

Nehemiah 5-6 - The Wall Is Finished

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Nehemiah chapter 5. In the last Nehemiah study that we had here, we talked about all of the difficulties they went through in attempting to just simply build the wall around Jerusalem and how many difficult things that they encountered.

And we talked about how similar that is to you when you make a determination in your life to just be obedient to God. You just make up your mind, I'm going to obey God. I'm going to do what God wants me to do. Whether it's in your marriage, or in your home, or in your business, or with your finances, or with your prayer life, or with your thought life, or what you're watching, or your entertainment, or whatever.

Just the Lord speaks to your heart, speaks to you about some area of your life that needs to be adjusted, and you just make that determination. Lord, I'm going to obey, I'm going to do what you want me to do, and then suddenly you find yourself with all kinds of opposition that is brought into your life in the midst of your attempt to walk in obedience to the Lord.

And that's really what we've seen that has happened here to Nehemiah as they are obeying the voice of God to do what they are doing. Just all kinds of crazy things have been happening.

But up to this point, most of the challenges have come from without. In other words, what I mean by that is they've had these outside sources that have been pressing in to try to, stop the work, confuse the workers, scare them, they've threatened them, and all these things.

Now, what we're going to find as we get into Nehemiah chapter 5, is that they're going to begin to deal with internal struggles. And these can be a little more personal. And frankly, even a little more disappointing. And we'll talk about why.

But here in Nehemiah chapter 5, verse 1, it says, “*Now there arose a great outcry of the people (these are the Jews) and of their wives against their Jewish brothers.*” (ESV) These are Jews who are bringing an outcry or a word of complaint about other Jews. Alright. This is a completely in house sort of an issue that they're dealing with. Alright. And that's one of the reasons why this

can be more discouraging. Because, you expect the enemy to be the enemy. You expect the enemy to be evil. You expect these outside attacks to be what they are. But when attacks begin to happen from within, it can be so much more challenging. And that's what we're seeing here in this passage. And then it begins to explain why this outcry is happening.

It says in verse 2, *“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.”³ There were also those who said, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine.”*

⁴And there were those who said, (you can see this is a multi-layered outcry) “We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards.⁵ 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.””

And it says in verse 6, and this is Nehemiah speaking here now. He says, *“I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.”* Stop there for just a moment.

As if the scorn and the ridicule and the threats of all of those who were angry at the Jews for building the wall wasn't enough, now they have to deal with issues of an internal nature. And they're bringing all these things to Nehemiah's attention.

Isn't it great to be in leadership, by the way? Nehemiah is trying to keep these people on track, being obedient to God with all of the things that are happening. And just one of the things about being in leadership is that people bring their complaints to you.

It's just like you're the complaint desk and they're coming to Nehemiah and not just a small group of people. There's a huge amount of people and there's this, as we've said, multi-layered outcry. There are basically 4 things that are being leveled at Nehemiah here that are going on.

For starters, the people were facing a food shortage. And we found out in verse 3 that it had to do with a famine that was going on in the land. Famines are never fun things. And so the people are short on food, and when people get short on food, they get short on temper. And those things explode rather quickly because people begin to panic.

Secondly, some of the Jews were wealthy enough to have stockpiles of grain. But rather than sharing those stockpiles with their less fortunate brethren, they decided that they were only going to sell it. And those who were needing to purchase grain to keep their families alive during this difficult time, well, they didn't have any money to do it, and so they had to surrender what belonged to them. Their fields, their vineyards, even their homes, as collateral, if you will, against purchasing grain for their families. That's the second thing that's going on.

Thirdly, those who didn't want to mortgage their property, but still wanted to pay cash for things were having to borrow money from other, again, more wealthy Jews in order to pay their taxes.

Boy, we're about at that time of year, aren't we? I've had people telling me about how much they've had to pay this year in their taxes. Sometimes it's just crazy. Obviously, the fewer dependents you have, the more you pay. And it's amazing to think that some people are paying as much as they are in taxes. But, taxes have been around for a long time.

Remember, the Jews are under the Persian dominion, and so they're not paying taxes to their own government. They're paying taxes to a foreign government. Can you imagine? I mean, we complain paying taxes to our own government. Can you imagine how we would feel if we were paying taxes to a government that had stepped into our land, dominated us, muscled us to the ground basically until we cried uncle, and then set up a military presence in our country to control us. And then said, oh, by the way, you got to pay. And they could basically charge whatever they want.

And usually those tax levies were fairly exorbitant so some people don't have enough money to pay taxes. So they're going to their other wealthier Jewish brethren, and they're saying, hey, can you help me? Would you loan me money to be able to pay my tax to the king? And as a result, they were being charged exorbitant interest rates by their brethren for these loans. That's the third thing.

The fourth thing that is going on here that's being brought to Nehemiah's attention is that, in order for those people to repay those loans, which they had no money to do, they were forced into slave labor, in which they even had to bring their children into play. They had to literally sell their children, if you will, into a forced labor sort of a relationship so as to pay off or to help pay off what the parents owed. That was a very common thing back in those days. Slavery was typically a result of debt, okay? People became enslaved when they became indebted. And if they had no means of paying back the debt with what

they were earning, they had to work for the person who had lent them the money. And they became enslaved because of it. And the children of these people were now serving these more wealthier Jews.

The bottom line of this whole thing, and this is what's coming to Nehemiah. The bottom line here, is that the poor people in Israel were being exploited and being completely taken advantage of by their wealthy kinsmen. That's what's happening. It's very simple. Been going on for a long time, but it wasn't supposed to go on among the Jews, and Nehemiah was really upset about this.

We'll talk about why here in just a little bit but look with me in verse 7 as we go on in the text. And Nehemiah says, *"I took counsel with myself, (which is a fancy way of saying, I had to think this thing through) and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials."* They are the wealthy people in Israel. The families of nobility and the families who are basically in some sort of an official capacity.

And he says, *"I said to them, "You are exacting interest, (we would call it today, charging interest so you can just throw that in there. "You are charging interest," he said) each from his brother."* *And I held a great assembly against them"* In other words, Nehemiah brought a lot of people together.

And he said to them, *"⁸ 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!" (and it says,) They were silent and could not find a word to say."*

Stop there please just for a moment. As I was giving you an example earlier about what they were dealing with, here in the United States of America, we really don't know what it's like to be oppressed by a foreign nation. For as long as we've been a sovereign nation, we have not had a foreign nation come onto our soil and oppress us in any sort of a long term sort of a way.

But, Israel, for over a hundred years now, they were no longer a sovereign nation. They were living, as I said, under the authority of the Medo Persian Empire. They were being taxed by that nation. They were forced to comply with the rules of that government, and they lived to please the king. A king that was not their king. A king that was a foreign king.

In other words, what I'm saying is they've been oppressed by a foreign country. Okay? For over a hundred years, they've been oppressed by a foreign nation.

And now, what is Nehemiah here that is happening? He hears that the people are oppressing one another.

And you can see how a leader, particularly a spiritual leader, would get pretty upset about this. These people are supposed to know better, for one thing. But secondly, it's like, look around you. Don't you see how we're all being treated? We're all being treated by the Medo Persians like we're basically a gnat under their thumb that they can come and squish any time they want.

And here you're treating your brothers in the exact same way when you ought to be helping them and giving them a leg up in a very difficult time. Remember, it's a time of famine. It's a time of great difficulty. The poor always suffer in times of famine, always. The wealthy get by, but the poor suffer.

Instead of the wealthy reaching out and saying, hey, how can we help you guys? How can we be a blessing to you guys? I know this is a really difficult season that we're going through, what can we do to help? They're charging them. Oh, you want to eat? Do you? You've gotten used to that, have you? Well, it's going to cost you. And not only is it going to cost you, it's going to cost you with interest. You don't have any money? Well, I'll take your house. I'll take your field. You got a vineyard? It's mine. You want to eat, right? Fine. You're not growing anything in your vineyard anyway, we're in a famine. Might as well just sign it over to me.

You see what's going on? There's a land grab going on. There's greed going on. And what is worse about this is that the Jews who were involved in this, these wealthy people were ignoring the covenant that they as a people had made with their God. Because there were very specific things that God had told them in the Mosaic covenant about how these things should go.

Let me show you a passage from Deuteronomy chapter 23, which is an example of this.

Deuteronomy 23:19-20 (ESV)

You shall not charge interest on loans to your brother, interest on money, interest on food, interest on anything that is lent for interest. You may charge a foreigner interest, but you may not charge your brother interest, that the LORD your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

You shall not charge interest on loans to your brother, interest on money, interest on food, interest on anything that is lent for interest. You may (go ahead

and) charge a foreigner (that's fine) interest, but you may not charge your brother interest, that (and here's why, look at this) the LORD your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.

This was one of the things God had told the people through the Mosaic Covenant. He basically said, listen, you want my blessing in the land. And if you want that blessing to flow into your lives, into anything that you undertake to do in the land, then follow my law.

Be a blessing to your fellow brethren when they need a leg up, when they need help. Don't kick them when they're down. Don't try to make extra money off them when they're having a hard time, be a blessing to them and I'll pour blessing into your life.

See, what's interesting about this is the, and this is the way Nehemiah sees it. He's sitting here saying, okay, here we are as a people petitioning God on a daily basis for protection because we got these people who are threatening to kill us. We got people who want to stop the work of the wall going up around Jerusalem, so we've been praying.

We've been saying dear God, protect us, keep us, watch over us, guide us with your power and so forth. And they're counting on those prayers being answered. Well, you know what they're praying about? They're praying about whatever they're doing in the land. This is what they happen to be doing in the land. They're building a wall.

God says to them, listen, do you want to be blessed as you do things in the land? Follow my law, follow the terms of the covenant that I made with you. And what does Nehemiah find out is happening? They're violating that covenant and at the same time praying for protection.

Frankly, this is a complaint that God has and is repeated through some of the other prophets in the Old Testament, where the nation of Israel will go through a period of time where they cry out for mercy, protection, and their hands aren't clean.

And so God confronts them. He says, boy, you got a lot you're praying about there, huh? Yeah, a lot of things. You need a lot of help these days. Praying about a lot of things. You want my help but you don't want to give up your sin. You don't want to change your life. You don't want to live a different sort of a way.

I don't know how long it's been since you read through the Old Testament, a Book of Malachi. I actually love that book. It's the very last book of the Old Testament. Next thing you run into is 400 years of silence and then Matthew.

But Malachi is a very fascinating book and even though there's no date as far as a way to date the book as to when it was written. Bible scholars generally believe that it was written during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. That those are the prophecies that God gave to the people during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Do you know what the basic premise or the message of the Book of Malachi is? It's basically this, you pray to me. You're asking for all kinds of blessings from my hand. And yet you're not living your lives in such a way as to bring about those blessings.

God confronted them with several things that they were doing. They were divorcing, the men were literally blowing off their marriages at the speed of sound. It was just, it was crazy. And He confronted them with it in the second chapter and said, hey you've taken this woman, the woman of your marriage covenant, and you've put her away. And then you want my blessing.

And then He confronted them about the fact that they weren't giving the tithes into the storehouse so that the poor and the Levitical priests could be fed and taken care of. And He says, you're not doing that. You stopped doing that.

And yet you want my blessing on your homes, on your fields, on your and God tells them in Malachi, it isn't going to happen. The blessings that you're seeking aren't going to happen. And He says to them, put away these deeds. You're sitting here crying crocodile tears. Why won't God hear us? Why won't God answer us? Why doesn't He receive our offering that we're offering, before Him?

And God says, I'll tell you why. Because your hands are dirty. Take care of what's going on in your lives and so that was the confrontation. And one of the other things He talked to him about was that the priesthood was corrupt during the time that Malachi prophesied as well. Let me show you, this is the icing on the cake, if you will. David wrote this in the Psalm, 66. He says,

Psalm 66:17-19 (ESV)

I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer.

I cried to him with my mouth, and high praise (he writes) was on my tongue. (but then he says this,) If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, (look at this) the Lord would not have listened. But truly God has listened; he has attended to the voice of my prayer.

Isn't that interesting? David says, I cried out to God, but if I had cherished sin in my heart. Now, what is David saying? And what am I saying to you? Am I telling you that you better have, you better be sin free before you pray to God? It's not what I'm saying. It's not what David is saying.

It's one thing to cherish sin in your heart and to hide it there and so forth. It's another thing to confess it. That's what God wants out of you and I. Just in case you were wondering.

We look at the sin of our lives, and we think God wants us to clean it up. The fact of the matter is, you don't have the power to clean it up, and neither do I. We can recognize it, we can turn from it, and we can pray to God because of it, and we can give it to the Lord that His work might be accomplished in our life to bring about a real change of our behavior.

Ultimately, there's nothing you and I can do in and of ourselves. I'm saying, to just grit our teeth and get over it. God doesn't come up to us and say, hey, buck up and just, pull yourself up by the bootstraps. It's time to get over this sin issue you got going on. Because we all deal with sin. We all deal with weaknesses and failures.

Here's the point. Are you willing to admit it? That's what God wants out of you and I. He wants that admission that says, Lord, this is sin in my life, and I am powerless to change this apart from you.

But with your power flowing through me, your Holy Spirit working in my life this can change. There's hope in you, Jesus. There's hope for me to find victory over this area of sin in my life, whatever that thing may be.

The power is through Jesus, not through you. You don't have that power, right? When it comes to sin, He just wants us to deal with it. At the foot of the cross, humble ourselves, And not cherish it. And that's an interesting phrase, isn't it? To cherish it in our hearts. What's the word picture you get there?

I see somebody in the spring and summertime of their sin, where they're just having a good time. And they're not ready to talk to God about it. They're not

ready to confess it. They're not ready to ask God to forgive them. They're not ready yet because they haven't, felt the sting of it yet.

Because, the Bible says sin is enjoyable for, what, a season. Right? And then after that, what happens? It's not enjoyable anymore. And then it's just horrible and it stinks, and it rots. Then we're all too anxious to bring it to the cross.

But there's that period of time in our life where we actually think, I think I'm getting away with this. And we'll hold back, even though we're convicted. We'll hold back. David even writes another Psalm where he talks about how he held back confessing his sin. And then he talks about what it was like when he finally got around to confessing it. It's like taking a house off your shoulders, isn't it?

When you're under conviction, oh, that is just a terrible existence. But then just to bring it to the cross. Jesus, this is me, and look at this sin in my life, and I confess it to you, and Lord, I confess to you, not only that this is sin, I confess to you I can't change this thing. I confess to you that I am powerless to change it, but I'll tell you one thing I'm not going to do.

I'm not going to cherish it in my heart anymore. And the way that's going to change is I'm going to start to let the light of your presence shine into that area of my heart. I've kept it closed off in the dark, where sin likes to grow, by the way.

But I want to begin to let the Word of God shine into my life related to that area of sin. That's what God's looking for in our lives, and, yeah. Let's keep going here now.

Verse 9. *“So I said, (this is Nehemiah speaking now) “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? ¹⁰ Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants (he's admitting here, we're also) are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest.”* Or charging of interest.

Nehemiah tells us here that he too was one of the people who was actively involved in lending money to poor people but he wasn't charging interest. And so what he's saying to them is, follow my example in this thing. I'm doing what you guys are doing. I'm lending money too, to these poor people, but, no interest you guys. Stop it. Let's knock it off. Notice the reason here in verse 9 that he gives for them doing what is right.

He says, I ought you not to walk in the fear of our God. The fear of God. What is the fear of God? It's just the understanding that God sees, and He knows, and He will hold us accountable. It's not a cringing fear like the scarecrow in front of the Wizard of Oz every time he's talking. It's not that kind of fear.

It's just the it's the thing that guides us through life, and keeps us from doing what is wrong because there's a God. There's a God in heaven and He holds men accountable.

In our case, as children of God, we know that our sin isn't going to be punished in an eternal sort of a way, but yet God still disciplines those whom He loves. And I'm inviting the Lord's discipline if I'm just going to do what ought not to be done, and so forth, and not fear the Lord. So what are they supposed to do?

Verse 11 is now where Nehemiah gives them some specific direction. Verse 11, *“Return to them (and notice the immediacy of it, the urgency of it) this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the percentage of money, (and that’s referring to the interest of whatever) grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them.”* Whatever you've been charging interest on, return it, and return it, today.

Why do you think Nehemiah is calling for an immediate response of the people? Well, first of all, repentance needs to be immediate. But second of all, if you stretch things out, our sinful nature being what it is, we lose our resolve so quickly. And we'll put things off that otherwise ought to be done. I mean, let's face it, when you are being, when I'm being convicted of a sin in my life, my natural response is to put off repentance until I'm particularly, I reach a certain level of, miserable. But that's just the way we go. We'll put things off. We'll put it off as long as we possibly can.

Nehemiah is a good leader and he knows human nature. And he says to them, guys, here's what you need to do. This very day, return their fields their homes, their olive orchards, and whatever else. And the interest, return it to them, give it back to them.

Verse 12, and *“Then they said, “We will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say. (and that's a good response. But then Nehemiah goes on, he says,)” And I called the priests and made them swear to do as they had promised.”* I don't know about you, but that to me is a bad thing. When you have to go to the priests, those who are in charge of the spiritual lives of the people, and you got to make them swear to obey God, you can see how far down we've gone. You can see how, discouraged potentially Nehemiah could

become by looking at the religious leaders of Israel, and he can see that their hearts just aren't in it. And so he's like, hey guys, swear to me you're going to do this. Swear to me you're going to, be obedient to this thing. Alright, we swear, you know. It's not a good sign.

Verse 13, and then to kind of illustrate this whole thing, he says, *“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.”*

Fortunately, we see here that last statement is the people really, truly were genuinely touched with a heart of repentance. And by the way, the word repentance isn't used in this passage, but this is repentance. This is repentance.

You want to know what repentance looks like? It looks just like this. It's turning around and going the other way. You're heading north, turn around and go south. If you're heading east, you turn around and you go west. It literally means a change of mind. But if there isn't a change of direction to go along with that change of mind, then you're just playing games. These people are literally saying, we're going to stop doing what we've been doing, and we're going to actually even return what we had taken.

Verse 14, Nehemiah goes on and says, *“Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor...”* Now this is brand new, we never heard this before. He came to oversee the building of the wall, now we find out, he actually becomes the governor.

By the way, that's the highest position in the land because there is no king anymore. Kings aren't happening. Right? They're only governors under the Medo Persian rule. And here's Nehemiah, he's been brought to the position of governor in the land.

And he says here, he says, *“...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.”*

You might say, well, wow, that's kind of dumb. He didn't eat the food that was given for the governor to eat, they just let it go to waste. No, that's not true. See, the food allowance of the governor was taxed from the people. What Nehemiah is saying, is that during the entire 12 years that he was governor, he never took

advantage of the levy or the taxation that was demanded of the people to feed the governor and his household. And his household was no small thing as we're going to see here.

But in verse 15, he tells us that, "*The former governors (or the governors of that land that came before him) 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. (and he said) But I did not do so, (because of why? What does it say in your Bible?) because of the fear of God.*" Because he feared God.

Here's the interesting thing. This is a right that he had according to the edict of the king. The king basically said, listen, the people must pay this amount of money to support the governor. Now, supporting government officials is not wrong, there really isn't fundamentally anything wrong with that. These people have devoted all of their time and attention to the work of governing. And it really should be the job of the people to pay a fair wage to these individuals. There's nothing wrong with that.

And yet, Nehemiah didn't take it, didn't accept it. Why? Because he wanted to bless the people, and because he wanted to express his fear of God.

Verse 16, he says, "*I also persevered in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work.*" In other words, and it sounds like sometime during the course of the construction on the wall, at some point, Nehemiah became governor while the work was still progressing.

And the very real temptation of a government leader is to kind of say, well, I have work to do administratively, and so I really shouldn't be here getting my hands dirty with all this menial labor. Obviously that's for you people to do, so I'm going to just head back to my office where it's air conditioned and they're bringing me, lemonade on the hour and I'm just going to kind of chill and just be the governor. Right? That everyone expects.

Notice what he says here. He says, we came to work. As governor, when it was time to get up in the morning and to go out to the wall and start working, Nehemiah went out and worked right alongside everybody else, and so did his officials as well. He said, boys, we're going to work. Put on your work duds, the duds, whatever you put on, and we're going to go and we're going to put in a day's labor today.

Verse 17, *“Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. ¹⁸ 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.”*

So the governor's house fed a minimum of 150 people a day. You can imagine, that's a lot of people, that's a lot of food. And he's saying here, I paid for it out of my own pocket. As the governor, I had the right to take the tax from the people to take care of these financial obligations, but I paid for them out of my own pocket.

And then he ends the chapter simply saying in verse 19, *“Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.”* And that's a common refrain for Nehemiah.

Chapter 6. Now, more opposition from without. *“Now when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it (although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates),*

² Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, “Come and let us meet together at (that place there) Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono.” (but he says here very clearly) But they intended to do me harm.”

Remember, he was the governor of the land. Do you guys remember? The governors of the land didn't always fare really well with people. Do you remember in the Book of Jeremiah? The very first governor of the land, who was a godly man. Jeremiah liked him very much. He was assassinated.

The threat of being assassinated was very real. Right? And Nehemiah knows that these guys are trying to, under the guise of official business. You're the governor now, they sent him this official message, probably on their, official letterhead, saying, please join us at this special location where we're going to be having a meeting, and as governor, you certainly are going to want to be there because this is official business. But Nehemiah says, I knew what they were doing. They wanted to harm me. They wanted to kill me. And he knew and understood that.

Look what he says in verse 3. *“And I sent messengers to them, saying, “I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I*

leave it and come down to you?”⁴ And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner.”

They didn't stop. They were relentless. They kept sending messages. Nehemiah, come and join us for this special official meeting of all of us leaders. And he kept saying over and over again, hey, I'm in the middle of doing this work.

Wouldn't that be great if you and I had that same attitude about obedience to God? And we would say, whenever there was some kind of a distraction, I am busy doing the work of the Lord. Why should I stop doing the work of the Lord to go down and, fiddle fiddle with you? And waste time when there's this work that needs to go on. Wouldn't that be incredible?

Think about the things that distract you in the area of your obedience from God. Just think about, in your own mind, what are the distractions? What are the things that draw you away? Or at least have the potential of drawing you away? I could probably come up with a bunch of them here. I won't because they're fairly personal, but I could think of things, believe me. Wow.

What if every time those things knocked on my door, I said, hey, this is the work of the Lord going on. Why should I stop doing the work of the Lord to go and waste time with you.

Verse 5, it says, *“In the same way Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand.⁶ In it was written, “It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, (that’s like saying, I heard it on the internet so that means it’s true) that you and the Jews intend to rebel; (or something like that) that is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports (we’re hearing that) you wish to become their king.⁷ And (furthermore, as far as we can see) you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, ‘There is a king in Judah.’ (and they're telling him) And now the king (Artaxerxes, he's going to) will hear (these things) of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together.”*

We better get together and talk about this because we need to talk about what to do, what to say when this thing all comes apart. Because if we're not on your side, if you, I mean, if this is false, Nehemiah, don't you think you think probably better get with us and tell us and convince us that it is so that when the king asks us about it, we can say no, no, no, that's not true. Nehemiah would never do something... Don't you think you probably better exonerate yourself from any kind of rumors that are going on in this sort of a way?

Now, what are they doing? They're expressing to Nehemiah this they're trying to get him to fire up this self-defense mechanism that, and it lives inside of all of us that makes us afraid that if we don't do something, some really bad stuff is going to happen. And it lives inside of all of us. I think you're in trouble, buddy. You better, we want to get together with you and see if we can't maybe diffuse this thing before it gets out of hand.

And it's just a ruse. There's nothing true about it. But even though we know sometimes that things aren't true or don't really have any bearing in reality, sometimes just that self-mechanism, self-defense mechanism or self-preservation mechanism will just snap to and we'll just like, oh, okay, I got to do this.

I love how Nehemiah just holds his ground. Look at verse 8, and, *“Then I sent to him, saying, “No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.”⁹ For they all wanted to frighten us, (he says) thinking, “Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.” But now, O God, strengthen my hands.”*”

What I love about Nehemiah is he's a man who has discernment enough to know this is a baseless attack of the enemy. And when there's a baseless attack of the enemy, there's no reason to get all up in a lather, just trust God.

Put your trust in God, just don't get upset, and don't get into panic mode. Do you know the enemy wants to get you into panic mode? So that you'll just... When we're panicking, we do all kinds of really dumb things. And I really love this example in Nehemiah, that he just has a cool head.

And first of all, he sends a letter back and goes, you know what, first of all, this, you just, you made all this stuff up. This is a figment of your imagination. There's no, this is baseless, fiction, first of all. But he says, I know what's going on.

And then he prays. I know what they're trying to do. They're just trying to frighten us so that we drop the work. We cease doing the work. So he prays, *“God strengthen my hands.”* Oh, that we might pray when panic begin to sets in.

Verse 10. *“Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined to his home, he said, “Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night.”*”

Now what he's suggesting that Nehemiah do is to go into the temple and basically hide himself in there so that these people who are wanting to assassinate him... Now this is a Jewish official who's telling him to do this. This is somebody who ought to be a friend, right?

Again, verse 11. Look at Nehemiah's response. *“But I said, “Should such a man as I run away? And (by the way) what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in.”*” I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to go hide. I'm not going to go hide, in the Holy of Holies or something like that, just so these guys aren't going to come in looking for me. I'm not going to do it. And, he said, I'm not going to run away.

He says in verse 12, *“And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy (if you will) against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had (actually) hired him.”* He was a man for hire.

“¹³ For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me.” Oh, that's the enemy loves to do that.

Gets you to really scared so you do something stupid. Then I can tell everybody how stupid you are. Enemy loves to do that rather than you and I just saying, I will trust God instead. I'm going to trust the Lord. I'm not going to become afraid.

Verse 14. I love his prayer. *“Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.”* But were just on their payroll.

Verse 15. *“So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶ And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us (it was their turn to be) were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, ...”*

Isn't that an interesting phraseology? They fell in their own esteem. In other words, they lost confidence in their ability now to hinder and hamper what was going on in Jerusalem because they realize God's in it. That's the thing. They realize God is in it.

And it says, *“for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.”* They knew that as much as they tried to stop it, and it never stopped, this had to be God.

“Moreover, (verse 17) in those days the nobles of Judah (and again, this is the nobility, they) sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them.” So they're passing letters back and forth.

“¹⁸ For many in Judah were bound by oath to (this Tobiah guy) him, because he was (actually and we find out here in verse 18, he was related to some of the Jews. It says he was) the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah: and (then) his son (Tobiah's son) Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as his wife.”

You can see that Tobiah and his son had married into Jewish nobility. Because of that, some of these people had sworn an oath to him, even if it meant going against their God. They were willing to risk the covenant relationship with their god. to support this Tobiah creep because they were related.

And it says in verse 19 that whenever they got together with Nehemiah, these nobles, it says, *“...they spoke of his good deeds in my presence...”*

They were constantly telling me, oh, he's a good guy. And they would tell me, oh, he likes the poor. He loves the poor. He works really diligently to help the poor. He's a good guy. He's a good man. He's always doing good things. He just, he loves to do, he's helping the widows and he's...

And they, it says, *“...and (they were constantly reporting what I said) reported my words (Nehemiah says, back) to him (Tobiah). Everything Nehemiah knew and understood. This guy is not a fool. He knows that whatever he says in front of these nobles who should be on his side, he knows it's going to get back to Tobiah. And he says, “And Tobiah (continually) sent letters to make me afraid.”*

And that pretty much explains whether Tobiah really is a good guy, doesn't it? Yeah, he was a creep. But anyway, that's where we're going to stop for tonight. Boy, doesn't it just It's almost frustrating to read some of this stuff, because he's just..., you think, why do bad guys have to be so bad? Why don't they just grow up and...

But we find out in John's Gospel. John says, this is the verdict. Light has come into the world, but men love darkness because their deeds were evil. (John 3:19) Because of that, they didn't want to come into the light for fear that they would be exposed for who they really are.

The bottom line, you guys, is people like darkness. They like it. They like it. And when the light shines through you, in your obedience to God, they don't want to see that light because that light does not reflect well on them. They're trying to evade the light as best they can. And the last thing they want to do is see it in you, so they're not going to like you.

They're going to want to oppress you. They're going to want to try to get you to dim your light. And you can see that's what's happening to Nehemiah here. They've been trying all these different end around, different sorts of option plays and this and that, to try to get Nehemiah to compromise.

The enemy wants you to compromise your life. You know why? Your light doesn't shine as bright in the midst of compromise. Compromise has a huge dimming effect to our Christian witness. And so the enemy, is obviously a tool that he wants to use very much. I'm going to get you, right about that time when you're telling people, like on Facebook, for example, that you're a Christian by, posting verses, which by the way, is a good thing to do.

I think if you're a believer and you're on Facebook, you should be posting scripture. I think that's a great thing to do, but just know this, the enemy is going to work on you. When he sees you being obedient to God, so that somebody's going to like say something, and you're going to come back with this total fleshly response. And he'll get you to compromise.

Because you've been saying all these things that are true about God, and then you're going to come out and just lambast somebody. Just absolutely, just this vicious sort of a response. Who are you to... And then suddenly everybody's going, Light's not shining so bright here now, is it, Mr. or Mrs. Christian? That's the enemy's m.o. Likes to do that.

That's what they're trying to get Nehemiah to do, run, hide. They're going to get you. Hey, I got work to do, man. I got work to do. And when the people are saying things and rumors are flying and they're saying, I understand that you're actually leading a rebellion here. That's, I mean, that's just the scuttlebutt. around town, that you're actually leading a rebellion and we hear that you're getting ready to proclaim yourself king? Does that sound familiar?

Oh the natural sort of a tendency on our part to defend ourselves at that point, to step up and just, say what we need to say, to call these people who they, what they are and try to shut him up and yet what we end up doing is we end up compromising our walk with the Lord in ways that just bolsters these beliefs.

When you are under attack, put your head down and walk forward in obedience one step at a time. There are days when you just have to do that. Sue and I were talking about this out on our walk today.

I was telling her, there's those times, and there's been times in my life when there were attacks coming from all over. And sometimes, you can sit and you can answer every attack and you can try to put out every fire. But you know what? That's going to dominate your time.

You're going to be writing notes on Facebook, or emails or tweets, or whatever, however you do, and you're going to be putting out all these little fires about all these things that are going on. Or, you can put your head down, and you can say, this is the road that God has ordained me to walk on, right here.

This is the road of obedience, right here. I'm going to put my eyes on obedience to the Lord, and I'm going to walk it out, and I'm going to let God handle the fallout from all these other things. I'm just not going to get involved.

That's what Nehemiah is showing us an example of here in this passage.

Just walk it out, be obedient, glorify the Lord.