

## THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

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

### A GREAT OUTCRY (NEHEMIAH 5:1-5)

In the beginning of this chapter, we see a great outcry from the men and their wives against their Jewish brothers. (vs. 1)

- Several factors had come together to produce a situation where many families were in such despair and poverty that they no longer had the means to provide for themselves.
- Many of Judah's towns and villages supplied men and women for the strenuous and difficult task of clearing rubble and rebuilding the gates and walls.

These people had stepped out in faith to undertake this work, by leaving their normal trades, and farms for a period of over two months.

- We see this starting to take its toll, as the main breadwinners were away from home, and many large families were going without food.
- Not only were they unable to work, but the area had been going through a famine and it became difficult to find food, causing merchants to inflate the price of grain.

Because of these factors, we have four different groups of people involved in this crisis.

- In the first group we have people who owned no land and couldn't afford to purchase any food. (vs. 2)
- The second group were landowners who had to mortgage off their property to buy food. (vs. 3)
- The third group was forced to borrow money to pay higher taxes due to the increased collection of it by the Persian empire. (vs. 4) Not only that but they were forced to sell their children into slavery. (vs. 5)

It was estimated that the Persian king collected an equivalent of 20 million darics (gold coins) a year in taxes. This caused much of the coined money to be taken out of circulation, increasing poverty dramatically.

- The taking of land by the Persians and its failure to produce crops on it, like was done previously, caused a 50% rise in prices for food.
- During times of economic distress families would borrow funds, using family members as collateral. If one couldn't repay the debt, they would be sold as a slave.

The fourth group consisted of those who were exploiting the situation for their own advantage. These people were not Sanballat or Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, or Ashdodites, but their own Jewish brothers and sisters.

- They selfishly profited from those who had given up their own trades and work in the fields to help build the wall.
- This still happens within the Church today. Many people are trying to do the work that God has called them too only to be discouraged from within.

When the enemy attacks us from the outside it tends to have a uniting effect on us, so this is when he starts to attack from within.

- Jesus understood this well as he said in Mark 3:25 in response to a scribe. He said, "...a house divided against itself... will not be able to stand."
- All the enemy has to do is appeal to our selfish desires and he sits back and lets us do the rest of the work.
- We will literally complain and argue about anything whenever we take our focus off of Jesus.

### A GREAT ASSEMBLY (NEHEMIAH 5:6-13)

After listening to the charges brought up by the people, Nehemiah was very angry, but he didn't let his anger control him and act out in sin. He first consulted with his heart before he gave a response. (vs. 6)

- Many times, in life anger is an appropriate but not a sufficient response.
- Just like Nehemiah we need to allow ourselves time to reflect on our anger so it can lead us into useful and constructive application.
- **Ephesians 4:26**

When we become angry about injustice or a situation, our mind must become stirred so that we educate ourselves about the situation.

- To often the response stays purely emotional and we either become hardened by the situation or allow the situation to pass without any helpful action.

Nehemiah decided to call a great assembly to confront the problem of selfishness of some and the heartbreaking poverty of many, demanding both public rebuke and repentance. (vs. 7)

- He did this by appealing to them on many levels to allow them to see their sin.
- God does the same things to us. He will approach us on many levels to bring repentance in our hearts turning us from our sin and looking back to him.

He first confronted them through scripture by reminding them of the words of God in Exodus 22 and Leviticus 25 saying they are not to collect interest or make any fellow Jew a slave. (vs. 7-8)

- Whenever we or someone else is living in sin who are believers, it is always important to be reminded of scripture.
- **1 Timothy 3:16**

Nehemiah then engaged their conscience and heart by showing them that many of their brothers and sister whom they had sold into slavery, had just been bought out of it. (vs. 8)

- There is some discussion as to whether these nobles were treating their fellow Jews as slaves and not freeing them in the year of Jubilee or selling them back to the Gentiles only to bought back again.
- Either way their selfishness was causing more poverty, oppression, and families to be separated.

He then appealed to their fear of God and their knowledge of His character. (vs. 9a)

- They knew that since God was holy, merciful, and righteous they were expected to live in the

same manner as a part of the covenant relationship.

- You can't just know about God's truth, because if it has truly taken control of your life, it will also be apart of your actions. (James 2)

Nehemiah then demonstrated that their testimony to the Gentile nations was being threatened. (vs. 9b)

- Our testimony to the world is very important. Not only do we declare what God is like, but we are to manifest those qualities in our lives and be a living example to the world, through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- How were the nations to believe that Israel's God is kind, merciful, and compassionate when his people were being anything but?

Nehemiah's last appeal demonstrated his own personal practice. (vs. 10)

- Nehemiah wasn't just telling them to do one thing while he did another, as a hypocrite, but was living as an example. Though he was lending to help people he wasn't charging them interest.
- He told the nobles and officials to return everything even the interest that was collected to correct the oppression they had put on the people. (vs. 11)

The nobles and officials declared they would restore everything without requiring anything in return.

- Nehemiah made them swear an oath to the Lord and bound them to it by shaking out the folds in his garment. This was a symbol of the seriousness of the oath.
- They then closed in praise of the Lord! Whenever we are brought back from our sin in true repentance, it is a cause for celebration and praise for all involved!

### A GREAT EXAMPLE (NEHEMIAH 5:14-19)

Here we get to see an overview of a 12-year period in which Nehemiah was the governor.

- During this snapshot we get to see the generosity that was ingrained into his life because of two biblical principles; his reverence for God and his compassion for others.
- He used his privileges for bringing glory to God and helping, not for using others to make a kingdom for himself.
- How often do we look at what we can get out of a situation instead of giving up our personal rights to live out the gospel?

A reverence for God was not just a posture Nehemiah took up when he was in front of others in public worship. It was lived out every day through honoring God's name, obeying God's words, and loving God's people.

- Because he feared God, he refused to take their food, their money, or let his servants abuse his power. (vs. 14-15) Instead they paid their own expenses and didn't ask to be reimbursed.
- He refused to be opportunistic by buying land, to later sell it back at a higher price once the wall was built. (vs. 16)

Not only did Nehemiah prove to be a trustworthy governor forgoing personal gain he also gave of his own wealth to provide for others.

- He regularly fed over 150 guest not counting those that would come from the surrounding nations! It is estimated he could have fed over 500 people a day with the amount of food he prepared daily. (vs. 17-18)
- It is guessed that he may have kept an open-door policy for people or fed those who were working on the wall. This is a great example of his generosity.

We have the same opportunity to do good with what we have been given instead of just using it on ourselves.

- As Christian believers we are often reminded throughout the Bible that we have a responsibility to be generous to people who are struggling.
- Because we are to glorify the Lord with all He has given us.
- Just as Nehemiah prayed at the end of this chapter, we aren't after the reward of people but after God's reward. (vs. 19)

### ARE YOU FEELING WEARY?

- Are the **pressures of life** bringing to surface struggles within **ourselves**, our **marriages**, or **relationships** with friends and/or families?
- Does it feel like you are on **life support** and **barely hanging on**?
- Jesus says, "**come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**"

### ARE WE A GENEROUS PEOPLE?

**We have an enemy** who doesn't want us to **notice those who are burdened** within the Church **further creating division.**

- Do we notice those **who are suffering** around us or do we only come to church to **get our needs met**?
- If he can keep us **focused on ourselves, we won't be able to see outwardly.**

### WHERE DO WE START?

- We need to maintain unity within the Church by keeping our focus on God above all else.
- **Our testimony to the world is known by our love for each other.** By this the world will know that Jesus was sent here for them and that He loves them.
- Get involved in **LifeGroups!**
- Serve on a **Church Team!**
- Go to a **Development Class!**