

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 14TH - 15TH, 2021 // BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

HARD TIMES (NEHEMIAH 5:1-5) FROM EXTERNAL TO INTERNAL

Ch. 4 focused on outside oppression, but ch. 5 focuses on strife within the community.

- Since proper defense measures had been taken, outside pressure had slowed down, but now conflicts amongst the Jews escalated.
- These problems had been around before Nehemiah, but because he was now governor, they had someone to complain to.

THE FIRST GROUP

The first group of people that had grievances were those who did not own land and were dependent on daily wages to survive. Because they had no land, they couldn't grow grain to eat and sell.

- This would be similar to young families that cannot afford a house, and rent is so high it prohibits them from getting ahead.

THE SECOND GROUP

The second set of grievances was from landowners that had to take loans out against their land in order to buy food for their families.

- Even though they may have been in a slightly better state, even the landowners were facing tough economic times because of a famine.

THE THIRD GROUP

The third group was also landowners, but their complaint was excessive taxes from the king on their land.

- The other problem was that they were borrowing money from other Jews to pay the tax, but the interest rates were too high. In other words, Jews were taking advantage of other Jews in a crisis. This was unethical.

V5 IS REALLY IMPORTANT

Because of a lack of benevolence in times of crises, irresponsibility with finances, and exceeding debt, people were "subjecting [their] sons and daughters to slavery."

- **The excess and carelessness of one generation will always affect the next. This is why we must be wise, humble, and generous.**

RESPONSIBILITY AND BENEVOLENCE

We can pull two really important principles from this section. 1) **We should handle our money wisely/biblically, live within our means, and avoid debt.** 2) We should also be generous with our finances because **the Christians should understand grace, benevolence, and generosity because, ultimately it's not our money.**

A DECISION (NEHEMIAH 5:6-13)

ETHICS MATTER

When Nehemiah heard that Jews were taking advantage of other Jews, he became "extremely angry." Even though huge interest rates and becoming a slave to pay for debt was legal, it was not ethical.

- Nehemiah made it clear that **law is secondary to ethics and morality and that Christians should be passionate about justice.**

SO, HE CALLS A LARGE MEETING

Nehemiah talked about how bad it was that people had sold slaves to foreigners but that it was even worse that the Jews were enslaving each other.

- He simply said, "What you are doing isn't right." **For any follower of God to take advantage of anyone, especially another believer, is sinful.**

REMEMBER THE SIMPLE COMMANDS

Jesus compressed all of the teachings of the Bible into 2 easy commands: love God and love your neighbor.

- Nehemiah wasn't anti-business or success. Of course, **there must be accountability and even judgment at times, but we are to show a similar level of grace and love to others that Jesus has shown us.**

LET'S START OVER

Nehemiah asked all of the lenders to return what they had taken from the borrowers and to stop charging interest. Shockingly, they humbled themselves and returned all they'd acquired.

- To ensure they kept their word, the priests were brought in and Nehemiah ceremonially shook out his robe to show the matter was settled.

"MAY GOD LIKEWISE SHAKE FROM HIS HOUSE"

Like Nehemiah shook his robe, he prayed that God would shake from His people those who dealt unethically and uncompassionately with others.

- The bottom line is **how we work, do business, and use our resources matter to God. We can either honor Him with our gifts, or risk being shaken out by God.**

BY EXAMPLE (NEHEMIAH 5:14-19) IT TURNED OUT TO BE A LONG TRIP

What started off as a trip to build back the wall of Jerusalem became Nehemiah being appointed as governor of Judah by Artaxerxes for 12 years. In that time Nehemiah lived below his means and rights, "never [eating] from the food allotted to the governor."

- Nehemiah **modeled how to live and lead by action, not just words.**

"BECAUSE OF THE FEAR OF GOD"

The previous governors of the region took advantage of their position and power and "oppressed the people." But because Nehemiah had a relationship with God and a proper "fear" of Him, he led differently.

- **The wall, economic reform, and defense came, but the hearts of the people had to be aligned to God first.**

THE STATE OF THE HEART MUST COME FIRST

Rebuilding the community, the economy, and social justice will never reach its potential or have a lasting impact without the hearts of man being set on the principles of God.

- The church should care and take part in these things, but **we must make sure our intent is good and that we are following the teachings of the Bible first.**

PERSONAL AMBITION MUST BE SET ASIDE

Nehemiah was a generous and selfless leader that hosted "150 Jews and officials, as well as guests from the surrounding nations at my table" every day. And, the resources that provided the food came from his salary so it didn't place a burden on the people.

- **Christ-like leadership is sacrificial, and all Christians are called to demonstrate it.**

KNOWING OUR BIGGEST REWARD COMES LATER

Nehemiah asked God to "Remember me favorably...for all that I have done for this people."

- This wasn't selfish, but him **wanting God's approval.** It also reminds us that **our ultimate reward lies in the life to come and that how we treat others is a factor that determines the size of that reward.**

"WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS..."

- Where our time, money, and energy go will reveal where our heart truly lies. How are we using our resources? Honestly, where is our heart?
- Though laws and social justice are important, they will not fix humanity unless our hearts are devoted to God and the teachings and principles of the Bible.

HOW WE WORK MATTERS

- In hard times we will be tempted to cut corners or even take advantage of others, but we must honor God and others through ethical practices and hard work.
- We must partner wisdom and benevolence because God cares for the poor and oppressed. We must also educate people on how to biblically handle money.

HOW WE LEAD MATTERS

- How we use the time, talent, and resources God has given us now will always affect later generations. Are we digging a hole someone else has to climb out of?
- Are we living responsibly and sacrificially? People are always watching.
- Do we as Christians understand that we are all called to lead on some level?
- **Matthew 5:14-16**
- **Who are we in this for? Or, whose kingdom are we building?**