

OPPOSITION FROM WITHIN

TEXT: (Nehemiah 5:1-13, TLB)

¹ About this time there was a great outcry of protest from parents against some of the rich Jews who were profiteering on them. ² What was happening was that families who ran out of money for food had to sell their children or ³ mortgage their fields, vineyards, and homes to these rich men; ⁴ and some couldn't even do that, for they already had borrowed to the limit to pay their taxes.

⁵ "We are their brothers, and our children are just like theirs," the people protested. "Yet we must sell our children into slavery to get enough money to live. We have already sold some of our daughters, and we are helpless to redeem them, for our fields, too, are mortgaged to these men."

⁶ I was very angry when I heard this; ⁷ so after thinking about it I spoke out against these rich government officials.

"What is this you are doing?" I demanded. "How dare you demand a mortgage as a condition for helping another Israelite!"

Then I called a public trial to deal with them.

⁸ At the trial I shouted at them, "The rest of us are doing all we can to *help* our Jewish brothers who have returned from exile as slaves in distant lands, but you are forcing them right back into slavery again. How often must we redeem them?"

And they had nothing to say in their own defense.

⁹ Then I pressed further. "What you are doing is very evil," I exclaimed. "Should you not walk in the fear of our God? Don't we have enough enemies among the nations around us who are trying to destroy us? ¹⁰ The rest of us are lending money and grain to our fellow Jews without any interest. I beg you, gentlemen, stop this business of usury. ¹¹ Restore their fields, vineyards, olive yards, and homes to them this very day and drop your claims against them."

¹² So they agreed to do it and said that they would assist their brothers without requiring them to mortgage their lands and sell them their children. Then I summoned the priests and made these men formally vow to carry out their promises. ¹³ And I invoked the curse of God upon any of them who refused. "May God destroy your homes and livelihood if you fail to keep this promise," I declared.

And all the people shouted, "Amen," and praised the Lord. And the rich men did as they had promised.

I. ATTACKS FROM WITHIN

1. "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10, NIV).
2. "About this time there was a great outcry of protest from parents against some of the rich Jews who were profiteering on them. What was happening was that families who ran out of money for food had to sell their children or mortgage their fields, vineyards, and homes to these rich men; and some couldn't even do that, for they already had borrowed to the limit to pay their taxes" (Nehemiah 5:1-4, NIV).

A. They Lost Focus

1. "By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall" (Nehemiah 2:13-15, NIV).

B. They Settled for Broken Walls

1. “A little yeast leavens the whole lump” (I Corinthians 5:6, KJV).
2. “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight” (Isaiah 5:20-21, NIV).

C. The Snare of Greed Had Consumed Some

1. “About this time there was a great outcry of protest from parents against some of the rich Jews who were profiteering on them. What was happening was that families who ran out of money for food had to sell their children or mortgage their fields, vineyards, and homes to these rich men” (Nehemiah 5:1-3, TLB).

II. THEY NEEDED A LEADER TO CAST A VISION

A. Where There Is No Vision

1. “Where *there is* no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18, KJV).
2. “Where there is no revelation, people cast off restraint; but blessed is the one who heeds wisdom’s instruction” (Proverbs 29:18, NIV).
3. “If people can’t see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves” (Proverbs 29:18, MSG).

B. Living By the Proverb of the Faithless

1. “Son of man, what is this proverb you have in the land of Israel: ‘The days go by and every vision comes to nothing’” (Ezekiel 12:22, NIV)?
2. “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD. Yet he too is wise and can bring disaster; he does not take back his words. He will rise up against the house of the wicked, against those who help evildoers. But the Egyptians are men and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit. When the LORD stretches out his hand, he who helps will stumble, he who is helped will fall; both will perish together” (Isaiah 31:1-3, NIV).
3. “I am going to put an end to this proverb, and they will no longer quote it in Israel” (Ezekiel 12:23, NIV).
4. “Say to them, ‘The days are near when every vision will be fulfilled’” (Ezekiel 12:23, NIV).

C. Needed a Leader to Challenge Their Behavior

1. “I was very angry when I heard this; so after thinking about it I spoke out against these rich government officials.
‘What is this you are doing?’ I demanded. ‘How dare you demand a mortgage as a condition for helping another Israelite!’” (Nehemiah 5:6-7, TLB).

II. THE POWER OF SERVITUDE

1. “So they agreed to do it and said that they would assist their brothers without requiring them to mortgage their lands and sell them their children. ...And all the people shouted, ‘Amen,’ and praised the Lord. And the rich men did as they had promised” (Nehemiah 5:12-13, TLB)

A. The Way to Greatness

1. "You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things" (Matthew 25:21, NIV).
2. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3:23-24, NIV).

B. Keep Your Ego in Check

1. "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (I Peter 5:5, NIV).
2. "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (II Chronicles 7:14, NIV).
3. "If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes" (II Corinthians 2:5-11, NIV).

CONCLUSION

1. "Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people...and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD" (II Kings 22:19, NIV).
2. "For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel" (Ezra 7:10, NIV).
3. "I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people" (Nehemiah 5:18, NIV).