

Nehemiah and faithful living in the face of internal struggles.

"⁶ When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. ⁷ I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!" Neh 5:6-7

NUGGET - In our daily lives we seek to be faithful followers of Christ. We want to do the things that we think will please Him. We want to live so that Jesus' name, which we bear through our baptism, is honored and shown in the best light. But so often that doesn't happen. We don't live up to the expectation we have of ourselves as disciples.

Heavens, when you say the word "disciples" that adds all sorts of pressure when we think of the stories in the gospels of those towering people of faith. Looking at all those people that followed Jesus during His earthly ministry, we don't see our lives being like them. At times like that, we would benefit remembering these verses from Nehemiah.

We have to deal with a traitor to living our lives for Christ. We have sin in our lives and the sin within us seeks to draw us away from Christ. We often want to trivialize sin. We are embarrassed that we have it and feel as though we should be able to handle it.

But in the lesson from Nehemiah today we learn that sin, like the trouble the people face living in Jerusalem comes at us in two ways. Sin has:

- Power and Cruelty

In verses [1-5](#) we hear the complaint of the people; that they are being treated badly. They are being treated cruelly. Satan knows that to keep you from serving Christ he has to treat you with cruelty. Sin does that, sin is unfair and sin seeks to hurt and destroy. Sin is a traitor to faithful living.

Sin also has power. Never forget that. Don't downplay that or make light of the power of sin. Notice in the [verse 7](#) that it was the nobles and officials of the city that Nehemiah accused. They had power and they used it; so also with sin. If sin weren't powerful and cruel we wouldn't have needed Jesus to come and take its cruelty on Himself and suffer the penalty of the power of sin, which is death.

Nehemiah dealt with the situation in Jerusalem by bringing it out into the open - by exposing the power and cruelty for what it was. (Read verses [7-13](#) to see the result of what he did.) For us, that is what repentance does.

Repentance exposes sin for what it is and, (and that *and* is important!), and repentance grabs hold of God's grace. Daily we can use confession (the first part of repentance, which is sorrow for sin and admitting to God we sin) to expose the traitor within. **AND** trust, the second part of repentance. Trust is personally laying hold of what Jesus has done to defeat sin's power and cruelty; that trust shines the light of God's forgiveness for Jesus' sake into our lives.

APPLICATION - Consider the following about faithful living in the face of struggles;

1. Switch on a light and the darkness is expelled. So also in our life, the light of repentance expels the traitor. Remember that at least the next 3 times you turn on a light. Remember Nehemiah dealing with the internal struggles in Jerusalem.

PRAY - When you turn on the light in a room, pause to acknowledge to God the sin in your life and thank Him for the light of His forgiveness that is more powerful than that wicked traitor.

*Going Deeper together. We meet in the **Fellowship Hall** during the Education Hour for discussion and prayer with all those who're able to come. If you're not able to make it Sunday, please feel free to e-mail me with your comments or questions so that we can have the benefit of sharing them together.*

Peace in Christ, Pastor Tom Rhodes



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GOING DEEPER

Nehemiah faced struggles within Jerusalem as they sought to carry out God's will, the vision that Nehemiah received from God to rebuild the city. He identified some of the leaders of people within Jerusalem that were the cause of the problem as we've talked about. And through the process of repentance, Nehemiah brought about the needed changes so that the work of rebuilding could remain the focus. Taking a look at [verses 12-19](#): we learn how this affected Nehemiah.

We learn there that the king has made Nehemiah the governor of Judah. (*Where else in scripture do we see someone being raised to a new position, and how does that help us understand what is happening to Nehemiah?*) Along with being governor there come certain perks and certain responsibilities. As you read this section you learn that Nehemiah took on all the responsibilities of the office, but did not seem to take advantage of some of the perks. (Look especially at verses 15-16 & 18).

Verses [16](#) and [18](#) are pivotal to understanding how Nehemiah was affected by all that had gone on before him. (*How does all that has gone before also affect us, in carrying out God's will in our life? Don't forget to consider all things.*) These verses also reveal how Nehemiah's life anticipates the manner in which Jesus will act when comes to do His work. Nehemiah devotes himself and his officers to the work of the vision, and not to self-interest. "...we did not acquire any land." Though other leaders before him had pressed their advantage to personal gain (*any other of God's chosen leaders make this same mistake in some way?*), Nehemiah chose to keep himself, and thereby his people, focused on the work to be done to restore Jerusalem.

Jesus also did this. Though He was the almighty Son of the living God, who had claim to all things as Creator, He chose to remain homeless on this earth. Instead He kept His focus and energy pointed toward the goal of redemption that He came to accomplish *for* His creation. Nehemiah's actions in forsaking the opportunity for the oppression of the people he is leading foreshadow the faithful living that Christ demonstrated fully in the face of opposition and temptation.

It is faithfulness of daily living before the eyes of God and in the midst of opposition, that Nehemiah demonstrates for us today. (*What made it 'easy' for Nehemiah to recognize this opposition and its source? And what did that mean for the work of the people in fulfilling the vision?*) Among the responsibilities of a governor is that you feed from your table those who serve as your assistants and officials. And again Nehemiah's life reflects faithfulness by (in verse 18) never holding the perks of his office over those he led. In forsaking the governors' portion of food he helps to reduce the demands on the people he leads. Again we see in this a picture of Jesus. Jesus provides the food for His people, the holy food of His body and blood to strengthen those that He has come to redeem. He withholds nothing that we need for living life faithfully before God now.

Nehemiah sets a high standard for us to attain to. In the face of temptation, in the face of what is rightfully his portion, in the face of precedent set by those who have taken advantage of the people before him, Nehemiah turns aside from all this and seeks to serve his people

through faithful living. He then turns to God and lays all that he has done for these people at God's feet and asks for God's favor, His approval.

Nehemiah does not seek reward from those he leads; he puts his service to the people, his life, under God's judgment. And he seeks his reward there. (*What are the advantages [and disadvantages] to living and leading in this fashion?*) That is a great example for us. We have been redeemed from the sin that seeks to hold its cruel power over us. And we have been given the vision by Jesus Christ to tell others of what He has done for us. Now we too, like Nehemiah, pour out our lives in service to one another and to those yet to hear the name of Jesus and then leave our reward to God.

Let us hold tenaciously to what St Peter tells us about our reward which is kept in heaven for us ([1 Peter 1:3-5](#)) as we seek to follow daily where Nehemiah leads us today; to living lives of faithful service to our Lord in the face of internal struggles (*How does Nehemiah help us to identify what those internal struggles are?*) Remember that Jesus in [Matthew 28:19-20](#) said that He would always be with us so we are not alone in this struggle. And St Paul in his 1st epistle to the Corinthians ([15:57-58](#)) encourages us that the victory of Jesus Christ is ours and that nothing, no opposition, can remove that from us. God's peace and strength for daily living *is* yours by grace through faith. Peace, Pastor Rhodes.