

“Problems Must be Taken by the Throat!”

Nehemiah 13 (13:30-31)

Intro. – He was a genius! By age five, he was playing the violin. At age thirteen, he was a concert organist. In his twenties he was studying under Haydin and Mozart. Mozart said of him, “He will give the world something worth listening to by the time his life ends.” Listen to this list of compositions he wrote in his lifetime: 9 symphonies; 5 concertos for piano, not to mention all the chamber music/sonatas for violin and piano he wrote.

The man’s name? Ludwig van Beethoven. Yes, the man was a genius, but, he was also no stranger to problems. It was during his twenties he began losing his hearing. This problem haunted him in the middle yrs of his life, but, he kept it a well-guarded secret. By his fifties, Beethoven was stone deaf. In this condition he attempted to conduct an orchestra. He failed miserably. Some five years later, Beethoven died.

While he was still alive, on one occasion, Beethoven was heard shouting at the top of his lungs as he slammed his fists on a piano, “I will take life by the throat!” Biographers agree because of his determination, Beethoven was far more productive than he otherwise would have been. He really did take life by the throat.

Let me borrow this phrase and apply it to our text. For a period of time after the building and dedication of the wall, Nehemiah continued to establish a righteous government in Jerusalem. In verse six we learn he leaves Jerusalem to return to Babylon for an undisclosed amount of time. During his absence, four areas of problems arose. When Nehemiah returned, he encountered these four problem areas and took them by the throat!

Purpose: to learn the principle that Biblical leadership means ACTION

I FRIENDSHIPS CAUSING COMPROMISE (vv 1-9)

A. Eliashib and Tobiah Were Friends

1. We don’t know much concerning these two, but, we know enough:
2. Eliashib:
 - a. was in charge of overseeing the chambers of Temple (more later)
 - b. referred to as *high priest of the Temple* (3:1; 3:28) = responsible for the vessels, rooms and worship of God in the Temple...
 - c. point = Eliashib was one of the main religious leaders of God’s people in Jerusalem!
3. Tobiah
 - a. an enemy of God and a constant problem to Nehemiah... read about in earlier chapters...
 - b. personally criticized, attacked and assaulted Nehemiah (2:10; 2:19; 4:3; 6:12,14,19)
 - c. Tobiah is classic example of the rebellious unbeliever who did anything to thwart will and work of God!

B. Nehemiah Addressed the Matter

1. Upon returning found Tobiah literally living in the Temple, Nehemiah took problem by throat!
2. Nehemiah goes into the room(s); throws all of Tobiah’s junk out and “ordered” the rooms be cleansed (i.e. fumigated... not even smell of Tobiah)...
 - a. having Tobiah in the Temple like having a fox in the hen house...
 - b. Nehemiah determined not to compromise Truth/convictions!

C. We Must Guard Against Compromise

1. Our friendships do much in determining our character, i.e. we become like those we befriend...
2. Do we have any idea the effect friends are having on our lives?
 - a. this was the issue Nehemiah was addressing: Eliashib was associating with Tobiah...
 - b. 1 Corinthians 15:33 *“Bad company corrupts good morals.”* Put another way: “You sleep with the dogs you eventually smell like the dogs.”
 - c. Proverbs 13:20 *“He who walks with wise men will be wise, but, the companion of fools will suffer harm.”*
3. Nehemiah is not concerned about being “politically correct,” but, was concerned about dealing with evil in the house of God! Deal with it he did – by the throat!!

We need to have like mindedness, avoiding all companionships that lead to compromising of the Truth!

II THE ROBBING OF GOD (vv 10-14)

- note: leaders always keep eyes open – not walking about whistling Dixie with their minds in neutral...
- A. Levites and Singers Were Leaving
 1. These were ones who served in Temple “full-time”... because of this, according to God’s wisdom/design they drew their living from the Temple...
 2. Money, however was not being given by people... all went suburbs
 3. Malachi 3:8-10 *“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, and test Me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.”*
- B. The Officials are Reprimanded and Restored
 1. Note: does Nehemiah wait for the next “meeting” to say “we ought to give some thought to this matter”?
 2. No! He reprimanded them (i.e. nailed their hides to the wall) then restored them to their responsibilities...
- C. Prayer is Offered
 1. We believe in prayer, right?! And all problems in our lives ought to be approached with prayer... (even sing “...take it to the Lord in prayer”)!
 2. But when situations resulting from direct disobedience to God’s will takes place, prayer often becomes a *spiritual cop-out* (i.e. forsaking our own responsibilities)
 - there’s no substitute for obedience – e.g. if a child wanders out in street we don’t fall on our knees and pray for the child’s safety do we? We immediately do everything in our abilities to snatch the child from harm’s way!
 3. When we “traffic in the realm of wrong,” God expects immediate action on our part in correcting it
 - Illus. – remember being in a singing group... tempers were flaring and tension was high... called on for prayer... brother spoke up, “I can’t pray or give the appearance of prayer until we resolve this tension...”
 4. Note: Nehemiah reprimands, restores and THEN PRAYS
 - Illus. – preacher in a meeting... heated discussion... “Let’s pray.” “I don’t feel like praying; instead, I fell like cussing. Let’s do our part to resolve this and then pray!”
- D. We Must Not Rob God
 1. Giving is a prominent teaching throughout Scripture...
 2. When God’s people do it God’s way, financial, talent etc. problems will not overwhelm!

III THE SECULARIZING OF THE SABBATH (vv 15-22)

- A. Clarifying of Terms
 1. Sabbath never has and never will be Sunday – Sabbath was and is Saturday or “day of rest.”
 2. Nehemiah 10:31 *“As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath...”*
- B. Sabbath Turned Into “Day After Thanksgiving”
 1. Nothing wrong with making a profit or having good honest business... just don’t do it on the Sabbath under the Jewish economy.
 2. This is exactly what Nehemiah found in Jerusalem (13:17b-18)...
- C. Problem Addressed Immediately
 1. Nehemiah takes “aggressive” action = locks out merchants & basically says you come back on a Sabbath and I’ll take you on and punch your lights out...
 2. Point: Nehemiah knew about what to get mad = righteous anger
 - a. we all need to declare all out war against wrong in individual lives, homes and church

b. righteous anger *always* stirs up the right motivation!

IV DISOBEDIENCE ALWAYS RESULTS IN NIGHTMARES (vv 23-30)

- home life amongst leaders and people in Jerusalem hit the skids (one word) = *disobedience*

A. Disregard for God's Will

1. Intermarried = wasn't a "race" thing... it was a "faithfulness" thing!...
2. Solomon given as an example of intermarrying... God's will is restated...
3. Grandson of Eliashib was the son-in-law to Sanballot!!! = all within the leadership of the people!

B. Today's Domestic Disobedience

1. Personal policies in performing weddings – do this to reassure we seek to *restore* the church and marriage and not *modify* the church and marriage.
2. Do we have a great burden for homes/marriages and the tender lives of young people involved with them? – Illus. – Mass. Elementary school of 300 kids (21) lived with 2 parents...
3. Nehemiah wasn't afraid to broach the matter of sin for the sake of *truth*. He literally took that problem by the throat!

Conclusion: We dare not *play* with wrong/sin. Such must be taken by the throat. In summary:

A. Nehemiah faced the wrong head on:

- wrong will never solved until it is identified as *wrong*...
- applies to problems in the church, business, home and life... must be met head on!

B. Nehemiah dealt with the wrong severely:

- probably those who thought he was cranky, not politically correct, rather rude...
- must not worry about pleasing men...yet, it is difficult to stand against wrong and not appear unloving, crotchety, cranky and bigoted...

C. Nehemiah replaced wrong with right – always had the right replacement...

D. Nehemiah followed up with prayer – for strength, wisdom and courage to carry out will of God!

Again, we dare not *play* with wrong/sin. These must be taken by the throat!