

Women's Bible Study – Spring 2019
Nehemiah 5
Angie Pankratz - 02/06/19



One thing I love about Nehemiah is that He is a man who knows the Lord. He knows the Lord and He knows His promises. We ended chapter 4 with Nehemiah directing the people to be fully equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor and yet Nehemiah tells his people - from the nobles to the common folk - "Our God will fight for us!"

It is obvious that Nehemiah has a close walk with the Lord. He knows him. He talks with Him and He obeys Him. He knows His God keeps his promises and will fight for His own. However, he also knows God uses His people. Even though His God will fight for His people, it is a necessary part of his plan to have the Israelites fully armed and ready to defend.

Never allow the promises of God to be an excuse for you to be lazy. Yes, God will provide. Yes, God will protect. Yes, God will heal. But that does not mean that we should not work, not have fire alarms and not seek medical help. God has given us wisdom and sometimes the way he provides for us is through our ability to work and make wise choices.

So that is how chapter 4 ended...Here we are in chapter 5 and there's another problem arising.

Read Neh. 5:1-8

We know based on Nehemiah 6:15 that it took the Israelites 52 days to complete the wall. The community had been focused on this mission and they likely paid a great economic price for this accomplishment. Main heads of household and breadwinners left their trades, crafts and farms to work on this wall. In a hand-to-mouth economy 8 weeks without a paycheck would take a toll on any society. Not to mention the exorbitant taxes the Persian king placed on them.

Nehemiah's first reaction is to listen to the people.

In 5:6 we are told that "Nehemiah heard their outcry." Now Nehemiah is not hurting financially. He is not one of them who is needing to mortgage his land or sell his children into slavery to put food on the table. Yet Nehemiah hears the voices of those hurting. He writes in this book (journal) exactly what the complaints of the people were. He didn't read about it or watch it on the nightly news. He met with them and heard their specific complaints.

"Those who shut their ears to the cries of the poor will be ignored in their own time of need." Prov. 21:13

I have been convicted many times to get my information on a particular people group from a 24 hour news station. Instead it would be much better to serve those who are hurting - whether it be the poor, refugees or Veterans or whomever - and hear directly from their own mouths why they can't get ahead than to hear from a distant individual or a TV commentary.

Next we see that Nehemiah gets angry.

"When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry." Neh. 5:6

I used to think that anger was a sin. However, here we see this emotion as a tool that God uses to bring about his good work. Emotion is a gift from God. I believe it's one way that we've been made in his image. Righteous anger - anger over an injustice - is not a sin but rather the means that God uses to bring about change.

When I think of William Booth of the Salvation Army, Mother Theresa and her ministry to those with disease or William Wilberforce and his campaign for the abolition of slavery...God used their righteous passion - or anger - about an injustice to bring about his justice.

But the injustices of the world were never overturned by sheer anger.

"When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials." Neh. 5:6-7

Nehemiah's fury motivated him to come up with a plan. If our compassion is genuine, anger will not be our final thought on an injustice!

Raymond Brown said, "(Nehemiah's) response is at three levels: emotional, intellectual and volitional. The heart is moved (very angry), the mind is engaged (I pondered them) and the will is motivated (and then accused)." (Brown, 1998)

In our home I've made it clear to my kids that I do not want them to whine about their hunger pains or to be frustrated about the length of time it may be taking me to flip the pancakes or whip the cream... They only need to come and say one line... "How can I help!?"

Your emotion about an injustice has likely been placed in your heart so that somehow you can be a small part of the change or healing process. Just like Nehemiah, ponder how the Lord might use you. He may be calling you to fast and pray for a situation or maybe he is asking you to go and serve. Only you will know after seeking His will...

So again Nehemiah just doesn't accuse but rather sets up a meeting with the nobles and officials. Don't email, don't text, don't post a message on Facebook... set up a meeting with someone you may disagree with face to face. There is something about a face to face interaction which often results in understanding and compromise much better than any other type of interaction.

Matthew 8:15 tells us to **go** to our brother or sister who has offended us.

So Nehemiah has a meeting with the Israelites who are putting these outrageous financial burdens on their own people. In Nehemiah's meeting with them he appeals to them to change their ways for two main reasons...

1.) They're hypocrites

He reminds them how they have finally brought back their fellow Israelites from Babylonian captivity and yet here they are forcing them to again be separated from their own families. Alas they are freed from slavery in Babylon only to be selling their children into slavery by their own leaders.

Nehemiah uses strong familial type terms - He says in verse 8, we have brought our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!

We are called to love our brothers in the Lord.

"If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need." Deut. 15:7-8

"If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." 1 John 4:20

2.) They must revere the Lord and his commands

Starting in verse 9 Nehemiah says -

What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?

Verse after verse the OT condemns the greed that seeks to profit from the misfortune of others.

"Don't take advantage of the poor just because you can; don't take advantage of those who stand helpless in court. The Lord will argue their case for them and threaten the life of anyone who threatens theirs." Prov. 22:22-23

Out of reverence for the Lord they were not to disregard his commands on how to treat those destitute in their communities. They were to deal mercifully with the poor as an example of the great mercy of the Lord.

God had called Israel to be a light to the nations. They were to be a testimony to the idol-worshipping nations around them of a God who is faithful, a God who redeems, a God who is merciful! Yet these Israelites had tainted their testimony to others because they treated their own so cruelly!

Our obedience to God shows him how great our gratitude and love towards Him is. Even beyond that it is a testimony to those around us of His work in our lives.

Before we completely annihilate the Israelite leaders, let's take a look how they respond to the Nehemiah's confrontation -

“‘We will give it back,’ they said. ‘And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.’” Neh. 5:12

So then Nehemiah held an assembly at which he said -

In this way may God shake out of their house and possessions anyone who does not keep this promise. So may such a person be shaken out and emptied!”

At this the whole assembly said, ‘Amen,’ and praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised. Neh. 5:13

The Israelite nobles humbly repented and true change took place.

We are told at the end of the chapter that even though Nehemiah was appointed Governor that he nor his brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. Out of reverence for God he did not place the same heavy burdens on the people as his predecessors. Instead he devoted himself to the work on the wall. He also hosted 150 Jews and officials at his table.

He ends chapter 5 with the most beautiful quote -

“Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people.”

The Lord tells us to not give in such a way that is showy or that our left hand does not know what the right hand is doing **because** we have confidence that our Father sees every act we do and will reward us for that.

“God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.” Hebrews 6:10

Looking back over this chapter I am challenged by three different individuals or groups of individuals. That is how I drew out the three questions on your announcement page.

First, I think of **the offenders**. I wonder who am I mistreating? Who has God commanded me to love and lay my life down for and yet instead I am making life hard for them? What areas of my life should I repent because I am misusing my power or position and neglecting those who find it hard to speak up for themselves? It is hypocrisy to say I love God and not show love to my neighbors.

Secondly I consider **the defender**. Nehemiah is such a great example of one who hears the cries of the victims of an unjust situation. Do I hear the cries of those mistreated? Do I

take the time to meet with them, hear their stories of injustice? Do I think, pray and help to construct a plan for their healing? Do I sacrifice my allotment, my blessing because I know that I am benefitting from someone's sacrifice?

Lastly, I consider **the offended**. With my background I have had many psychology classes to know that healing can only take place once I recognize areas of my life that I perceive as unjust. It is hurtful and unnecessary to mention names and specific situations out loud but we are called to bring our hurts to the Lord.

We may not in this lifetime meet a Nehemiah who comes to our rescue. We may never have anyone who truly understands an area of injustice in our lives but we have a God who is our refuge, fortress and great defender. Yes, we share in his suffering here on earth but we know that they are not worth comparing with the glory of God that will one day be revealed to us.

Do I trust that the Lord is truly my Defender?

"The Lord is your mighty defender, perfect and just in all his ways; Your God is faithful and true; he does what is right and fair." Deut. 32:4

It may not happen here on earth but we are promised a time when there will be a new heaven and new earth where righteousness dwells... In that we place our hope. It doesn't make it easier until that day comes but we have that assurance that victory and justice will one day happen!

Jan. 30th, 2019(snow day cancellation): Juli Fischer's recap of Nehemiah 3 & 4

Chapter 3 - Nehemiah used wisdom.

- a. Delegated
- b. Relied on Communitywords "next to him" used often

Chapter 4 – Attacks on Building the Wall

- a. Anger of others. (Verses 1, and 7)**When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed.**
The wall would hurt Sanballat's trade route and the economy
- b. Mockery or sarcasm (verse 2) **in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?"**
- c. Threats and intimidation (verses 8, 11) **they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.**

- d. Discouragement and exhaustion (verses 10, 6) **Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, “The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.”**
- e. Negativism from within (verse 12) **Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, “Wherever you turn, they will attack us.”** Lived near the wall but not a part of the building
- f. Fear (verse 14) **After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”**

His Response

- a. Prayer (verses 4, 9) **Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity.**
 - 1. Why? Reminds us who is in control.
 - 2. We acknowledge in whom we trust.
 - 3. Fight the good fight
- b. Vigilance (verse 6) **so we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.**
- c. Keep the eye on the enemy (verse 9) (1Peter 5:8) **But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.**
- d. Focus on the Lord (verse 14) (Colossians 3:2) **After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your families, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”**

Application

- a. Ch. 3 - body of Christ. Romans 12:4,5
- b. Ch. 4- the struggle for the church, John 15:18,19

**Women’s Bible Study is a ministry of Autumn Ridge Church in Rochester, MN 55902
 Questions? ouren.jennifer@autumnridgechurch.org or call 507-288-8880**