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### **The Plains of "Oh No!"**

A bear and a hunter met in the woods. They had two needs. The hunter told the bear, "I sure would like a nice warm bear skin coat." Now the bear told the hunter, "I want a full stomach". As the hunter raised his gun, the bear lifted up a paw and said, now listen mister hunter, instead of shooting why don't we sit down on this log here and see if we can work out some sort of compromise. So they sat down next to each other to talk compromise. Well, the bear ate the man and they both walked away with their needs met. The bear had a full stomach and the man had a bear skin coat. Compromise is a good and healthy thing to do if we are trying to work out differences between people, but compromise in ones spiritual life can be lethal to ones spiritual vitality. Oh, I'm not talking about compromise between God's people, I'm not talking about a compromise of preferences. I'm talking about compromise with the enemy. Compromise with the enemy will drain our spiritual vitality. Compromise with the enemy is lethal to the soul. The enemy is like that bear who would like nothing better than to trick you into sitting on a log with him, eat you up, walk away and belch.

Have you ever felt the enemy tempting you to compromise? Ever heard those quiet little whispers in your ear? Maybe it was when you were all alone. Was it during a time when you were discouraged? Maybe it was during a vacation, take it easy time. Just after a great time of success? Have you ever heard the whispers...the whispers of compromise? (Psst...Be a Christian...but don't be fanatical about it. Go ahead sleep in this weekend, you have worked pretty hard this week. You don't have time to read that Bible...leave it up there on the shelf. Let it sit up there, that requires too much brain exertion...I wonder if there is anything good on TV tonight? Go ahead, swear a little around the guys, that will make them feel more comfortable. Sneak a little peak at that forbidden fruit, take a hit or two, it will calm your nerves. Come on, your strong now, you've been going to church, you can handle it now. Sure go on out to church, but don't miss the time with the boys. What you want

to be an example to your kids, Ah they'll be in bed by the time you get home anyway. Have you ever felt drawn to the land of compromise? My purpose this morning is to keep us from wandering into the land of compromise. It's pretty easy to get there, the tough part is staying out. How can we keep out of the land of compromise?

This morning we will first look at the enemies strategies for getting us to compromise, then we will look at the life of Nehemiah and see how we can keep from becoming sidetracked by compromise.

Turn with me to Nehemiah 6:1-4 (READ) It is interesting to note that in the preceding chapter 5 there was no mention of the enemies namely Sanballet, Tobiah and Geshem. Remember in this chapter there was plenty of internal strife and conflict between the uncaring wealthy nobles and the poorer folks who were forced into slavery due to famine, overpopulation and high taxes. With that conflict resolved, with the focus back on finishing the wall, back come the enemy attacks. No need for the enemy when God's people are shooting at each other.(READ)

What are those strategies of Satan that we need to be aware of? First we see the **Substitute Teacher** strategy. If one wishes to survive as a substitute teacher. First identify the leader of the troublemakers, divide and conquer. If you can remove the leader from his group, you've won the battle and survived another day of teaching. Look what happens in verse one. Did you catch a change of person in the grammar? It changes from we plural to I the singular. It's no longer the group "we" that completed the building but what is reported to Sanballet? I, Nehemiah built the wall. Remember this is Nehemiah writing from the perspective of the enemy. They have leveled there gunsights and aimed the cross hairs directly at the leader, Nehemiah. It tougher to attack a whole group. Much easier to take shots at the leader. The Tobiah and Sanballat crowd wanted nothing better then to pull Nehemiah away from Jerusalem, away from the vision that God had given him to rebuild the wall. They wanted him to spend less time on the wall and more time dealing with them. The opposition will attempt to sideline the leader every chance they can. Divide and conquer.

Energy that is diffused is far less effective then a laser like focus pushing only to complete the goal. I was over at Wayne Clark's the other day and he was showing me the lasers he was repairing. Some of them

sent in for repairs only needed their mirrors cleaned and adjusted. It was the dirt on the surface of the mirror was diffusing the laser beam, causing it to scatter its light and diminish its effectiveness. Nehemiah knew the enemy was trying to dirty up his focused lens on the task that God had called him to and refused to be taken away from the battle zone. A light diffused is far less effective than the laser focused light. The media today is quite skilled in distracting a leader of an organization in order to disable the whole group. Do not think the whole group will not suffer if the leader is allowed to be pumped full of lead. By attacking the leader personally, they try to divide him from the group. Separate them by wedges not made of steel but wedges of words.

What does Satan need to separate you from to render you ineffective. Has he wiped out someone you looked up to in the faith to get at you? If he can keep us from the people who can bring encouragement in the Lord, the enemy has us in his pocket. Maybe you've not even noticed that your focus on God has become a little diffused, it's not as bright as it once was, it's not as well defined, not as clear and sharp. Has some dirt of compromise become smeared on your mirrors. Is it time to go in for some repairs and renew that focused vision of what you know God wants you to do? The enemy knows all about the substitute teacher principle, divide and conquer, the Godly man and woman must maintain a focused vision in the face of distracting compromise from the opposition. How can we keep from being sidetracked by Satan's strategies? How can we stay out of the land of compromise?

Look at verse 2. The Tobiah-Sanballat crowd wanted to meet with Nehemiah out on the plains of Ono. What did they want? Sounds like they want to be friends, work out their differences. They say come on out to Chephirim. This could be the proper name for a town yet undiscovered. But since it is the plural form of the Hebrew word for village, They may be saying come on out to one to the villages in the plains of Ono an area about 25 miles west of Jerusalem near present day Israel's International airport. They may be saying get away from all that brick and mortar, come on out and get some perspective, let's talk. Maybe they wanted to do him physical harm, maybe it was a set up to smear his character in the face of his supporters. I think they were

tempting Nehemiah with compromise. All great progress for God prompts a compromise. If you can't stop progress, distract them, slow them down, lure them out with compromise.

This is the **Little Fishy strategy**. Sometimes when I go fishing and I've spotted a fish, I'm almost certain there is a fish behind a rock, yes...I may resort to talking to the fish. This odd habit actually sounds quite normal out there on the river as long as you say it softly under your breath, very tempting like, "Come on little fishy, Come on out from behind that rock little fishy, look at this tempting little lure, look at this juicy looking fly." My wife Erin finds this strategy especially helpful when fishing. The enemy wants to lure you out from behind the wall. He has all sorts of tempting enticements to get you to compromise your position and take a bite. Yet, hidden beneath that juicy worm is sharpened steel that bites back. Ever felt that steel in your life? It hurts doesn't it. Once those hooks are into you, it's tough to back them out.

The enemies first attack is to try and stamp it out, wipe out your faith and love for God, if he can't do that then next comes compromise. Anything to render you and me ineffective. If you are experiencing this second level of enemy attacks, be encouraged you made it through the first level, but don't rest on your laurels, compromise can just as easily sideline you from the race. We all want to be running in the race don't we? Can we possibly be content with watching from the stands eating popcorn and drinking soda? Nehemiah read the embossed gold sealed invitation to the plains of Ono and thought immediately, "Oh No!" Oh No I'm not going to compromise with the enemy. The enemy wants to lure you away from doing what God wants you to do. What you know your supposed to be doing. The enemy wants to slow you down, don't be so fanatic, don't read that old Bible, come on you stick in the mud lets experience a little culture, step into reality, step into life. You don't have to struggle against that, that habit come on to the plains of Ono. The reason we aren't getting along is because we don't know each other. Exposure to compromise can desensitize us to the world's sin and allow us to be more accepting of sin and less attracted to God's way. What are some areas where you are letting yourself to be desensitized to compromise? Attack from the enemy will sap valuable time and energy, can we afford that? How can we keep from becoming sidetracked by

compromise. The enemy will use the substitute teacher strategy. The enemy will use the little fishy strategy. He will stop at nothing to side track you and me. How can we keep on track?

What does Nehemiah do in verse 3. He flat out tells them to party in the plains of Ono, without him. Nehemiah has far too many important things to be doing. The Godly leader must stay on the front line of his task. He or she must be able to recognize the ploys of the opposition. Nehemiah see right through the glossy invitation to the bare hook within. Nehemiah knows how to say "no". What I like is the way that Nehemiah continues in the face of distraction and conflict to keep focused on what God wants him to do. I have found it is so easy to put on the back burner those things that I know God wants me to do when tensions and conflicts come rolling my way.

How can we keep from taking a vacation to the land of Ono, to the land of compromise? Keep focused on what God wants us to do. Doing what God wants us to do is simply obedience isn't it. We need to establish in our lives a paradigm of obedience. Some of you may have heard about Demmings TQM Management principles. The catchword of the day is "paradigm." A paradigm is an over riding principle that guides the decisions of the workers. Nordstrom's started this years ago with the paradigm, "Delight the Customer" If you were ever in a situation you weren't sure how to respond, if you worked at delighting the customer, that was what the Nordstrom folks wanted you to do. Sometimes this can be confusing because we have learned from experience other paradigms that might conflict such as, "Sell all you possibly Can." and "Never let people take advantage of you". Those could get in the way if your sole desire was to delight the customer. As believers we are called to operate under a different paradigm. We are called to delight the Lord. There are paradigms we have learned in our past that conflict with that. We have learned well the paradigm, "Look out for number one" we are too familiar with the paradigm "If it feels good do it". But here in Nehemiah we learn of the obedience paradigm. If you are ever wondering what to do, a compromising situation arises, the obedience paradigm should kick in, do what you know God wants you to do, delight the Lord and you'll be right where He wants you. God wanted Nehemiah to build that wall.

Nehemiah was doing what God wanted him to do when he was out there slamming mortar. What does God want you to do? Obey Him.

Know the strategies of Satan: The Substitute teacher strategy, divide and conquer. The Little Fishy strategy, lure you out from the rock. Remember the obedience paradigm, Do what God wants you to do and you'll be right where your supposed to be. Did you see that Sanballet wanted Nehemiah to "come down" to the plains of Ono. We can come down to compromise anytime. Anybody can compromise that's easy. What tough is standing up and living a righteous life in the midst of a world that's anti God. It's tough isn't it? If you choose to stay away from the plains of compromise by assured of repeated attacks from the enemy. Verse 4 says they sent four messages to Nehemiah. Do not allow these repeated attacks to soften your response. The invitations can come like the ocean, one wave after another, it seems the temptations will never stop. Have you ever felt worn down by the oppositions invitations? It's tough isn't it. It's tough but it's best, it's the best way for you, for your kids and grandkids. Seemingly impossible things can be accomplished when we are determined to obey God and put His interests first. C.K Chesterton said, "Christianity has not been tried and found wanting, it's been found difficult and not tried." Lets stay out the plains of Ono.