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When Shooting Occurs in
Your Own Foxhole

Nehemiah 5:1-19

Foxhole Fire

A foxhole is a small pit that is dug as a shelter in battle and usually contains two or more soldiers. When you are in a foxhole, you trust and count on the others to have your back and you have theirs. You protect one another from the enemy. So it would be unthinkable to attack your own.

However, that is exactly what happens in the Body of Christ many times. One Christian lobes an accusation against another. One Christian publicly calls out the other for not acting "very Christian-like." Church members attack other church members or they go after the pastor or deacons or elders.

All of this hinders the work that God has called us to do. He has called us to build His Kingdom, much like God called Nehemiah to help build the walls of Jerusalem.

Last week we saw how Nehemiah handled difficulties that were thrown at him from the outside. There were foes heaping insults and threats at Nehemiah and the people. Yet Nehemiah Kept Calm and Carried On.

Trouble Within the Ranks

Now trouble arises from within the ranks. The people cried out to Nehemiah that their own countrymen were taking advantage of the current food shortage to charge them exorbitant interest, to take over their fields and homes through mortgages they could not repay, and to enslave their children to satisfy their debts. The injustice threatened to end the wall-building project. Nehemiah listened intently and actively to their complaint.

¹And there was a great outcry of the people and their wives against their Jewish brethren.

"When complaints are freely heard, deeply considered, and speedily reformed, then is the utmost bound of civil liberty attained that wise men look for."

--John Milton

²For there were those who said, "We, our sons, and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain, that we may eat and live."

³There were also some who said, "We have mortgaged our lands and vineyards and houses, that we might buy grain because of the famine."

⁴There were also those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our lands and vineyards."

⁵Yet 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."

There were four such difficulties.

(1) The people face a food shortage. They said they needed to get grain for food to keep themselves and their families alive (v. 2). The work on the wall hindered their tending their crops. And this crop failure was called a famine.

(2) Others had grain (buying it from others), but to get it they had to mortgage their fields ... vineyards, and homes (v. 3).

(3) others, not wanting to mortgage their property, had to borrow money from their Jewish brothers to pay property taxes to King Artaxerxes (v. 4). This problem was compounded by the fact that they were charged exorbitant interest rates by their own Jewish brothers.

This led to a fourth problem.

(4) To repay their creditors they had to sell their children into slavery. This of course left them in a hopeless state.

This made Nehemiah angry. He acknowledged the injustice.

⁶And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

Nehemiah's Response

But notice that Nehemiah wisely waited until his anger had cooled and until he considered what should be done. Then he went to the men who were responsible for the injustice.

⁷After 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.

⁸And 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.

Nehemiah stood up for what was right. He made it clear by pointing out that he and several others had bought many of their brothers and sisters out of bondage and now these other folks were putting them back into bondage as they took advantage of their brothers and sisters who had fallen on hard times. This was as crazy as it wasn't right.

Notice also that he appeals to the fear of God as a motivation for obedience.

⁹Then 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?"

The men listened to his rebuke and pledged to make restoration for the damage they had done.

¹²So 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.

Nehemiah's Example

Nehemiah then mentions that he was appointed governor for 12 years over Jerusalem. The governors before him had taken advantage of their position and had taxed the people greatly. He led by example by not taking advantage of his position like those before him had done.

¹⁴Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions.

¹⁵But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people, and took from them bread and wine, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants bore rule over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God.

It was probably expected by the people that he would treat them just like all the governors before him. But because of his integrity and his fear of God, he did not.

Not only did he not take advantage of the people like the earlier governors had done, but he also went a step further and sacrificed what would have been rightly his for the sake of unity.

¹⁸Now that which was prepared daily was one ox and six choice sheep. Also fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine. Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor's provisions, because the bondage was heavy on this people.

As governor, he would have certain privileges and compensation of which he could take advantage. But he knew his fellow brothers and sisters were going through hard times. So he decided to set aside what was rightly his in order to maintain the unity and because he feared God and wanted to please Him. Thus he could honestly pray:

¹⁹Remember me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

APPLICATION

1. Be a true listener.
2. Acknowledge injustice when it occurs
3. Be measured in the timing of your response
4. Stand up for what is right
5. Lead by example
6. Be willing to sacrifice for the sake of unity
7. Do all because of a healthy fear of God

