

14. TAKING PROBLEMS BY THE THROAT

Nehemiah was a cupbearer, wall builder, and a governor. Now we are at the last chapter of this grand book, Nehemiah is doing his final cleansing of the Israeli people.

It is easy for us to think less of the Israelites in the Bible because of their weakness in not trusting God. However, the principles of this Nehemiah apply very much to all of us in this modern day.

So, the Israelites built a wall around Jerusalem to protect themselves from attacks of the enemy outside. Just like them, we are good at keeping ourselves protected from external influences. We argue or protest against abortion, ungodly decisions made by ungodly politicians and so on. But what about the enemy within? We are going to see the very enemy we allow to come in to our homes and our hearts in this study.

The problems against a call to obedience in God's Word is not just limited to one area and one time, but every area in our lives in continuing base: spiritual realm, financial area, day to day living and even in our domestic relationship.

Nehemiah was a kind of person who would take the problems by the throat and dealt with them. How should we learn from Nehemiah and his determination to do what is right in the sight of God!

A. CONTINUING SPIRITUAL PROBLEM

The reason why Jesus could completely please the Father in heaven, is because Jesus was obedient to the every word of the Father.

Hosea 6:6 For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

God does not desire for sacrifice without obedient hearts, but He wants us to have obedient hearts to follow Him.

Nehemiah 13:1-3 On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God, because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. So it was, when they had heard the Law, that they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel.

God told these Israelites' ancestors not to get mixed up with foreign people around their land in Ex 34:12.

Exod. 34:12 Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst.

In last week study, we talked about "Unequally Yoked" in marriage, dating and doing business. God didn't set that rule to ruin our fun, but to protect us from falling into devil's traps.

Between v3 and v4 we don't know how much time was passed. Nehemiah returned to his former position as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes as he promised to him and his queen. But when he came back to Jerusalem, the people of Israel had returned to their old bad habits as a dog returning to his vomit.

Prov 26:11 *As a dog returns to his own vomit, So a fool repeats his folly.*

Nehemiah 13:4-9 4 Now before this, Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, was allied with Tobiah. 5 And he had prepared for him a large room, where previously they had stored the grain offerings, the frankincense, the articles, the tithes of grain, the new wine and oil, which were commanded to be given to the Levites and singers and gatekeepers, and the offerings for the priests. 6 But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king, 7 and I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. 8 And it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room. 9 Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I brought back into them the articles of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense.

Tobiah was that dirty rat who opposed against Nehemiah from building the wall around Jerusalem from the day one and he was the one of the very mixed multitude. This idiotic Eliashib the priest allowed Tobiah to come into the temple and gave him a nice suite. Literally, the enemy sneaked back into the very heart of the Israelites by their high priest.

To bring ungodly things back into our lives and hearts, we end up removing godly things out of our hearts in return. They cannot be coexisted. Whatever we allow in our hearts, that is going to take control over our minds.

The spiritual maturity and godliness cannot be measured by what we do in front of other people, but what we do behind closed door when nobody is looking, no one to be accountable. That is who truly we are spiritually.

Nehemiah was not interested in winning popularity contests. His only interest was in cleaning out the evil that was already affecting the people's ability to hear and obey the Word of the Lord.

After we remove ungodly things out of our hearts, we need to cleanse them and purify them and fill them with the Word of God which is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16).

B. CONTINUING FINANCIAL PROBLEM

Nehemiah 13:10-14 I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. So I contended with the rulers, and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their place. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse. And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse Shelemiah the priest and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah; and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were considered faithful, and their task was to distribute to their brethren. Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services!

After they made a covenant with Nehemiah about their financial support for the priests, they backed off and broke the covenant with Nehemiah and God.

It is better not to make a promise with God, but simply do what the Lord tells us to do in His Word. Because whenever we promise to God that we are going to be better next time without commitment, we are relying on our own strength to get the things done than His strength. The result is same all the time, flat on our faces.

You are thinking by now, "Oh no, he is going to talk about giving money to the church. All these Christian preachers want my money." Let me make a couple of comments:

1) Even though we have the money in our pockets, it is not our money. God allowed us to have, so we can make living. So everything we have belongs to Him.

2) I don't care how much you have and what you do with. It is your choice and you have to live with good rewards and bad consequences. But it is my duty to let you know that the love of money will control our hearts and destroy our obedience to the Lord.

Matt. 6:20-21 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

C. CONTINUING PROBLEM IN OBEDIENCE

Nehemiah 13:15-22 15 In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and loading donkeys with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them about the day on which they were selling provisions. 16 Men of Tyre dwelt there also, who brought in fish and all kinds of goods, and sold them on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. 17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day? 18 Did not your fathers do thus, and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Yet you bring added wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath." 19 So it was, at the gates of Jerusalem, as it began to be dark before the Sabbath, that I commanded the gates to be shut, and charged that they must not be opened till after the Sabbath. Then I posted some of my servants at the gates, so that no burdens would be brought in on the Sabbath day. 20 Now the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. 21 Then I warned them, and said to them, "Why do you spend the night around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you!" From that time on they came no more on the Sabbath. 22 And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your mercy!

Among the items of the covenant they signed before in chapter 10, keeping Sabbath was broken too. It is not about keeping Sabbath and keeping their traditions, but it is about obedient to God's Word.

At the root, this was a problem of priorities - there is nothing wrong with buying and selling, only when our desire to buy and sell, to make money or spend money, becomes more important to us than honoring God. This was a clear way the people of Israel were putting making and spending money before glorifying God.

Whether it is workplace or home, we should do what we honor God. We should be willing to refuse any temptation that makes us to compromise the Word of God. Once we allow a small compromise to set in our hearts, it will lead us for more compromises.

There was nothing indecisive about Nehemiah. You thought I step on toes. Nehemiah doesn't step on toes. He uses a sledge hammer on toes. It is not over yet.

D. CONTINUING DOMESTIC PROBLEMS

Nehemiah 13:23-31 **23** In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. **24** And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and could not speak the language of Judah, but spoke according to the language of one or the other people. **25** So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves. **26** Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin. **27** Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?" **28** And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was a son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite; therefore I drove him from me. **29** Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. **30** Thus I cleansed them of everything pagan. I also assigned duties to the priests and the Levites, each to his service, **31** and to bringing the wood offering and the firstfruits at appointed times. Remember me, O my God, for good!

The result of intermarrying with the pagan people was the mixing not only of blood, but of languages and beliefs as well. Israel was raising a generation of children who could not speak or understand the language of the Scripture. That means they cannot understand the Word of God and that translates to no faith in God Almighty.

I am a firm believer that missionary dating is nothing more than a lie from hell. You cannot mix Christianity with any others. Because when you mix truth and lie, truth become a lie. The lie doesn't become truth. Any religions other than Christianity, no matter how sincere they are, is false and it is from the pit of hell. How are you going mix those two?

His example of Solomon is well taken. If Solomon, the wisest man ever, sinned with unwise and ungodly romance, do we think we are capable to handle it? A fat chance!

So if you are in romantic relationship with unbeliever, before it get hotter, stop it now. I am not telling you this, but God's Word is.

In v25, we find Nehemiah taking very drastic actions against these people: The word "cursed" means "to treat with contempt, to revile." It is a very severe term.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Are we filling our hearts with something ungodly?

As Jesus cleansed the temple twice and drove out all the merchants and animals and turned the money tables upside down, we often have to go through our own hearts with the spiritual righteous whips and drive out anything ungodly from our hearts, because we are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Ps. 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.

God is faithful to those who are obedient to Him.

2) Is the love of money in our heart getting a better grip than our love for the Lord?

Let's not cheat ourselves from the blessings of the Lord by trying to keep that few dollars in our pockets. We cannot outgive our God. If we learn to trust Him with our pocket book, we can trust Him with everything.

3) Correcting wrongs demands fearless conviction.

The fear of what others might think or say, the fear of upsetting the status quo, the fear of being misunderstood should not overshadow the fear of the Lord in our hearts.

4) We can clean our hearts, give money to God's work, and have fearless conviction. But if we don't fill our hearts with the Word of God, they too shall live short lives.

Unless we replace those bad habits and sins of our lives with the Word of God, the latter stage will be worse than the former.