

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 15TH, 2021 // BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

POWERLESS (NEHEMIAH 5:1-5)

WIDESPREAD OUTCRY

The people of God had found an advocate in Nehemiah, so they brought their issues to him.

- There was a famine in Jerusalem and the people there needed grain to eat and live, so loans were taken out on their land and vineyards. Others had to take out loans on their land to pay the taxes that the king was imposing on the people.

This outcry was "against their Jewish countrymen" (v1), meaning that during this crisis there were Jews that were taking advantage of their fellow Jews.

- Even though the famine may not have been avoided, the current hardships were preventable if their Jewish brothers had not taken advantage of them.

DEEPER ISSUES

The wealthy were exploiting the poor in order to make themselves rich. They used their position to rob some and put others into bondage.

- Greed was one of the sins that caused Israel to be judged and sent into Babylonian captivity. **Freed from captivity they return to the same sin, like a "dog returning to its vomit (Proverbs 26:11)."**

Multiple attempts from Sanballat to stop progress were unsuccessful, but this internal strife was all it took to stop God's work.

- God has promised that "even the gates of Hell will not prevail" against the Church, however when the people of God are not unified and working together, we are unable to stand (Mark 3:25).

THE PLEDGE (NEHEMIAH 5:6-13)

RIGHTEOUS ANGER

Upon hearing the news of the Jewish people exploiting their own, Nehemiah became "extremely angry."

- This was a righteous anger at the mistreatment of the poor, similar to Jesus flipping tables in the temple. **God has a special concern for the poor and will hold those accountable that take advantage of them.**

Nehemiah was neither wrong in being angry nor was he wrong in how he reacted to his anger. He took the time to "seriously consider the matter" before he acted.

- Where **righteous anger seeks restoration, unrighteous anger leads to destruction. Be angry and sin not!** (Eph 4:26)

"CALLED A LARGE ASSEMBLY"

After careful consideration, Nehemiah decides to publicly **rebuke** the people who were responsible in **hopes of repentance and restoration.**

- His goal was not to bring public humiliation but to bring personal restoration. **The reason and the way in which we speak against social injustices should look drastically different from the world!**

His rebuke was against the inflated interest that resulted in defaulted loans and the seizure of property.

- Though loaning at an interest was allowed for things that were not absolute necessities, it was wrong to benefit from someone financially if someone needed money for their most basic needs.

Nehemiah says, "we have done our best to buy back our [brothers] who were sold to foreigners."

- When Judah was conquered, many Jews were sold to foreigners, and many had been bought out of slavery, only to now be sold into slavery to other Jews because they couldn't pay off high-interest loans!

God had freed Israel from slavery in Egypt (Exodus) and captivity in Babylon (Ezra and Neh.), all for their fellow Jews to sell them back into bondage for profit.

- These greedy money lenders were actively tearing down what God and Nehemiah were trying to build up and returning their own people to bondage.

FEAR OF OUR GOD

After the assembly remains silent knowing they were wrong and without excuse, Nehemiah asks them, "Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God?"

- Their treatment of the people of God and the disregard for the law of God showed that they were not walking in fear of our God.

To the believer, fear of our God is not a fear of judgement or eternal separation, but a reverence of God.

- "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful. By it, we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." (Heb 12:28-29)

"Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Pro 1:7)." True wisdom comes from an understanding of who God is.

- Our culture is lacking fear for our God. We have become wise in our own eyes. We gain more and more knowledge, but never come to the truth of who God is. Like "fools we despise wisdom and discipline."

ABOVE REPROACH

Nehemiah reminds the money lenders that God has called them (Israel) to be a "light to the Gentiles" (Isaiah), but **their treatment of their own people weakened their ministry to their pagan neighbors.**

- When there is so much disunity and strife within the church it's no wonder that Christianity is on a decline in our country.

NEHEMIAH'S PERSONAL PRACTICE

He sets the standard by using himself as the example. He tells them that he has been lending money to the needy without interest or the threat of taking their property. Then he challenges them to do the same, and to give back what they had taken.

- In an act of repentance, they agree to do as Nehemiah had requested.

EVERYONE TOOK AN OATH

To symbolize what God would do to the money lenders if they broke their vow, Nehemiah "shook the folds of his robe."

- The Jewish leaders would have understood that shaking the dust off your robe or your feet would have been an act of condemnation (Acts 13:51; 18:6; Matt 10:14).

Everyone in the group responded with an "Amen" and they praised the Lord. The word amen means "so be it" or "may the Lord do all that you said."

- They were not only unified in their decision of restitution, but also in the acknowledgment and repentance of their sins. Then they responded in praise to the Lord.

GODLY EXAMPLE (NEHEMIAH 5:14-19)

THINKING OF OTHERS

As governor, Nehemiah would have been allotted food the same as previous governors, however he knew that the food he was "owed" came at a great burden to his people.

- Nehemiah put the needs of others ahead of his own personal interest. Since the burden was so great, he never ate the food allotted to him.

GENEROSITY

Not only did Nehemiah not take when he could have, but he also gave when he didn't have to.

- He gave away food that was given to him from the king's provisions, having as many as 150 guests at his table regularly for a huge feast.

DEVOTED

Nehemiah left his position as a Persian official in Babylon to come to Jerusalem and work to rebuild the walls.

- He didn't just occasionally show up to check progress, he was there actively participating in the construction and defense of the city.

"REMEMBER ME FAVORABLY"

Nehemiah asks God to remember all that he has done for His people.

- In his prayer, we see that he is not looking for praise, notoriety, or reward from people. Instead, everything he did was to please God who would ultimately reward him for his sacrificial work.

INVENTORY

- Are we returning to the same sin over and over?
- **Have we truly repented of sin in our lives?**
- **Do we live a life of repentance?**
- **If we are pursuing Christ, by proximity we should be moving away from sin.**
- **Do we have a healthy fear of the Lord?**
- **Do we think of others as more important than ourselves?**
- **Are we generous with all that we have? What about our time?**
- **Are we devoted, sacrificially giving up "self" for something bigger than us?**