

When We Care Enough To Confront **Nehemiah 5:1-13**

INTRO:

What do you do when things are rolling along and suddenly, out of nowhere, a problem bursts into the open which threatens the whole work? This is exactly the situation Nehemiah faced in **Nehemiah 5**. The work was moving forward. Every man had his job and they were busy about the work. The work was going so well that Nehemiah could report, in spite of the opposition of Sanballet and Tobiah, ***“the walls were half built because the people had a mind to work.”*** Suddenly, there was an outcry of the people. Morale took a nose dive. A problem that had festered beneath the surface unexpectedly broke forth. How is a leader to respond? What steps is he supposed to take? Nehemiah will show us.

I. The Situation (v. 1-5)

II. The Confrontation (v. 6-13)

I. The Situation (v. 1-5)

Nehemiah 5:1–5 *“And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren. For there were those who said, ‘We, our sons, and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live.’ There were also some who said, ‘We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain because of the famine.’ There were also those who said, ‘We have borrowed money for the king’s tax on our lands and vineyards. Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and indeed we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been brought into slavery. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards.’”*

A. In John Bunyan's masterful allegory *Pilgrim's Progress*, we meet some very interesting people. There is “Pilgrim” who is on a journey to the celestial city. We also find “Faithful” and “Mr. Worldly Wise.” I am sure if Bunyan were to write his book today he would have included another character, “*Mr. Make a Buck*” to reflect those who make merchandise of the work of God.

1. There were ***Mr. Make a Bucks*** in Nehemiah's day too. Do you remember those nobles who wouldn't put their necks to the work? Well they didn't sit around idle, they came up with a way to make big money on the work of God.
2. You can't eat walls and with the labor diverted to wall construction, little planting was being done. So, the people had to mortgage their farms and borrow

money to buy food. You already know who lent the money don't you? Yep, nobles lent it. Then the bills began to come due. The interest was high and the nobles were not given to sentimentality so they forced the people to sell their children into slavery and to give up their property to satisfy their debts. The people having no way to redeem their children saw these Nobles sell their children to the Gentiles around them to get their money out of them. The result of all this is that the people were upset.

B. Now besides being cruel and unfeeling, the situation was compounded with the fact that everything these “*Mr. Make a Bucks*” did went against the express command of God. It was sin.

C. In **Exodus 22:25** the LORD commanded,

“If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest.”

D. Secondly, if your countryman sold himself into slavery to you to satisfy his debts, you were not to treat him as a slave, but as a hired servant.

Leviticus 25:35-40 ***“If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you. Do not take interest of any kind from him, but fear your God, so that your countryman may continue to live among you. You must not lend him money at interest or sell him food at a profit. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God. If one of your countrymen becomes poor among you and sells himself to you, do not make him work as a slave. He is to be treated as a hired worker or a temporary resident among you; he is to work for you until the Year of Jubilee.”***

You were not under any circumstances to sell him in a slave market.

II. The Confrontation (v. 6-13)

A. When we care enough to confront, we must keep in mind the confrontation must be undertaken with great care. To rush hurriedly and headlong into a confrontation is to court disaster. It must always be done after careful preparation. Look at how Nehemiah prepared himself for the confrontation. Nehemiah's first response was anger.

v.6 ***“And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.”***

1. He thought before he acted. The Biblical principle is found in **Matthew 7:4** where Jesus said,

“How will you say to your brother, let me pull the mote out of thine eye: and behold a beam is in thine own eye?”

Prepare yourself before you confront someone else.

2. Nehemiah dealt first with his emotions (v.6). He acknowledged his first response to this news was anger. We find Nehemiah thought through the situation before he acted.

B. He then thought through what he would do.

v.7 *“After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, ‘Each of you is exacting usury from his brother.’ So I called a great assembly against them.”*

He consulted with himself and I am sure with the LORD also. The action he was about to take was very carefully thought out. Notice his actions were designed to solve the problem. (Too often we confront, not to solve the problem, but to make us feel better)

C. Finally, he acted (v.7). He rebuked the nobles and rulers for their sin. We must not go from anger to confrontation without contemplation in between.

James 1:20 *“The wrath of man doeth not the righteousness of God.”*

D. Having looked at the preparation we now need to consider the confrontation itself.

v.7-10 *“After serious thought, I rebuked the nobles and rulers, and said to them, ‘Each of you is exacting usury from his brother.’ So I called a great assembly against them. And I said to them, ‘According to our ability we have redeemed our Jewish brethren who were sold to the nations. Now indeed, will you even sell your brethren? Or should they be sold to us?’ Then they were silenced and found nothing to say. Then I said, ‘What you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? I also, with my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury.’”*

Here are some timeless truths about this process that we can learn here.

1. Deal first with the principle of sin, not personalities or motives. Nehemiah didn't say, "You money grubbing, self-centered, lazy, nobles, you are trying to destroy God's work here. All you care about is money!"

2. He did say "You are charging interest on loans to your brethren." That is a concise, unemotional statement of their sin. (v.7b-8) He dealt with them on the level of their offense. He took them before the people because their sin was against the whole. Make confrontation as private as possible.

3. He dealt with the heart problem. He did not say, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself." He said "You are not doing right. You need to examine your walk with the Lord!" He was clear to point out the cost of not changing. God would be reproached. He didn't say that everyone would starve and the work would be destroyed. He just said that God would not be glorified.

4. Finally, he demanded action.

vs.10-13 *"I also, with my brethren and my servants, am lending them money and grain. Please, let us stop this usury! Restore now to them, even this day, their lands, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also a hundredth of the money and the grain, the new wine and the oil, that you have charged them.' So they said, 'We will restore it, and will require nothing from them; we will do as you say.'" Then I called the priests, and required an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. Then I shook out the fold of my garment and said, 'So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied.' And all the assembly said, 'Amen!' and praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise."*

He laid out a plan of action to correct the situation.

E. Please note that the confrontation was not done to make Nehemiah feel better. He did it to correct the nobles' sinful actions, and to reconcile the situation on the part of the people.

How do we handle it when we care enough to confront?

1. Recognize sometimes we must confront.
2. When those times come, prepare yourself. Deal with your emotions.
3. Spend time in contemplation. Lay out a plan of restoration.
4. Then take action carefully, with a desire to help the one confronted.

The example God hates sin so He confronted our sin. We are all sinners. We are enemies of God. He lay before us a plan of restoration. Jesus died in order that we may be restored to Him. He then asked of us action receive Him. Being very clear about the consequences if we don't respond. How will we respond to God's confrontation?

Hymn #522 *He Lifted Me*