

Title: Internal Threats Against the Unity of God's People

Passage: Nehemiah 5

Key Truths:

- Satan's strategies:
 - External threats: Stir people who do not love God to persecute His people (Nehemiah 4),
 - Internal threats: Use people who are infiltrated among God's people to pretend to be God's people and create disunity, (Nehemiah 4); and Tempt God's people with power and influence to stray away from His Word. (Nehemiah 5)
- Key Distinction: Anger
 - Righteous anger: I angry because God doesn't get what He deserves,
 - Unrighteousness anger: I not getting what I deserve.

Application:

- Think of the example of our Lord Jesus Christ; He used all that He had for the benefit of others.
- Listen to the Words of Jesus.
- We are blessed to be a blessing to others; it is better to give than receive.
- Be a hospitable person like Nehemiah.

Possible Discussion Questions:

- What point(s) in the sermon did the Lord most impress upon you?
 - How would you describe yourself - a godly or ungodly rich person? Why?
 - What can you do in the coming week to show hospitality to someone around you?
 - Who may you consider inviting to church this Easter Sunday?
 - What next steps will you take in response to the sermon?
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Introduction / Recap

- When God moves, Satan is also on the move - looking to undermine or attack what God is doing.
 - Satan's nature is always destructive.
 - Where God brings life, Satan wants to bring death.

- Where God brings unity, Satan wants to bring disunity and dissension.
- Satan's strategies:
 - External threats
 - Stir people who do not love God to persecute His people (Nehemiah 4),
 - Internal threats
 - Use people who are infiltrated among God's people to pretend to be God's people and create disunity, (Nehemiah 4); and
 - Tempt God's people with power and influence to stray away from His Word. (Nehemiah 5)
- Examples today:
 - People in the church who question whether what God describes sin is truly sin.
 - People who say they are Christians but live like the world or even worse than unbelievers.

Nehemiah 5 - see threats of:

- love of money, power, greed, and selfishness

EXPOSITION

Nehemiah 5:1-5

Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. For there were those who said, "With our sons and our daughters, we are many. So let us get grain, that we may eat and keep alive." There were also those who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine." And there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards. Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children are as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards."

Problem of poor and rich.

- Misperception: Only solution is to take from rich and give to the poor. Rich are bad people while poor are honorable.

Categories

- Godly, poor people
 - People who have worked hard but in circumstances outside of their control
 - Ex: poor widow at the Temple
- Godly, rich people
 - Ex: Joseph
- Ungodly, poor people
 - Poor but never considerate of God's kingdom
- Ungodly, rich people
 - Ones who have wealth through unlawful ways.
 - Ones who have wealth through lawful ways but selfish.

Bible response:

Matthew 6:21

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Contrast: Karl Marx

- Was an atheist
- Believe in confiscation of private property and re-distribute.
- Goal: government run of utopia where the needs of each person are met.
 - Government is the highest authority (since there is no God).
- But it is anti-God and anti-liberty worldview.
- Ultimately, the system becomes corrupt because of sin in human flesh.

Nehemiah 5

- Godly, poor who are oppressed by the ungodly, rich but situation is fixed by godly, rich.
- Godly, poor seeking mercy from oppression as the ungodly, rich are following the law but harshly and beyond the intent of the law.

God's solution:

Nehemiah 5:6

I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

Anger

- See Jesus in the temple who drove people out.
 - Can be appropriate depending on intent and purpose
- Key Distinction:
 - Righteous anger: I angry because God doesn't get what He deserves,
 - Unrighteousness anger: I not getting what I deserve.

Nehemiah 5:7a

I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials.

- Nehemiah did not react first but did thoughtful analysis before responding.

Nehemiah 5:7b-8

I said to them, "You are exacting interest, each from his brother." And I held a great assembly against them and said to them, "We, as far as we are able, have bought back our Jewish brothers who have been sold to the nations, but you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us!" They were silent and could not find a word to say.

- Nehemiah stopped working on the wall to address the issue of the people.
 - Likewise, we need to talk a break and confront the sin issue promptly.

Nehemiah 5:9

So I said, "The thing that you are doing is not good. Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies?"

- The ungodly, rich people were going beyond the intent of the Law.
- The Law was actually clear to care for poor people

Exodus 22:25

"If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be like a moneylender to him, and you shall not exact interest from him.

Leviticus 25:25

"If your brother becomes poor and sells part of his property, then his nearest redeemer shall come and redeem what his brother has sold.

- Poor people in the Old Testament
 - They were cared for but not with free handouts.
 - People with fields would leave some portions on the edges and allow poor people to glean along the edges.
- Caution: Helping poor but actually doing more or hurt

- Book: "When helping hurts"
- Showering money on communities creates a dependency-mindset rather than developing self-dignity.

Nehemiah 5:10-11

Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest. Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the percentage of money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them."

- Summary: Repent and stop being greedy.

Nehemiah 5:12

Then they said, "We will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say." And I called the priests and made them swear to do as they had promised.

- People responded in repentance.

Nehemiah 5:13

I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may God shake out every man from his house and from his labor who does not keep this promise. So may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said "Amen" and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

- Nehemiah provided an additional picture of the severity of the promises made and the potential consequences with any breach of them.

Biblical example of the selfless leader:

Nehemiah 5:14-19

Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor. The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God. I also persevered in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. Now what was

prepared at my expense for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds, and every ten days all kinds of wine in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on this people. Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.

- Nehemiah provided a godly example of sacrificial leadership.

1 Timothy 6:17-19

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

Temptation: Thinking self as merely a godly, poor person.

But who is truly rich?

- Median worldwide income: less than \$8,200 per year.
- Contrast: median U.S. household income is \$93,000 (top 0.17% of the world)
 - Half that amount (\$47,000) is still 5 times wealthier than most of the world.
- If you have a toilet in the home, more well off than 65% of the world.
- If you have running, clean water, you are well off.
- Beware of with whom you are comparing. Instead of comparing yourself to other first-world people, what about comparing yourself to third-world people?
- Key question is:
 - Are you a godly, rich person, or
 - Are you an ungodly, rich person?

APPLICATION

Think of the example of our Lord Jesus Christ; He used all that He had for the benefit of others.

Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Listen to the words of Jesus.

Matthew 6:19-21

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 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.

Matthew 6:24

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

1 Timothy 6:10a

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.

Evaluation:

- Beyond normal necessities, where have you spent money?

We are blessed to be a blessing to others; it is better to give than receive.

Acts 20:35

In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Matthew 20:26-28

It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Be a hospitable person like Nehemiah.

- See qualities of a pastor (every mature Christian)
 - Titus 1
 - 1 Timothy 3
- Be intentional and be hospitable.
- Consider welcoming people to your place.
- People are not looking for friendly people, they are looking for friends.

2 Corinthians 13:11-14

Finally, dear brothers and sisters, rejoice! Be restored. Comfort one another. Be like minded. Live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.