

A Needy People!

Nehemiah 5: 6-13

I like going back to Nehemiah at various times because it calls us to rise up and start again. We need that from time to time. Nehemiah says:

⁶ When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. ⁷ I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are charging your own people interest!" So, I called together a large meeting to deal with them ⁸ and said: "As far as possible, we have bought back 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!" They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.

⁹ So I continued, "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? ¹⁰ I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest! ¹¹ Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them—one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil."

¹² "We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say."

Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. ¹³ I also shook out the folds of my robe and 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."

This part of the story starts with God's people crying out against the Jewish brothers, "**an outcry of the people and their wives...**" meaning, everyone was upset with them. This meant, one group was fighting against another. When God's people fight one another, they certainly are not fighting the real enemy, nor getting the Lord's work done. That was a concern for Nehemiah and many others. The reason for the problems, "**money.**" They couldn't afford to eat, pay their mortgages, buy the things they needed, and on top of that, there was a famine. The issues they were dealing with came because some within their own group were abusing others. Some of them couldn't pay back the money they borrowed and thus everything was growing darker and darker. They had a feel of emptiness, of hopelessness.

We all know that there are many people in need in our world today., that is just a given fact. The truth be known, we are all needy people.

Illustration

Situations very similar to these, are affecting many, including our children. There was an incident recently, where three people in one high school committed suicide. It took place at Lakeridge High School. Two teachers and one student in the last three years have taken their lives. People are crying out for help, all around us, many more than perhaps you or I can even realize. The question arises, what do we do?

The people of Nehemiah's day, were just as needy as many are today, just as poor, perhaps even more so, than most. No doubt, they were wanting for something or someone who would offer them strength and Grace, while supplying them with hope and compassion filled with love. They were a needy people. Just as many of us are today.

Our world is hurting, and thus, we as a people, every one of us are hurting. When events such as the Lakeridge incident happens, (**and that is not the only event like that taking place in our world**) it affects not only those involved, but every one of us.

Listen to some gruesome statistics found within the church:

From an earlier Barna Report - November 3, 2003

•More than four out of five adults – 83% - contend that they are concerned about the moral condition of the nation. **Given the fact that 84% of all adults consider themselves to be Christians, they have good reason to worry about the moral state of this country. Many of their own views, conflict with the moral teachings of their professed faith in God's and His teaching.** (repeat)

Not long ago, a study was done to see where people stand on ten moral behaviors, and this is what they found. **A majority of Americans** believed that each of the following three activities were **"morally acceptable."** It didn't say whether they were Christians or non-Christians.

Those included:

- gambling (61%), is acceptable - **despite how it is destroying people**
- co-habitation (60%), **is acceptable** and
- sexual fantasies (59%) are acceptable, even when it tears families apart.

Nearly half of the adult population, (50%) felt that two other behaviors were morally acceptable:

- having an abortion (45%) (**that included supposed Christians**) and
- having a sexual relationship with someone of the opposite sex, other than their spouse (42%).

About one-third (33%) of the population gave the stamp of approval to:

- pornography (38%),
- profanity (36%),
- drunkenness (35%) and
- homosexual behavior (30%).

The activity that garnered the least support was - **using non-prescription drugs (17%) nationwide – as acceptable.** I don't know about you, but that amazed me, since we (**Oregon among several states**) now have legalized drugs, which are destroying our families lives. Within the Evangelical portion of God's church, the percentages do drop some, yet, they are not altogether gone. It dropped **4% (so from 45 to 41)** for those interviewed who were in favor of having abortions, and yet still, **27%** believed that most of that other activities are acceptable for those who serve the Lord. All of the other issues I mentioned earlier, fall somewhere in between those percentages, and that is within God's church. We are a **NEEDY** people!

Our morality has been broken into pieces, and the only way we will find the healing we need, the wholeness we must have, is through Jesus Christ. Living by the Word!

We cannot continue to be involved with the habits of this world, and expect that we will be able to live the kind of life the Lord is calling us to live. Nehemiah heard the outcry of his people, those who felt lost, those who desired to live, not just survive, and he went to the Lord in prayer and then took action.

Let's look at what took place as Nehemiah helps the poor...

First - Nehemiah confronts the issues...

"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. I told them, "You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!" So, I called together a large meeting to deal with them and said: "As far as possible, we have bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your brothers, only for them to be sold back to us!" They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say." NEH 5:6-8

These were hard times for the nation of Israel. Hard times for those who followed a loving God. It was Nehemiah's, and the governors of the land, job to ***"deliver the poor and the needy"*** from the oppression they were under. ***Hard times, and hard hearts***, made the poor people a miserable people. Am I talking about Nehemiah's day, ***or today?*** You tell me. ***It never seems like hard times come during moments when life is easy, they come after we have allowed the world to dominate our lives.***

In the midst of rebuilding the wall, Nehemiah following what the Lord told Him to do, the complaints come rolling in about how the people were being abused. Nehemiah's hands were full already, still, he knew he must do something to answer the cries.

How easy it is to turn a deaf ear toward those who are crying out, when you are overloaded? How easy is it to simply ignore the cries of the hurting, when we are living comfortably? Oh, how easy it is to plug our ears with almost anything we can find or hear, so that we need not respond to those who are in dire ways. At times, rather easy, isn't it? But that was not the case for Nehemiah. He could not ignore this any longer.

Nehemiah took three simple steps to handle this situation:

1) He sympathized with the people. In his anger - he felt the hurt and pain of the people. He sympathized with them, and allowed their pain to become his. Why, so he could understand what they were going through.

2) He consulted with God. Nehemiah spent time in prayer, listening to God. He spent time considering what was taking place and why. Nehemiah took some time to consider all the facts, the outside forces imposed upon them, and what steps he should take. He thought things through carefully and intentionally. He considered and counted the costs of his actions.

3) He rebuked the nobles and the rulers under his authority...

He went to those who had allowed power and money to sway their hearts, and told them they were out of line. When evil is out of line, it may well be that God desires someone, maybe

some of us, to stand up and make it known that this is unacceptable. Nehemiah was the right person, at the right time, to make that statement. At times, we may well be that right person for our time, in a given situation.

Within each of our lives, there are things we should not allow to be acceptable. It is time, may I repeat myself, it is time to make a stand for the Lord, in our homes, in our work places and in our communities, where we live. ***It is time to let the world know that we live for Christ! We dare not be bashful or afraid to make it public that we worship and follow Him.*** Behavior and actions are needed. A two-sided coin in life, behavior and actions within our lives. We can't keep doing what the world does, if we truly wish to impact others for Christ.

One of the issues we face is that everyone seems to be waiting for the next guy, the other guy, to step up. Watching, waiting, wanting, yet doing nothing. When evil is allowed to reign and control, lives will be destroyed. It is time! Time to confront the issues...

Jesus says in John,

"³³ In fact, you sent investigators to listen to John the Baptist, and his testimony about me was true. ³⁴ Of course, I have no need of human witnesses, but I say these things so you might be saved. ³⁵ John was like a burning and shining lamp, and you were excited for a while about his message. ³⁶ But I have a greater witness than John—my teachings and my miracles.

The Father gave me these works to accomplish, and they prove that he sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has testified about me himself. You have never heard his voice or seen him face to face, ³⁸ and you do not have his message in your hearts, because you do not believe me—the one he sent to you." JOH 5:33-38 **Do we believe in Jesus?**

People are hurting all around us, right now. People who ***do not believe*** in the One God who was sent to save this world, Jesus! It is time to share with those who do not believe, the truth. So that they will come to know Him as Lord, or, if we don't make this stand, they may die as sinners lost to hell forever. Then, once we make the stand, speaking the Words and living the life before them, it will then be their choice. They need to see, know and hear.

Second - Stopped the evil, start doing what's right...

"So, I continued, "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? I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop! Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the usury you are charging them--the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil." NEH 5:9-11

Nehemiah was a great leader. He calls the people of that time and area to come together in a large assembly, prior to his rebuke. He wanted all of the people to hear what he had to say, and what he was going to do. He wanted the masses to bear witness to the words of guidance and relief coming. Like Ezra, Nehemiah was a wise, good, useful and powerful man of God.

Nehemiah use everything at his disposal to cause the rulers to conform to what is right.

1) He revealed the evil they were participating in. Part of that evil was known as “usury.” *It is the practice of charging excessive interest when loaning funds to a stranger and it was not uncommon in that day.* Charging far more than they needed to charge.

They were breaking God’s Law, as the law said not to charge your brothers in need.

2) Nehemiah reminds them that he, along with others, had purchased many of them to free them from their former slave owner, and now, these Nobels and Rulers were enslaving them again.

There are times when one must refer to the Law of God, using it to point out the injustice being done to God’s own, by God’s own people. Some may have even taken advantage of brothers and sisters in Christ, in the name of the Lord. Is that right, should we? He told them, God has freed these people from the bondage of slavery, what right have you to enslave them.

We are to be examples as leaders in the body, especially when times are hard, that show the love of God. Especially during difficult times.

Right now, I believe the Lord is looking for:

• ***Parents to be parents, and worry less about being your child’s best friend.*** Parenting them. Teaching them the Word by living it. Leading them toward the Lord, correcting and stopping them when they do something wrong, and discipline them when discipline is required.

I believe the Lord is looking for:

• ***Managers of businesses to be managers...*** Men and women of integrity, who will not allow the evil around them, to corrupt them, as they do what is right in business. Honesty and integrity. Perhaps even stopping other co-workers from stealing, lying, cheating, and destroying their lives, and ours. ***Being a good example.***

I believe the Lord is looking for:

• ***Christians to stop compromising their personal values to fit into another group of people, maybe even other Christians no walking after Christ.***

From his book *"Fit to Lead: Making Leadership Christians,"* James E. Means says, When the opportunity arises: ***"If it is wrong, then say it is wrong. If something needs to stop, then let those who need to stop know it." "Do it lovingly, but directly."*** As the Lord’s own children, this is part of what we are called to do. The key here is ***doing so with is love.*** Any individual who is invested with the leadership mantle, must fight constantly against the temptation to do that which wins the approval of people, by doing that which brings praise to God.

Lastly – the Lord is looking for:

3 – People who will draw them back to God

¹² *They replied, "We will give back everything and demand nothing more from the people. We will do as you say." Then I called the priests and made the nobles and officials swear to do what*

they had promised. ¹³ I shook out the folds of my robe and said, "If you fail to keep your promise, may God shake you like this from your homes and from your property!" The whole assembly responded, "Amen," and they praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised." NEH 5:12-13

We may not have to sign a written document, however, we may need to **form a covenant with God**, as to what we will do in certain situations. Nehemiah turned their attention back to the Lord, and the promises God made to them, and the promises they needed to make unto God. It is easy to forget what we told the Lord last month, last week, or even yesterday. It is the mission, and task, of every true follower of Christ, to help the Lord draw people back who may have wandered off. Nehemiah's hope was that those who are serious, will sign on the dotted line so to speak, and those who are not, they will walk away and leave the rest alone.

Nehemiah commanded a great deal of respect for his personal life, and the conviction he stood for.

- He always tried to direct people around him, to the Lord.
- He always sought to do what was right. No matter what.
- He always did what the Lord told Him to do, no matter how difficult, or, costly it might have been. He knew, that what the people truly needed, was the Lord!

- The answers we need today, are not found in empty promises of the politicians.
- The answers need today, are not found at the end of a broken bottle.
- The answers we need today, are found in Jesus Christ.** The answers we need, and the answers others need, are found by getting on our knees and seeking His face. Then standing up and following Him, even when it is difficult.

The Psalmist reminds us,

"Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always." PSA 105:4

Isaiah tells us,

"The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the LORD will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them." ISA 41:17

We live in a dry and thirsty land. A land where man can do whatever he may wish, seemingly, with little or no guilt. **Yet, have they found what he truly need? No,** they have not! God is waiting for each of us to come to Him, and then as we find Him, we are to lead others to Him as well. We need to be a Nehemiah in our homes, our work places, and our neighborhoods.

- Confront the issues – lovingly...
- Stop the evil and start doing right – be a good example...
- Come to Jesus - He is the answer to our need – directing others to come with us...