



### Outline

#### Part 3- "The Credibility Factor"

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**Scripture:** Nehemiah 5:14–19, Proverbs 11:3

**Idea:** Recovery begins when moral authority supersedes reelection as the value of choice among our leaders.

Recovery begins when our nation's leaders prioritize their moral authority over their congressional authority.

#### Introduction/Review

1. When events intersect with what we believe, we believe we should talk about it. Since we are in the midst of a national recovery, and our Bible has so much to say about such, it seemed like a good time to talk about it. Until we recover.
2. One of the greatest national recovery stories in history is found in the Old Testament. If you are Jewish, you've got to love this story. There are no miracles. Nothing supernatural takes place. God doesn't appear. It was just good old-fashioned heads-down leadership and prayer.

#### I. Nehemiah's Story

- A. In **586 BC**, Nebuchadnezzar conquers Judah. He destroys the temple and carries off Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Years.
- B. Fifty years later, Persia is the superpower and King Cyrus issues a decree that the Jews could go home. Zerubbabel allows 50,000 people to return and the temple is rebuilt. Then a few years later, Ezra brings a group back.

*Things weren't great: they were poorly organized. There was no wall around the city. The people were poor. Wealthy merchants had impoverished the Jews by loaning and charging exorbitant rates and were slowly taking control of the land and collateralizing debt with women and children.*

- C. In 444 BC, Artaxerxes is King of **Persia**. He has a Jewish cupbearer/confidant. The cupbearer was born in captivity. Educated. And he had watched the most powerful person in the world . . .

*His story opens with a visit from his brother who had just returned from Jerusalem with a bad report. The gate is burned. There are no walls. And Nehemiah's heart is broken for his nation. He weeps, fasts, and asks if he can take extended leave and go to his country and rebuild the city. King makes him governor and loads him up with everything he will need. He shows up, surveys, casts an incredible vision, and they start.*



*But many can't work because they are working off debts. It's then that he discovers that wealthy merchants from the surrounding areas have financially enslaved the people in the city. He takes his personal money and begins paying off the debts owed to the gentiles. He JUMP-STARTS the economy! And this frees the people to WORK on the wall. He spends a PERSONAL fortune for the sake of the cause.*

*But then Nehemiah discovers wealthy Jews were doing the same thing. They saw Nehemiah doling out cash to pay off debts, so they got in line. They were taking advantage of the poverty and misfortune of the people. It forced them to borrow against their children and wives and farms.*

*He is ticked! Hittin', spittin' mad.*

## **II. Nehemiah confronted the unfair/illegal practices of the rich.**

<sup>1</sup> Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. <sup>2</sup> Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain." <sup>3</sup> Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine." <sup>4</sup> Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards." <sup>5</sup> Although we are of the same flesh and blood as the rest of our people and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others."

### **Nehemiah 5**

<sup>6</sup> When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. <sup>7</sup> I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are charging your own people interest!" *[Technically illegal. God said Israel was to be a lending nation, not a borrowing one. Lend Jews money, but charge no interest.]*

So I called together a large meeting to deal with them <sup>8</sup> and said: "As far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles.

Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!" *[These shrewd business guys heard Nehemiah was paying off debts at a premium so they were loaning at 12 percent, knowing he was good for it. They took unjust advantage of the underprivileged.]*

They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say. *[Doesn't seem very realistic. Rich guys with nothing to say? Income threatened?]*

<sup>9</sup> So I continued, "What you are doing is not **right**. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? *[Do you know how this looks to the world?]*

<sup>10</sup> I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest! *[They had to pay principle.]* <sup>11</sup> Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them—one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil." *[12 percent annual interest]*



<sup>12</sup> “We will give it back,” they said. “And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.” *[He didn’t trust ‘em.]*

Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. <sup>13</sup> I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, “In this way may God shake out of their houses and possessions anyone who does not keep this promise. So may such a person be shaken out and emptied!”

At this the whole assembly said, “Amen,” and praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised.

*That was easy. Imagine the President addressing the heads of mortgage companies, oil companies, health care providers, and anybody else you perceive is taking unfair advantage of the situation . . . and saying, “Okay, for the sake of the country, let’s go beyond the letter of the law. Stop and repay.”*

*. . . and they all said, “Amen. Praise the Lord.” Unrealistic? Here’s the rest of the story. Nehemiah had something going for him many leaders do not.*

**III. Nehemiah had traction with the wealthy because he had something previous governors didn’t have: moral authority.** There was public alignment between what he had done personally and what he was asking them to do.

#### **Nehemiah 5 (TNIV)**

<sup>14</sup> Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—**twelve years**—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor.

*[As Governor, Nehemiah was given the right to collect taxes plus a percentage of all that was grown, which guaranteed him an income backed by the Persian Empire BEYOND legal.]*

<sup>15</sup> But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels **[1 lb.]** of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people.

But out of reverence for God I did not **act like that**. *[Entitled to, but chose not to. He held himself to a higher standard.]*

<sup>16</sup> Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. *[Did what he came to do.]*

All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land. *[Property ownership was a sign of power. He didn’t enrich himself at the expense of the people. Did what he said he came to do: Build the wall.]*

<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the



surrounding nations. <sup>18</sup> Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, **because** the demands were heavy on these people.

<sup>19</sup> Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people. *[Isn't that awesome. Ever met anyone like that? He had something the other governors didn't.]*

#### IV. Nehemiah had influence beyond his title or position: he had *moral authority*.

- A. He had been walking his talk . . . and it had cost him. His lifestyle shamed them.
- B. Moral authority: the credibility you earn by walking your talk.
  - 1. The relationship other people see between what you say and what you do, between what you claim to be and what you are.
  - 2. Your position determines your ability to exercise authority over people. Your moral authority determines your ability to exert influence.

Position = Authority

Moral Authority = Credibility and Influence

- 3. The New Testament uses the phrase “beyond reproach.”

*Here's the sad thing . . .*

#### V. For the last thirteen years, there has been debate over whether or not a political leader's “personal” life matters. *[It's our fault.]*

- A. The American people have voted: YES and NO.
  - 1. Yes, if it's your guy whose integrity is being disputed.
  - 2. No, if it's my guy whose integrity is being disputed.

*Does it matter?*

- 3. Jewish/Christian script says YES. Of course it matters.
  - If having **influence/credibility** matters, it matters.
  - If having leaders we can **trust** matters, it matters.
  - If you want to stop the cancer of **cynicism**, it matters.
  - If we want the next generation of kids . . .

- B. We should expect and require moral authority of our national leadership.



*Recovery begins when moral authority supersedes reelection as the value of choice among our national leaders.*

*Recovery begins when our nation's leaders prioritize their moral authority over their congressional authority.*

1. We are only human.
  - This isn't a homeowner's association.
  - This isn't a bowling league.
  - It's the United States of America.
2. The whole world is watching.
  - The Muslim world is smirking.
  - The Chinese are bewildered.
3. We expect you to be beyond reproach **morally, ethically, and financially.**

So . . .

#### **RANT**

- If you've got a **secret** that if it became known would undermine your credibility, dishonor our nation and your position, just go ahead and resign now.
- If you aren't paying your **taxes**, resign.
- If you are beholden to **special interest groups**, resign.
- If you **give away less than two percent** of your annual income, resign. We don't want you to decide how generous to be with our money if you've never learned to be generous with your own.
- If you are lying to your family and having an **affair**, resign.  
*All the major world religions condemn that. If you aren't religious, you don't even subscribe to the national motto.*
- If you are an **alcoholic** or a prescription drug **abuser**, resign.

*We don't have time for that anymore.*

*We have men and women risking their lives every day on the streets of America and in military bases all over the world. If you don't have the moral authority to lead, honor them and get the heck out of Washington.*

You don't need to feel bad. Think about it as job creation. You are creating an opening.

#### **Conclusion: We need to elect Nehemiahs.**

1. Here's what we know: if you get some Republican Nehemiahs and some Democrat Nehemiahs together, men and women who differ politically, but who know they are eyeball to eyeball with other men and women who believe deeply, care passionately, and who walk their talk . . .
2. Ain't nothing they can't get done.



3. They will face down injustices of the rich without stirring up a culture war. They will address the needs of the poor without rewarding behaviors that shouldn't be repeated.
4. Their **vision** will not be clouded by their personal duplicity and fear of being found out.
5. They will see clearly.
6. They will choose wisely.
7. We will recover.
8. The wisest king who ever lived wrote:

**Proverbs 11:3** – The **integrity** of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.

9. We've had enough duplicity on both sides of the aisle.
10. We need men and women of integrity who have more than a position, who have moral authority. God, raise up more Nehemiahs.

***Recovery begins when moral authority supersedes reelection as the value of choice among our national leaders.***

*And before we get too worked up, the one thing all elected officials have in common—they were elected.*