

The last time we were together Nehemiah was confronting the people, particularly the wealthy, who were taking advantage of the poorer of the people who couldn't afford food because of the famine in the land at that time, who were either borrowing money from the wealthy or were having to place themselves or their children into slavery to meet their needs.

Nehemiah found out about this and was pretty upset.

Nehemiah 5:6-10 ⁶ Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words. ⁷ I consulted with myself and contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, "You are exacting usury, each from his brother!" Therefore, I held a great assembly against them. ⁸ I said to them, "We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?" Then they were silent and could not find a word *to say*. ⁹ Again I said, "The thing which 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?" ¹⁰ "And likewise I, my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Please, let us leave off this usury.

Part of the problem here is that there were those of the people of God who were taking advantage of others, not necessarily by lending them money, but by charging them interest. And since many of the poor didn't have much the only way that the lenders would lend money was to have collateral put up to cover the principle as well as the interest on the loan.

So, what type of collateral might some of the poor put up?

Their property, their land, their houses, or their children who would be cheap labor for the wealthy as they would use them to tend their fields.

And so, Nehemiah confronts them and essentially says that you're not only doing ill against your brethren you are offending our God who brought us back to the land as he said, should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? (v.9)

And it would appear as if the people took this rebuke to heart and turned from their wickedness.

Nehemiah 5:12-13 ¹² Then they said, "We will give *it* back and will require nothing from them; we will do exactly as you say." So I called the priests and took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. ¹³ I also shook out the front of my garment and said, "Thus may God shake out every man from his house and from his possessions who does not fulfill this promise; even thus may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen!" And they praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise.

And so, what Nehemiah has done here is to place upon the conscience of each person involved, an oath before God Himself that they should obey the Lord and be fair to their neighbors.

But notice what the oath includes. It includes a curse. ¹³ I also shook out the front of my garment and said, "Thus may God shake out every man from his house and from his possessions who does not fulfill this promise; even thus may he be shaken out and emptied."

It appears that the fear of God has been placed upon them and their response is indicative of this.

13 "And all the assembly said, "Amen!" And they praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise."

But what about this idea of fearing God? Is there a legitimate sense of fear and awe that even we today, as believers in Christ, should exercise?

The word fear in our text actually means fear, but it includes the idea of standing in awe of such a great God. And so, fearing God, even as a believer who has been saved by grace, is to understand that He is a God who is just and we are a people who deserve His wrath.

And so, we stand in awe of His grace that has been extended to us and desire to walk in His ways to thank and please Him, not because we're afraid of Him, but because we're afraid to displease Him who has loved us so much.

The writer of the hymn amazing grace got it right.

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me....
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now, I see.

T'was Grace that taught...
my heart to fear.
And Grace, my fears relieved.
How precious did that Grace appear...
the hour I first believed.

When Paul was addressing the issue of the Jews thinking they were special because God had chosen to give them the law and the covenants and the system of sacrifice that portrayed the Lamb of God who would come to take away sin, he made it a point to show them that no one, not even the Jews, sought God.

No one, outside of God taking that heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh, would seek God or desire Him in any way. Only God can place that sense of fear and awe in a person's heart as they are now able to flee to Him for forgiveness and grace.

Romans 3:9-18 ⁹ What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; ¹⁰ as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." ¹³ "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; ¹⁴ "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS"; ¹⁵ "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, ¹⁶ DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, ¹⁷ AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." ¹⁸ "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."

In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul was explaining to them that if they have been given grace and forgiveness by God then out of gratitude they should have that holy fear and reverence not to displease Him. And his reasoning was that if your sins have been completely wiped clean so that you stand in the righteousness of Christ why would you continue in that sin that Christ gave His life for?

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 ¹⁸ Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and

He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

And then in this same letter he sums up this idea of living lives of love out of gratitude for the grace that has been given to us in Christ but he puts it into this context.

2 Corinthians 7:1 ^{NAU} Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Peter essentially says the same thing as he also points out that it cost our Lord Jesus everything to redeem us from our sin, why would we go back to wallow in it?

1 Peter 1:15-19 ¹⁵ but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; ¹⁶ because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." ¹⁷ If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*; ¹⁸ knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.

Fearing God as a believer in Christ is to humble ourselves in thanks and gratitude knowing that had He not chosen us, called us, justified us, sanctified and will ultimately glorify us, we would be lost forever. That should change everything about us in such a way that we give Him every part of our lives in thanks.

And this is what Nehemiah was trying to convey to the Jews since the context of their situation was God bringing them from under the bondage of Babylon and returning them to the Promised Land which is a picture of being brought back to God's presence to enjoy Him forever.

And it appears that Nehemiah practiced what he preached as he took to heart a desire not to displease the Lord by taking advantage of the people.

Nehemiah 5:14-19 ¹⁴ Moreover, from the day that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, *for*

twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor's food *allowance*.¹⁵ But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God.¹⁶ I also applied myself to the work on this wall; we did not buy any land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work.¹⁷ Moreover, *there were* at my table one hundred and fifty Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us.¹⁸ Now that which was prepared for each day was one ox *and* six choice sheep, also birds were prepared for me; and once in ten days all sorts of wine *were furnished* in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the governor's food *allowance*, because the servitude was heavy on this people.¹⁹ Remember me, O my God, for good, *according to* all that I have done for this people.

As we come to chapter six of Nehemiah we see that the entire chapter is devoted to the enemies of the Jews trying to intimidate them in not going forward with the work of completing the walls and the doors of the city of Jerusalem.

Five times they sent letters to Nehemiah threatening to tell the King of Babylon that they are rebuilding the city and its walls to ultimately rise up and become a nation that will rebel against Babylon. Nehemiah doesn't pay any attention to them but rather trusts that God will protect them from such threats.

Nehemiah 6:5-10⁵ Then Sanballat sent his servant to me in the same manner a fifth time with an open letter in his hand.⁶ In it was written, "It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says, that you and the Jews are planning to rebel; therefore you are rebuilding the wall. And you are to be their king, according to these reports."⁷ "You have also appointed prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, 'A king is in Judah!' And now it will be reported to the king according to these reports. So come now, let us take counsel together."⁸ Then I sent *a message* to him saying, "Such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind."⁹ For all of them were *trying* to frighten us, thinking, "They will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done." But now, *O God*, strengthen my hands.¹⁰ When I entered the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined at home, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and

let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming to kill you at night."

But one of Nehemiah's enemies comes up with what I believe is an approach that we should more concerned with even during our day and we see this in the next few verses of our text.

Nehemiah 6:10-13 ¹⁰ When I entered the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel, who was confined at home, he said, "Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you, and they are coming to kill you at night." ¹¹ But I said, "Should a man like me flee? And could one such as I go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in." ¹² Then I perceived that surely God had not sent him, but he uttered *his* prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. ¹³ He was hired for this reason, that I might become frightened and act accordingly and sin, so that they might have an evil report in order that they could reproach me.

The enemy hired prophets within the community of God's people to lie and to frighten Nehemiah into walking away from God's work. They were bought. Now, we might say, surely God's people could not be bought could they?

It happens more often than we think. How many of God's ministers succumb to the trappings of this world, be it fleshly lusts, the allure of money and power. And part of the way in which this affects the sheep of God's pasture is that these leaders will dumb down the word of God and begin teaching things that do not equip the saints enabling them to see the doctrines of demons so that the work of God cannot go on effectively.

Sanballat and Tobiah were enemies of Nehemiah and their design was to frighten the people of God, not so much that they would leave the land and go back to Babylon, which I'm sure they would have welcomed, but rather to keep them from continuing on with the work God gave them.

They played upon the emotions of the Jews in this sense. They were hoping for a sensual reaction to their threats instead of them acting on faith in their God.

And it's the same today. The enemy knows we are sensual people who have a tendency to rely on our emotions rather than relying on the faith in our God that we have been given.

So, how does the enemy accomplish that today?

He does it in a variety of ways.

First he has pawns within the visible church who are willing not to teach the whole counsel of God's word. This is why people who have been sitting in the pews for years are still babes in Christ. They've never gotten past the stage of feeding on milk instead of being challenged to eat meat.

And when the people of God are not fed a healthy diet of the bread of life they are anemic when it comes to carrying on the great commission of preaching the gospel and making disciples because they don't see the need. They're content to show up on Sunday for the religious show they've become accustomed to experiencing.

This is why the Robert Schuller's, the Joel Olsteen's, the Rick Warren's are so popular. They are teachers of the sensual, the emotional part of man. They are not teaching the whole counsel of God's word and they are not teaching a healthy fear of God that includes our Lord being Holy and a God who punishes sin in His wrath.

They love teaching about His grace and His peace and His love, but even then they don't fully expound on why those aspects of God's nature are so awesome. Unless we understand that we don't deserve His love and grace and peace, then we will never appreciate them and live lives that honor Him knowing that outside of His saving grace we would all suffer His wrath. That's a holy fear they just don't teach.

And so, when your foundation is built entirely on emotion rather than on the objective truth of God's word, when the first Sanballat comes and kicks sand in your face the tendency is to capitulate because you don't want confrontation. Let's just all get along. And certainly we want to be at peace with all men, but not at the expense of the truth of who God is and what He has done through His Son.

And so, one way in which the enemy has tried to thwart God's work is to buy off the prophets. The other way he does this is to scare the people into thinking that if we teach the whole counsel of God's word no one will want to come to our church.

We need to keep it light and fluffy to make everything attractive to the outside world. This way they'll like us and will want to stay. Again, we don't want to be jerks for Jesus, but if our attitude is for

the world to like us then we've missed the point of being true to God's word.

Jesus makes it clear that our job is not to make the world like us so that we can give the world the truth. But when we remain faithful to the truth what does Christ promise will happen?

John 15:18-19 ¹⁸ "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. ¹⁹ "If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

Our job as believers in Christ Jesus is not to be friends with the world, our job is to love the world with the only solution to their sin problem, the gospel of Jesus Christ, as we share it in love and compassion and humility.

The work must go on, and in the case of Nehemiah it does.

Nehemiah 6:14-15 ¹⁴ Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were *trying* to frighten me. ¹⁵ So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of *the month* Elul, in fifty-two days.

But after the work gets done Nehemiah considers what families are being represented in Jerusalem and he asks for an account of their numbers.

Now someone else in Scripture was compelled to take a count of all the people in Israel.

Does anyone remember who that was?

Yes it was David. And the context of that count had to do with Israel's war against the Phillistines.

1 Chronicles 20:5-8 ⁵ And there was war with the Philistines again, and Elhanan the son of Jair killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear *was* like a weaver's beam. ⁶ Again there was war at Gath, where there was a man of *great* stature who had twenty-four fingers and toes, six *fingers on each hand* and six *toes on each foot*; and he also was descended from the giants. ⁷ When he taunted Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimea, David's brother, killed him. ⁸ These were descended from the giants in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.

So, David is victorious in battle and then in chapter 21 of 1 Chronicles we read this.

1 Chronicles 21:1-4 ^{NAU} Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel. ² So David said to Joab and to the princes of the people, "Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan, and bring me *word* that I may know their number." ³ Joab said, "May the LORD add to His people a hundred times as many as they are! But, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? Why does my lord seek this thing? Why should he be a cause of guilt to Israel?" ⁴ Nevertheless, the king's word prevailed against Joab. Therefore, Joab departed and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem.

Joab understood that this was not something that God had initiated nor condoned. But Israel was numbered anyway.

Why was numbering Israel such a bad thing?

Because it showed that David began to rely more on numbers of people rather than on the One true God who is able to save.

As a result God ended up destroying 70,000 Jews in the land before His anger was halted. David ended up repenting but not before the Lord made His point abundantly clear that not to trust God is a heinous act before the Lord.

So, why does Nehemiah think it is proper to count the people?

Nehemiah 7:5 ⁵ Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogies. Then I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up first in which I found the following record:

God placed it upon the heart of Nehemiah to do this. It wasn't Nehemiah's idea and it wasn't done on Nehemiah's part to see how strong they were as their enemies were in the land threatening them.

So, why the numbering by family name?

Part of it had to do with locating the people who belonged to the original 12 tribes of Israel, but there appears to be another reason and that has to do with the worship of the one true God.

Notice verses 63-64

Nehemiah 7:63-64 ⁶³ Of the priests: the sons of Hobaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, the sons of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters

of Barzillai, the Gileadite, and was named after them. ⁶⁴ These searched *among* their ancestral registration, but it could not be located; therefore they were considered unclean *and excluded* from the priesthood. Apparently there were written records of the names of the families in Israel and it included the names of the priests of Israel.

Everyone would have known the families of these priests, whether or not they had the written records. So, why are they not allowed to serve as priests simply because they don't have the registration?

Because there was the possibility, slight as it may have been, that someone may have served as a priest who could not be proven to be from such a family and because of this they were considered unclean and excluded from the priesthood.

God is very specific as to who can serve and no one whom God does not choose for the task, from particular families, can over step God's choice.

And of course this is a picture of the final priest who must come from a certain lineage and be of a certain priesthood, which was not the Aaronic priesthood.

Does anyone remember after what order of priesthood our final priest came?

Hebrews 6:19-20 ¹⁹ This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, ²⁰ where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:11-17 ¹¹ Now if perfection was through the Levitical priesthood (for on the basis of it the people received the Law), what further need *was there* for another priest to arise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be designated according to the order of Aaron? ¹² For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also. ¹³ For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. ¹⁴ For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests. ¹⁵ And this is clearer still, if another priest arises according to the likeness of Melchizedek, ¹⁶ who has become *such* not on the basis of a law of physical requirement, but according to the power of an

indestructible life. ¹⁷ For it is attested *of Him*, "YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK."

In the O.T there was only one priest according to the order of Melchizedek and that was Melchizedek. This was recognized by God as a one of kind, unique priesthood that foreshadowed the one of a kind, unique priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Again, it's all about Christ and His desire to save a people for Himself of whom you and I in Christ belong.