

“Getting Tough With Those Who Break The Rules”

Scripture: Nehemiah 13:1-31

Introduction

This chapter begins with the people doing what was right, and what they had been taught. They were reading the law and observing it by putting out of their midst, those who were not really genuine Jews. They were getting rid of those who were related to the Ammonites and Moabites who were forbidden to have any part with the Jews. Yet, the people had waited too long, and the damage had already been done. They should have dealt with these people right after Nehemiah had left, but they didn't! As a result, their sin of compromise brought great problems to the people as we will soon see. But, when Nehemiah, the great leader and man of God returned, feathers began to fly! Let's see what he did!

I. NEHEMIAH GOT TOUGH WITH THOSE GUILTY OF COMPROMISE. vs. 1-3

- A. In verses 1-3 of this text, there is the implication that the people had waited too long to deal with the mixed groups and impure people. I certainly don't know the time frame in this chapter, but I have to wonder if just maybe the people were lazy and compromising until they heard that Nehemiah may be coming back.
- B. Isn't this what usually happens? People disobey God until they think that they might be going to die and meet God! And, what about those kids that ransack the house, until they know that Dad and Mom are about to return home. I believe this is what happened, but when Nehemiah got there, he was ready to deal with the problems.
- C. There always comes a time in the life of any great leader when he or she has to drop the ax on disobedient and compromising people. This is not an easy thing to do, but it has to be done if the ministry, organization, or church is to get its act together and move on with the program of ministry. So, just accept the fact that sometimes you have to be tough!

II. NEHEMIAH GOT TOUGH WITH THOSE GUILTY OF COMPLICITY. vs. 4-9

- A. Nehemiah arrives back in Jerusalem for the second time. When he arrives, what he discovers is not very pretty. He finds out that Tobiah, remember him, is now living in the store house of the temple where ordinarily the first fruit tithes of the people are brought to be stored. This room was for the purpose of storing the tithes and offerings of the people so that the priests and Levites would have food to feed their families. The room was also to be used for the storing of the sacrificial tools, anointing oil, and the incense. But, instead, all these things were no longer there, and Eliashib, the priest that looked after the temple and store house, had decided the he would rent out the store house or room to Tobiah, his dear friend and buddy. Can you believe it? The sacred room that had been set

apart for the materials of God was now being used by one of the biggest thugs and opponents that the people of God had faced. This was truly mockery of the highest degree.

B. So, Nehemiah got tough and walked into the store house and threw all of Tobiah's belongings out the door of the chamber, and he sent servants in to scrub and clean the room. After this, Nehemiah had the utensils and tools of worship brought back into their rightful place. Nehemiah really got tough with those who were complicit with the enemy. Folks, sometimes you just have to get tough if you are going to be a great leader. You do everything you can to avoid conflict, but sooner or later, you get rid of those who contaminate the work.

III. NEHEMIAH GOT TOUGH WITH THOSE GUILTY OF COMPLACENCY. vs. 10-14

A. Well, Nehemiah cleans out the store house, and now he has to bring the priests back in from the fields because they are out having to work in the fields to try to get enough food to feed their families, when they should have been fed from the tithes and offerings. Obviously, there had been a problem between Eliashib and the other priests when he rented out the store chamber in the temple. There is just no telling how much bitterness had developed because Eliashib decided to put his friend before the work of God and taking care of God's priests. Eliashib is the one that should have been kicked out.

B. Complacency is a horrible thing. And yet, today it is killing so many hundreds and hundreds of churches and ministries, just because the people have forgotten their purpose for existing, and have resorted to a maintenance mentality. Great leaders will never allow complacent people to remain in the leadership of their ministries, churches, or organizations. If you want to know just how much Jesus hates complacency, go to **Revelation 3:14-22**, to see that complacency makes Him sick! And, if it makes the Son of God sick, it should also make us sick! Real spiritual leaders get tough with complacent people.

IV. NEHEMIAH GOT TOUGH WITH THOSE GUILTY OF CARNALITY. vs. 15-22

A. In verses 15-22, we find Nehemiah running into another serious problem. He walks down a street on the sabbath day, and what does he find? He finds the men of Judah buying and selling with men from Tyre and other pagan cities. All of this was happening on the sabbath day. Nehemiah almost goes berserk! He runs these carnal merchants out of the city, and he rebukes the nobles and politicians of Judah with a serious threat. He has the gates of the city closed, and he tells the nobles and rulers that from now on, the gates must remain closed in the city on the sabbath day.

B. The sabbath breaking merchants leave the city, but they set up just outside the gates because they assumed that some people would be coming and going in and out of the gates. They just went far enough away to provide temptation for the people to go on sinning on the sabbath day. So, the man of God goes out to these people and he threatens to lay hands on them if they are ever caught near the gates again

on the sabbath day. Now, I can just hear some of our overtly religious friends say, "Can you believe this man of God acted like this"? Well, yes I can, because I remember my Lord chasing the money changers out of the temple area with a whip. Folks, when will we ever learn that sometimes you can't deal with evil people just by grace and gracious ways. America would not be in the war with terror today, if we would quit believing that we can reason with wicked and lost Muslims. We are truly a foolish nation if we think that light can communicate with darkness. The **Book of Second Corinthians tells us this explicitly. II Corinthians 6:14 says, ".....and what communion hath light with darkness?"** The implied answer is absolutely none! So, Nehemiah got tough with those guilty of carnality!

V. NEHEMIAH GOT TOUGH WITH THOSE GUILTY OF CORRUPTION. vs. 23-31

- A. In these last verses of the Book of Nehemiah, we find Nehemiah having to deal one more time with those who were corrupt. Before he had left for his return trip to Persia, the people pledged to get rid of the wives of the pagan tribes that had caused the husbands to commit sacrilege and idol worship. Now, Nehemiah discovers that they had not completely kept their pledge, and he takes over. In verses 23-27, Nehemiah rebukes these deceptive people, and he even loses his temper and pulls out the hair of some of these people. Nehemiah said what he meant, and meant what he said!
- B. Now, I don't advocate pulling out the hairs of those who break their vows to God and His leaders, but I do believe God hates corruption and wants us to get the world out of our churches, ministries and organizations. It is not easy, but it must be done!
- C. In the remaining four verses of chapter 13, Nehemiah once more comes in contact with the son in law of Sanballat down on the streets, and he loses it. He chases the man from him and pleads with God to remember these who have defiled the priesthood and broken the covenant of God. And before he finishes, he runs all of the evil strangers out of the city, and he places priests to make sure that these defiled never come back in and attempt to do the work of the priesthood.
- D. And the last thing that Nehemiah does, is to once again plead with God to remember him for the good he had done for His people. Nehemiah knew that if the people had fallen so far in just two years during his absence, they would never show appreciation to him and for him in the time to come. So, in total exasperation, he begs God to please not forget what he had done for the children of God! As I told you before, I have been right where Nehemiah was. It is not a comfortable place, but it is a true fact of life that those whom we have done the most for, will forget and even turn against us after a very short while. So, whatever we do must be done for Jesus because He never will forget. Yes, sometimes great leaders have to be tough, even though it is not easy, it is of necessity for the sake of all the people and the work of God. As often as we can, we should show compassion. But the time will come that we have to show judgment. Is that not the way our Lord works?