

Opposition from Within

3.14.10

“Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers.” The inclusion of the wives shows the significance of the problem. It was against their own.

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.” 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.”

A Perfect Storm of Trouble:

1. There was a famine leading to starvation (v.1). People were having to mortgage their homes to buy just enough food to survive. In this agrarian culture, this was an even more significant problem because people were not only fed from the land but also made a living from it (v.2-3).
2. In addition to these difficulties, they were required to pay exorbitant taxes to the king on the land they could keep (v.4).
3. As if these weren't bad enough, the poorer Jews had borrowed money from the wealthier Jews to pay the tax to keep their land. Because they couldn't pay back their loans, they were having to sell their children into slavery and, likely, even prostitution. They could do nothing about it (v.5).

P: There is always a price to be paid for doing God's work.

Do I know this is true? Do I know Jesus has suffered before me? Do I turn to Jesus when I suffer?

“I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.” This is significant anger.

P: God's people *should* be angry at the things that make God angry.

Anger in the Bible:

1. Righteous Anger: Becoming angry about the things that make God angry but not sinning in the process (Eph. 4:25-27)
 - a. Do the things that make God angry make me angry? If not, why not? What should change?
 - b. We need to be careful to not assume *everything* is righteous anger.
2. Unrighteous Anger: Something in that process gets derailed.
 - a. Examples: Nebuchadnezzar. Peter cutting off soldier's ear.
3. Any time we find ourselves getting angry, we need to ask “Why am I Angry?”
 - a. Is this righteous anger? If so, what righteous action is God leading me to take?
 - b. Is this unrighteous anger? If so, repent and look for the “sin behind the sin.”

“I took counsel with myself...” Nehemiah stopped to think before he acted.

P: It is a wise person that takes stock before taking action.

Do I think before I speak or act or do I “act first and apologize” later?

“and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. I said to them, “You are exacting interest, each from his brother.” This was called “usury.” Loaning money wasn't a problem but charging interest to another Jew was a direct violation of the Law that God had established - a serious sin.

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. 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? 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.” He lets them have it- appropriately.

P: Good leaders appropriately confront sin and call for repentance.

Do I do this in my own life? With others? Do I do this the proper, Gospel-centered way?

“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.” They heard and responded accordingly.

“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.” Public ceremonial gesture.

The Pathway to Change

1. Confrontation (*Scripture: can be through sermons, group, personal conversations. etc.*).
2. Conviction and Confession. (*We recognize we are wrong and confess our sin.*)
3. Repentance (*A spiritual “U-Turn.” “Putting off” our sinful practice.*)
4. Restitution (*“Putting on” Christ. Making amends when we can. eg. Paying back the money*)

What do you need to put off today? Put on? Where have you “stopped short on this path?”

“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.” Nehemiah shows profound character for a powerful reason.

P: Good leaders do the right thing for the right reason.

Is this kind of servanthood at work in my life? Do I do the right thing for the right reason?

“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.” When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work.” Even more profound character.

P: Nehemiah provides a profound picture of generosity, self-sacrifice and an eye toward Ultimate Reality.

Am I following this example of generosity, self-sacrifice and eye toward heaven?

The example of Nehemiah points us to the example and empowerment of Jesus.