and you might end up with nothing? Nehemiah says, "Well, that's certainly possible." Do you think Nehemiah left Jerusalem richer or poorer than when he came? I think he left poorer. Good man, Nehemiah! He didn't just rebuke them in the first half of chapter 5; he said, "I'm going to be the example to you, and I'm going to be far different than all the other governors."

Let's keep going. Verse 17: "And moreover, at my table, 150 of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us." Was he rich? He fed 150 people every day. He was a big man. And more. Those that came, that's right. Okay? He was a good man.

Now we're told what he paid, verse 18: "Now it was prepared for me daily, one ox, six sheep, fowls, and once in ten days all sorts of wine. Yet for this required I not the bread of the governor, because the bondage was heavy upon this people." So he might have got money from the king to do this, but he certainly didn't charge anybody in Jerusalem. He didn't charge the people at all.

Interesting, the little line about all sorts of wine every ten days. And I said to myself, I'm not sure that that's what I should do; I don't want to give the people wine all the time. Why did he do that? Well, in part because he was the king's representative. And the king was—he was having people sit down and they required wine. And when I was working many years ago, it was periodically my requirement to invite people for lunch on behalf of my company. And I had to buy them wine if that's what they wanted, because my company demanded it. I didn't take the wine. And I can remember sitting beside one of these guys one day, and he reached out and he took his glass and he said, "Rhine wine." And Rhine wine was really good stuff. And the River Rhine runs through the city of Frankfurt and through Germany. And frankly, it's a terrible, terrible place. So he reached to himself and he said, "I've got Rhine wine." And then he reached to my glass and he said, "Rhine water." He said, "You can drink the Rhine water; I'm going to drink the Rhine wine." Okay, the Rhine wine. And that's the way it was. But Nehemiah, I think, was a servant of the king, and he had to do that.

Verse 19, I kind of like. It says, "Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people." Do you think he ever went to bed at night and said, "Lord, I'm not sure what's happening here. This doesn't seem to be working very well." And then he thought about all the promises of God. And he said, "Lord, you're going to remember. You'll remember what I've done for this people." And on Judgment Day, Nehemiah is going to get a big reward. Do you think he's going to get a big reward in heaven? He's already got a big reward in heaven, of course. We respect this man, Nehemiah. He was a good man.

Well, that's not an exhaustive analysis of the passage, but that's a bit of an overview for you. Any other questions or comments? And Eric will have some questions and comments.

Sacrificial Ministry and Christlike Humility

Well, I don't have any questions; I have a couple of comments. This is really further to answering what he said earlier, where he says—in chapter 5, verse 8—"According to our ability, we've redeemed our Jewish brethren." No, sorry. Sorry. What is it now? Oh, yes, verse 10:

> [Nehemiah 5:10 NKJV] I also, with my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury!

That's a great example. And then he continues this to expand on the generosity, for us to understand what a great example that Nehemiah was to the people. He was outstanding in the sense that all the other governors were expected to be able to demand the governor's provisions. In verse 18, it says there—the last sentence of verse 18 is: "Yet in spite of this, I did not demand the governor's provisions, or bread, because the bondage was heavy on this people." He didn't want to increase the bondage that the people were already under. They were suffering. And it wasn't a time for selfishness; it was a time that people would sacrifice. And there were a lot of sacrifices that had to be made there in order to build that wall.

And I think in any work of God, there has to be sacrifices: the sacrifice of prayer in itself, the time set aside for prayer, the time set aside for comforting the weak and encouraging them, to shepherd and to help those that need, and even to set aside an ear to hear the problems and the difficulties that some might be going through. The people of God need someone to sacrifice their time and their resources in order to meet their needs.

He was a great example to the nation, and especially as a leader, because if the leaders don't sacrifice, the people aren't going to sacrifice. Everybody was looking at Nehemiah; everyone was watching him. The enemy certainly had their eye upon him and tried at every point possible to bring down the testimony of Nehemiah, to ruin his character. We'll see some other attempts here later on, the conspiracies in this next chapter 6. There are three conspiracies there to try to ruin his testimony and so on. And so he needed to set a good example.

But he wasn't looking for earthly rewards. In verse 19, he says, "Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I've done for this people." That was his desire: it was for the people of God. And he reminds God, "Remember me for the things that I'm doing on their behalf. They're your people, and I'm doing it for them." And so he wasn't looking for any earthly reward for this; he wasn't looking for a pat on the back. He was making the boast, the same boast perhaps that Paul did in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, if you go there. Paul also didn't want to be a burden to the Corinthian assembly because of the difficulties that they were having there. The first book of Corinthians details all the problems that there were in that assembly, but Paul, the one thing he did not want to do was to become a burden to them. He wanted his message to those Corinthians—as bad an assembly as it was; there was divisions, there was moral problems, there was worship problems, there was divisions among them and so on, everything possible, bad doctrine and so on. But he says there in verse 6 of chapter 11, he says:

> [2 Corinthians 11:6 NKJV] 6 Even though I am untrained in speech, yet I am not in knowledge. But we have been thoroughly manifested among you in all things.

You have seen me, just as the people of God witnessed Nehemiah among them in leading them and encouraging them in the work. He said, "Did I commit a sin? Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted?"

> [2 Corinthians 11:7 NKJV] 7 Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?

It's true: Nehemiah humbled himself. He didn't take his side with the rich as they were taking advantage of the poor. He humbled himself to become like the poor and even sharing what resources that he had with them. And he says:

> [2 Corinthians 11:8 NKJV] 8 I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you.

Amen! But when I was present with you and in need, I was a burden to no one. I didn't let you know that I had a problem. I didn't. He says:

> [2 Corinthians 11:9 NKJV] 9 And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep myself.

And he goes on:

> [2 Corinthians 11:10-11 NKJV] 10 As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia. 11 Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!

And so Nehemiah—the name Nehemiah means "the consolation," consolation, a comfort. And the people could look to Nehemiah and say, "Here was a man that loved us; he gave all for himself." Isn't that really—try to draw the picture of the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself?

> [2 Corinthians 8:9 NKJV] For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

And so this was Nehemiah who poured out his life for the people of God. But he was not looking for an earthly reward. He was looking for not a temporary reward; he was looking for a permanent reward. He looked to the Lord for his reward. So a lovely example, this man, that the people could easily follow, a man who had their best interests in mind. And so when he reproved and rebuked the elders, the princes, the nobles, and the priests, they knew that this man had their best interests in his mind for all the people.

One thing we might mention is when he—in verse 9 of chapter 5, if you go back there for a moment, there's just a point I want to raise here that I don't think I mentioned. I may have, but I didn't mention it a lot. It says, "Then I said, what you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?" He's reminding them: the reproach of the nations, that their actions that they were doing not only were bringing reproach on the poor, but on them as well. It was the Lord's reputation that really was at stake here, because they were the Lord's people. And so our actions, too, they

reflect on Christ, don't they? And so in our day, the world has reason to blaspheme against Christians and against God because of the actions of a lot of Christians. That's their reproach. We bear that reproach from our enemies, those that hate God. We're reproached because we too have not acted the way we should towards our brethren. And so it gives the world occasion to blaspheme the people of God and to blaspheme the God of the people of God.

Those are my comments, Dan, and to the end of chapter 5.

Nehemiah 6: Relentless Enemies and the Plain of Ono

All right, chapter 6. It says:

> [Nehemiah 6:3 NKJV] So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?"

So, you sit back and you say, don't these enemies, Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem, don't they ever go away? And the answer is **no**. If you are involved in the work of God, is the enemy ever going to stop trying to stop you? No. Did you win a victory over the devil yesterday? You say, "Yep." Does that mean he's going to go away from now on? No. What's he going to do tomorrow? Going to come back at you with something different, or maybe even the same thing. It's interesting. Did you read it? They sent me this information four times. Nehemiah says, "Are you guys deaf? I said no. And then I said no. And then I said no. And then I said no." Why did Sanballat invite them four times? Probably because many people would have said yes on the third occasion. The devil is a skillful liar, deceiver, and tempter. And he's not going to go away easily. Persistent is one of his greatest attributes. And he just—he's at you, at you, at you, at you, at you. And you say, "Go away." And he doesn't go away.

So that's the way this section ends. Verse 1 says, it came to pass Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and the rest of the enemies. Eric just reported to us earlier that it was Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem, but that wasn't all of them. There's all kinds of them. Do you say, "I got a problem. Mr. So-and-so, he's a big problem." You say, "Well, that's wonderful. I know him." What about—and then you say, "I know Mr. So-and-so is a problem, but what about the other people who might be problems too?" And each one is a problem in a different way. The devil is not easily discouraged. And we're to resist him, but he's going to keep on coming.

So here they come now. They heard that he'd built the wall. So they said to him—verse 2:

> [Nehemiah 6:2 NKJV] that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm.

What were they planning to do? I don't know. We're not given the detail. What did they attempt to accomplish? I don't know. Probably, they simply said, "You know, we'd like to talk to you about this." Remember, when we first met them, what were they interested in? They were aggrieved that someone had an interest in the welfare of the children of Israel. And then what did they do next? They said, "We would like to help you build the wall." Well, now, that was a long time ago, and they've changed their tune many times. But were they maybe saying, "Huh? Nehemiah, if you come along, we might be able to help you." There's something. And Nehemiah—all we know is that Nehemiah said, where are we? The end of verse 2: "They thought to do me mischief." I don't think Nehemiah knew precisely what it was, but I think Nehemiah said, "I don't trust those guys, and I think that if I end up going with them, I'm going to be in deep trouble."

Interesting. The line says in verse 3: "I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it?" Well, haven't you ever heard of a boss who delegates? And he delegates to everybody else, and that he doesn't have to do the work. Why would the work cease because Nehemiah wasn't there? Did Nehemiah have to be there at eight o'clock every morning? And the answer is **yes**. Nehemiah led by example; he didn't lead by delegation. He didn't say, "I'm the boss; you get the work done. I'll see you after lunch, but I've got an important lunch." That's not Nehemiah. Go to the plain of Ono? No, he could say, "I've got important business." Was it important business? Yes. And Nehemiah said, "I cannot go. If I go, the work will cease."

Now, frankly, that's very often the case. If the man of God goes, the work ceases. Tragic. Very difficult. Thank you. What happened when Joshua died and the other elders? The work ceased. They followed the Lord all the days of Joshua and the days of those elders who outlived Joshua. But when they were gone, the work ceased. Josiah was a good king. What happened after he died? Crashed. Over and over and over, the examples are there. And so Nehemiah is wise enough to say, "I cannot delegate." It's easy to say to somebody else, "You do the work." It's easy if you're the boss and there's money involved. You say, "I'm going to pay you $10,000. You do the work." But the Christian doesn't do that. The Christian doesn't

say, "The work's got to be done; you do it, and everything will be fine. I've got something else to do." If the Lord calls you, then you go.

I marvel at the city of Antioch. There were five elders in Antioch we're told about in Acts 6, Acts 13. Five good men:

> [Acts 13:1-2 NKJV] 1 Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

And so Paul and Barnabas go off. What do the other guys do? And they look one another in the eye and they say, "Excuse me, but we just lost our two best men. What are we going to do?" And the Lord had it all organized, and those three men carried on in the assembly in Antioch, and they did a marvelous work because they were following the call of the Lord. The Lord will lead and He will provide. Who is going to look after things if Nehemiah goes? Nehemiah says, "I can't go. I can't delegate. The work will cease if I go." And so he kept on doing the work.

Again, I marvel. Again, verse 4:

> [Nehemiah 6:4 NKJV] But they sent me this message four times, and I answered them in the same manner.

I answered them after the same manner every time. You'd think that they'd get tired! Then, verse 5, then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time. Didn't make anywhere. The first four times wasn't good enough, so this time Sanballat sends the servant —same message, same logic, but a different way of communicating. He had an open letter in his hand wherein was written:

> [Nehemiah 6:5-7 NKJV] 5 Then Sanballat sent his servant to me as before, the fifth time, with an open letter in his hand. 6 In it was written: It is reported among the nations, and Geshem says, that you and the Jews plan to rebel; therefore, according to these rumors, you are rebuilding the wall, that you may be their king.

> [7] And you have also appointed prophets to proclaim concerning you at Jerusalem, saying, "There is a king in Judah!" Now these matters will be reported to the king. So come, therefore, and let us consult together.

So what do you think of that? I ask myself the question: if that were true, what good would a discussion with Sanballat be a benefit, or what good would it do Nehemiah? Wasn't Sanballat in a position to—and he probably was a pretty influential guy. He was, you remember, a leader in the Israelite kingdom, in Samaria. He had the Israelite army, at least in part, under his control. He was confederate with the other Israelite leaders. He was an influential man. How are you going to keep false reports from getting to the king? And so Sanballat says, "I'm influential with the king, you know." I think Nehemiah probably said, "Sanballat, you were never as influential with that king as I was. Remember, the king's on my side." But Nehemiah doesn't say that; Nehemiah keeps on trusting in the Lord.

Verse 8:

> [Nehemiah 6:8-9 NKJV] [8] Then I sent to him, saying, "No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart." [9] For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, "Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done." Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.

Their plan was that they would scare Nehemiah and weaken his hands and the hands of all the others. And they probably published this just like Sennacherib's army published the news in Hezekiah's case. But Nehemiah simply says, "Lord, they are threatening to weaken us. Therefore, Lord, would you please strengthen us?" I think that's a marvelous response. Okay, you're going to make me weak; I'm going to pray to God, He's going to make me strong. So, again, you end up saying, this guy, Nehemiah, he's a good man. He knows what to do. When the devil attacks, he prays more. He uses his wisdom, but in the end, he's dependent on the Lord. He's going back to the Lord, and so his life is wonderful. Verse 9 again: "Their hands shall be weakened. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands." Okay, they're saying it's weak; I'm going to say, "Lord, you make it strong." So those are comments on the first nine verses of chapter 6.

Compromise and the Deception of False Religion

Yes, let me get some comments on these two attempts of the enemies of God to get Nehemiah to meet with them and try to get him to compromise. That would seem to be their aim. It seems that in verse 1 we read about these enemies:

> [Nehemiah 6:1 NKJV] Now it happened when Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and the rest of our enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall, and that there were no breaks left in it (though at that time I had not hung the doors in the gates),

though at that time, he says, they had not hung the doors in the gates yet. I guess the work had to be completed by the carpenters and by the blacksmiths and so on. It took a lot of work to actually build the portals of the gates and to hang those doors. But the wall had been built up, and so the only exposed places left were easily defended by a determined defending crew.

They had to change their tactics now. They couldn't intimidate them by threatening them to go over the wall, the half-built walls. The walls had been built right up now, so they were unassailable; they couldn't get over them. So now they had to change their tactics. And this next tactic here that they attempt, it says in verse 2:

> [Nehemiah 6:2 NKJV] that Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together among the villages in the plain of Ono." But they thought to do me harm.

Now, Ono is a city in the tribe of Benjamin. It's not in Judah; it isn't in the kingdom of Judah. That is, the governor Nehemiah, appointed by the king of Persia, he was appointed as governor of Judah. And so this invitation, it sounded like they wanted a reconciliation of some—that's what it could be attempted at, an attempt at trying to appear as though they wanted to reconcile with the governor. And they suggested, "We meet out on neutral ground there in the plain of Ono," which isn't too far away from Jerusalem, but nevertheless, it's outside of the responsibility of Nehemiah. But it sounds like they wanted to consult with him: "Well, let's have a meeting and see if we can get over our difficulties." That's what it appears to be: somehow to reconcile our problems and our difficulties. But of course, their hidden—their true purpose, their hidden reason was they were looking for some way to do him some

harm. And as has been stated by Harold, we're not sure what exactly that was, and I'm not even sure if they knew. But they were trying to get an inroad somehow to get Nehemiah to compromise with them.

Now who do they represent, these enemies? They really represent not real believers. You remember who these Samaritans—there were Samaritans, and who they were. If you go back to 2 Kings, we could refresh our minds as to what they believed and what they represented. 2 Kings chapter 17 and verse 33, it says concerning these Samaritans:

> [2 Kings 17:33 NKJV] They feared the LORD,

That is, they acknowledged the Lord Himself. That is Jehovah. That word is Jehovah. So they acknowledged Him. They knew the name of the supreme God, the God who made covenant with Israel. So they feared Him, or they acknowledged Him in some way:

> yet served their own gods--according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away.

So they carried the name of the people of God in name only. They were not true believers. They knew the jargon, they knew a lot of the customs, they knew a lot of the laws of Israel; however, they did not truly worship Jehovah. They worshiped their own gods, although they acknowledged Jehovah.

So they represent for us a world that professes to be Christian and would like to be reconciled to the real Christians. They make inroads: "Let us consult together. Maybe we can sort out our difficulties." Christendom—this represents at large Christendom at large, because most of Christianity is by profession alone. Most of it is all just ritual, and a lot of it is idolatry in many, many places. And, you know, the Vatican, they have councils where they want to reach out to evangelicals—amen—and bring them into their fold, as it were. And so it's really like a tactic of the evil one to say, "You know, I believe the same as you. Therefore let us have a consultation and see where we can find common ground." And it sounds very, very good to those who are untaught.

But not a man like Nehemiah. Nehemiah had a singleness of heart and mind to do nothing but the will of God. Why do you think that the Roman Catholic Church—I named them; they're the most prominent—why do you think they want to bring the evangelicals into the

fold? They tried to persecute them for centuries, but in our modern age, they can't do that anymore without appearing as what they really are: haters of God. So what they do is they try then to attempt to compromise, to bring the evangelicals into their fold. Or you have the Ecumenical Movement. That's the name that was given to this movement that would try to draw in—and they did draw many churches into their fold. Some of the good Christian organizations, they were parachurch organizations, they went first into that fold. However, that did not work. That attempt by the enemies of God did not work with Nehemiah. He says:

> [Nehemiah 6:3 NKJV] So I sent messengers to them, saying, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?"

Amen! What could be added to the work that I'm doing by going down there and meeting you? The work is here, not there. The work is **here**! And so he says, "I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?" What can you add to the work of God? Nothing! Four times he does that. They send it four times, and he continued to answer. And if they had sent it seven times, he would have answered the same thing.

So I'll stop there tonight, and then perhaps we can pick it up then in verse 5, is it? Oh, yes, verse 5. We pick it up next time, I would guess.

Okay, so again, thank you all. Good to see everybody here tonight. We're praying that the Lord is going to continue to bless us. And Nehemiah didn't give up, and by the grace of God, we're not going to stop either. We're going to keep telling people about Jesus. And so pray that the Lord's work today will bring good results, and pray that the Lord will do the same tomorrow and throughout the week.

Someone please close in prayer. Thank you. Thank you. Sorry. Okay.

Closing Prayer

Our loving Heavenly Father who art in heaven, we do hallow Your name. And thank You for the church, the body of Christ, and for the message that went out this evening. Yes, there is danger in the church, and we pray that people would be aware of what's happening. But most of all, Lord, I thank You for the work of 16th Avenue and what they're doing, and for those who have been baptized, those who have been saved, and for the ESL work that goes on. Amen.

Lord, thank You for what You've done for the church here on 16th Avenue. Pray that You would bless the Bible study too, when we realize that we are to be persistent in the work and in the work that God's given us to do: to reach out, and to reach out to the poor, and to support the weak, and support those who are hurting. But most of all, Lord, I pray that we would also be able to increase the work of God too in our ministry of support.

Now, Lord, would You bless as we go back now and as we go to our week? Thank You again for the Lord's Day, especially the Lord's Table, reminding us again of the awesomeness of our God: "This do in remembrance of Me." May we always enjoy it; may it be a joy to remember what You have done for us.

Now, would You bless as we separate? Would You separate with Your blessing? And thank You again for the message that went forth from both Harold and Eric, and that we would remember that You want us to be faithful in our prayers and what we can do for the glory of God.

Thank You now, Lord, for what You've done, and we just say thank You. And may we walk humbly before You this week. Make us a blessing in our life, and we're given the opportunity to share the glorious gospel too. Bless us now. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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