

Re-Building the Walls Nehemiah 5 part 5

Defeating Discouragement

By Rev. P. Michael Williamson October 11th 2009

Where have we been so far?

Ch 1: Jerusalem is in a mess.

Ch 2: Asking the king for a leave of absence.

Ch 3: God's work. Working well with others.

Ch 4: Lessons on being God's work crew. Opposition is inevitable; Prayer & work go hand in hand; Unity is essential; Personal cost is part of the deal. This is what every team needs to know.

Ch 5: The problem in today's passage is **Selfish Ambition: Let me explain. Bad news good news... Bad news.** Before the exile the rich were ripping off the poor with dishonest scales and selling the sweepings from the floor with their wheat. See Amos 8:1-6. **Good news** One of the best examples of the God's system at work was Ruth gleaning the side of the fields of Boas.

After the exile there was still some "Babylon" in the Jewish merchants and money lenders, even though they had returned to the Promised Land. "These selfish money lenders were tearing down everything that God and Nehemiah were trying to build up."

Defeating Discouragement

Nehemiah 5 – 6:14

1. A Great Cry v.1-5

God hears the cry of the poor for justice.

Three problems confronting the poor: a famine; loss of earnings because of their part in rebuilding the wall; taxes payable to the Persian King

The rich were lending money to the poor taking their land and vineyards as collateral and had taken away their ability to provide food for their families during the famine. The poor had been forced to sell their children into slavery just in order to eat. It was Egypt all over again except this time it was their own countrymen who were the oppressors. God's people were and are supposed to be "A light to the gentiles." The poor cried out to Nehemiah.

2. A Great Assembly v.6-13

i. Nehemiah's Anger

Nehemiah was outraged at these charges brought against the rich. His anger flared up at the utter injustice of the situation.

ii. Nehemiah's Prayer

Nehemiah yes was angry but he was not hasty, he pondered first and I believe it is implied that he prayed before he acted. Then he confronted the nobles and officials with the unjust treatment of the poor.

iii. Nehemiah's Rebuke

Nehemiah saved his rebuke for the large public meeting. He uses the term "Brothers" 4 times in his rebuke and he is basing his response on God's word, the Law of Moses forbid charging interest to fellow Jews (they were charging 12% annual rate). The rebuke was based on love for each other, and on God's redemptive purpose in the world.

Nehemiah told them what they should do; return the land and interest to correct this injustice. He warned the rich to fear God's judgement.

Once the rich had agreed to do what Nehemiah told them, he had them make an oath before the priests, city officials and the whole assembly.

Shaking out his robes was a sign that if you don't keep your promises may God shake you out of the Jewish community. The congregation's response was Amen meaning: So be it. This was not just a public meeting this was an act of worship to put things back the way that God had intended the community to behave towards each other.

3. A Great Example v.14-19

Nehemiah put serving the people ahead of selfish ambition and personal gain. He used his privileges for helping the people, he did not use people to build a kingdom for himself. Previous Governor's had used their position to promote their own importance, influence and authority. For leaders EGO so often gets in the way of serving the people. EGO stands for Edging God Out which is a direct result of pursuing selfish ambition. Nehemiah is such a positive example unlike the previous governor's. He kept an open table for at least 150 people which he supplied out of his own pocket. He and his staff did not receive the daily allowance that was their right. They did not want to burden the people.

Having settled the disputes within the community which had caused discouragement, Nehemiah now had to face personal attack from outside the community.

4. A Great Attack Nehemiah 6:1-14

The enemy's tactics are always very similar.

Read John 10:10a "The enemy seeks to steal, kill and destroy."

i. Destroy Nehemiah

So Sanballat sought to destroy Nehemiah's work on the wall by inviting him to a meeting 25 miles from Jerusalem in a place called Ono. In four letters Sanballat asked the same question, the enemy will always be persistent. Nehemiah's answer was always the same I will not be distracted from this great project to come and meet with you.

Even when Sanballat said they could help with the project. Yeh right! Compromise the work of building the wall was what Sanballat was trying to achieve. Nehemiah was not drawn in by his deception. Sanballat had been against the project from the very beginning. Why would he change his tune now?

ii. Disturb Nehemiah

The open letter was a way of trying to intimidate Nehemiah as the messenger would be able to read it and gossip the contents around the community. Sanballat's intent was to disrupt the community from within. Usually official letters were sealed so only the recipient could read the content. Sanballat claimed to be reporting a rumour that was circulating amongst the people that Nehemiah was going to have himself proclaimed King; Nehemiah called the fabrication for what it was an outright lie.

iii. Discredit Nehemiah

One of the community prophets was seemingly scared to come out of his house and he confided in Nehemiah that they should both hide in the Temple for safety that night. Nehemiah knew that was against God's word. The law forbid a layman to enter the Temple sanctuary on pain of death. Here was a Sanballat hireling inside the community trying to discredit Nehemiah before God and the whole community. Nehemiah was not taken in by this deceptive scheme to discredit him as what was being suggested was going against God's word.

Application for us today

All of life is worship, all we do is an offering to God. Nehemiah saw the rebuilding of the walls as worship to God and part of his purpose.

Worship means: "to bow down" and "to serve."

Nehemiah was outraged at the treatment of the poor by the rich. God is outraged at the way the poor are abused by the rich. This is a continuous theme running through the scripture. When it comes to the poor God literally has a deep passion for the poor, the oppressed, the widows and the orphans.

Justice is close to God's heart and so justice needs to be close to our hearts to. Justice means to set things right in God's plan for the world. Justice can become an out working of our worship

"The Bible makes it clear that doing something about this injustice is part of our worship to God"

When Necessary Use Words Mike Pilavachi Regal Books 2006 p.106

The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern (Proverbs 29:7)

The subject of Justice merits 500 examples of direct teaching in the New Testament alone. That should grab our attention as to what is close to God's heart.... God wants to "infiltrate and motivate all areas of our lives" When Necessary Use Words Mike Pilavachi Regal Books 2006 p.100 &p104

Proverbs 14:31 states "He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God."



Mike Pilavachi goes onto say: "If we do not take justice seriously, we are not taking God and his ways seriously. If we want to truly honour God, we must stop seeing worship as something we do in church, and take it out into society."

When Necessary Use Words Mike Pilavachi Regal Books 2006 p.106

Next week as part of our service we will all have an opportunity to stand up and speak out against injustice.

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EGO stands for Edging God Out

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