

## **Walk in the Fear of God**

*Nehemiah 5:1-19; Sunday, February 6, 2022*

### **Introduction:** Winter Olympics

- Who has had a chance to watch any of the Olympics this weekend?
- The Olympics remind me of God's heart for the nations! Let's pray that God would burden our hearts and open our eyes to gospel need and opportunities among the nations.
  - *"And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:9-10, ESV)*
- Pray!

### **Context**

#### **Review Chapter 2: 1/23: The Foundation of Favor by Tanner Turley**

- Nehemiah found favor in God's sight.
- Nehemiah was granted permission from the king to return and inspect Jerusalem's walls.
- After inspecting the walls, Nehemiah shares the poor condition with the people and calls them to rebuild the walls. The people responded by saying, "Let us rise up and build" (2:18).

#### **Then we come to chapters 3 and 4.**

- Tanner was planning on preaching on these two chapters last Sunday before the blizzard caused us to cancel our in person service.
- Normally, we would've just bumped that text and sermon to the following Sunday (to today), but Tanner had already planned to be out of town this weekend and I had already began working on my text, chapter 5.
- So, we've decided to do something that I don't think we've ever done...but because of the circumstances, we've decided to do.
  - I'm going to briefly summarize chapters 3-4 and then preach from Nehemiah 5 today.
  - Next week, Tanner is going to return to chapters 3-4 and preach the sermon he had already prepared.

#### **Summarize Chapter 3**

- Chapter 3 recounts the systematic work of rebuilding and repairing the walls around Jerusalem. The chapter goes section by section describing the work and naming the workers.
- The gates named encircle the city of Jerusalem, beginning north of the temple with the Sheep Gate and moving counter-clockwise around the city.
  - The Sheep Gate (1-2)
  - The Fish Gate (3-5)

- The Gate of Yeshanah (6-12)
- The Valley Gate (13)
- The Dung Gate (14)
- The Fountain Gate (15-27)
- The Horse Gate (28-32)
- The point of this chapter is to show how the people as a whole responded to Nehemiah's challenge, trusted in God's provision and worked together to rebuild the walls.

#### **Summarize Chapter 4**

- But the rebuilding wasn't without opposition. Sanballat and his allies were angry that the walls were being rebuilt and plotted to thwart the rebuild.
- So what did Nehemiah and the people do?
  - They prayed (4:4, 9).
  - They worked hard (4:6).
  - They looked to God with confidence (4:14, 20).
  - They prepared to take action (4:15-23).

#### **Transition to chapter 5:**

- As we come to chapter 5, we see that Nehemiah not only faced *external* threats and opposition to the completion of the wall, he also faced *internal* threats and barriers to the completion of the wall.
- In chapter 5, the focus shifts from the broken *walls* to broken *ways* among the people. The *structure* at stake in chapter 5 is the community itself.

#### **Read Nehemiah 5:1-19.**

#### **An Overview of the Narrative:**

#### **The Great Outcry (5:1-5):**

- There was a "great outcry" of the people and the wives against the Jews.
  - This word "outcry" is the same word used to describe the oppression the Israelites faced under Egyptian oppression (see Exod. 2:23; 3:9).
  - This was a cry for justice to their OWN people.
  - The outcry is from Jews about Jews.
  - The "wives" are mentioned probably because the men were working on the walls and not able to do their usual work and provide for their families.
- The situation:
  - The wall building and external opposition put more economic strain on the community.
    - This is a tension that Nehemiah has to manage.
    - God has called him to rebuild the walls. He needs people to work.
    - He also must make sure the community is cared for.
  - Manpower was diverted from raising crops and the harvest to raising walls.

- Nehemiah had even asked the workers to stay in Jerusalem and not return to their villages (see. 4:22).
- This had become a burden on the people.
- This problem developed over time.
- The main problem:
  - As a result, the people were struggling to make it financially and were suffering from a lack of food (5:2).
  - This was partially due to a famine (5:3) but primarily because the men were so focused on building the walls that the crops have been neglected.
- The implications:
  - They were mortgaging their fields, vineyards and houses to get food (5:3).
  - They borrowed money to pay the tax on their fields and vineyards (5:4).
  - As a final straw, with no other means of income, they were selling their children into slavery to pay for the taxes and food debts (5:5; economic slavery).
  - They felt powerless to resolve the situation (5:5).
  - The leaders were not just being insensitive to the needs of the people, they were exploiting the situation to their benefit.

#### **Nehemiah's Response and Rebuke (5:6-13):**

- As soon as it is brought to Nehemiah's attention, he understands exactly what is going on and he was outraged (5:6).
  - Nehemiah's anger seems justified given the injustice that was occurring. It shows the measure of his concern and love for the people.
  - "Took counsel with himself" = he got himself under control.
  - Some of the privileged people (the officials and nobles) were taking advantage of the situation.
  - They used their power to oppress the people and enrich themselves at the expense of the common people by charging interest (5:7).
  - This is a practice that the Law forbid (cf. Exod. 22:25; Lev. 25:36-37; Deut. 23:19-20).
  - They were not acting like "brothers."
- Nehemiah brings charges against the nobles and officials and holds an assembly (5:7).
  - He calls out their injustice (5:7-8).
  - He calls them to stop and change their ways (5:10).
  - He calls them to repent and return what they've gained (5:11).
    - "Shook out the fold" = a symbolic action matching the curse to follow to compel commitment to their stated action (cf. Matt. 10:14-15; Acts 18:6).
- The officials responded rightly and followed Nehemiah's instructions (5:12-13).

#### **Nehemiah's Sacrificial Example (5:14-19):**

- Nehemiah then provides an example for them to follow for how to provide for and care for people.
- As a part of his job, he was responsible for hosting and entertaining both domestic and

- foreign dignitaries.
- Nehemiah, as governor, could rightfully take a food allowance (5:14).
  - To do this he would've had to raise taxes for this.
  - Previous governors charged the people 40 shekels daily to cover the food allowance, which became a heavy burden on the people (5:15).
- Nehemiah and his brothers refused to use the food allowance (5:14).
- Instead, Nehemiah still provided for 150 people/day but paid for the expense himself (5:17-18).
  - This would've been a huge sacrifice on his part.
    - 1 ox/day
    - 6 sheep/day
    - 6 birds/day
    - Every ten days: an abundance of wine.
  - Imagine the cost over 12 years as Governor.
- Nehemiah refused to put this heavy burden on the people (18).

**Do you see what motivated Nehemiah?**

- We see this highlighted with the repeated phrase “the fear of God.”
  - Review 5:9.
  - Review 5:15.

According to Nehemiah, central to fixing and repairing the Jews’ broken ways was a *re-centering* of their affections and relationship to God. Nehemiah called them to walk in the fear of God.

**The Point: Daily walk in the fear of God and cultivate a passion for the glory of his name.**

What does Nehemiah 5 teach us about how to daily walk in the fear of God? First...

**I. Humbly submit to God and his Word and wholly strive to please him (5:1-9).**

The command to “fear God” is one of the central commands of the Bible. Look at what Deut. 10:12-13 says,

*“And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good?”* (Deuteronomy 10:12–13, ESV)

What does this verse teach us about fear?

- Walk in his ways.
- To love him.
- To serve him.

- Wholly: with all of your heart and soul.
- To keep his commands...which are for your good!

There are different kinds of fear:

- Natural fear: this is a fear of something that may cause us harm.
  - Spiders, looking out the window as seeing a sidewalk or road completely cased in ice, looking down a double black diamond, etc.
  - We avoid and flee what we fear.
- Godly fear:
  - The Puritan John Flavel says, “Godly fear does not arise from a perception of God as hazardous, but glorious.”
  - True and godly fear realizes that the best solution isn’t running from God, but running to him.
  - God isn’t interested in a legal relationship where we want to escape, but rather a relationship where we are family and want to cultivate.
  - When you run to him you will find the embracing arms of a loving Father. He is a personal God. The God who has bound himself in love to you through the gospel. It’s the covenant keeping God.

I love this reflection from Ray Ortlund on how the fear of God should shape our lives:

“The fear of the Lord takes us way beyond technical compliance with biblical law. It’s possible to obey the Ten Commandments while resenting them deep inside....But the fear of the Lord creates a heart of total openness: “Father, I am yours. How can I actively, fully please you right now?” (Ray Ortlund).

So to walk in the fear of God means to humbly submit to God and his Word and wholly strive to please him!

- It means to live in such a way that God-centered way where he shapes everything in your life.
- You build your life around God.
- He becomes the most important voice and opinion in your life.

What had happened in Nehemiah’s time was that the people were not walking in the fear God.

- They had neglected God’s Word.
- They were not walking in his ways or keeping his commands.
- Israel’s primary problem was not opposition from its enemies but their lack of devotion and commit to God.

*A second truth we learn about walking in the fear of God is that we should...*

## **II. Turn away from evil and confess and repent of sin (5:10-13).**

Nehemiah called them to repent and make right the injustices that they had done.

- He calls them to a genuine and costly repentance for two main reasons:
  - They had broken God’s law.
  - The history of God’s deliverance that led to the giving of those laws.
- We see all of these come together in Leviticus 25.

*“If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God. “If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave: he shall be with you as a hired worker and as a sojourner. He shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. Then he shall go out from you, he and his children with him, and go back to his own clan and return to the possession of his fathers. For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God.” (Leviticus 25:35–43, ESV)*

**Highlight the following:**

- What should you do if your brother becomes poor?
  - Support him. Care for him.
- Take no interest or profit!
- Fear your God (x2).
- “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God” (x2).

**See also Neh. 5:8:**

- Nehemiah reminds them that they just came out of exile!!!
- He highlights the irony of the Jews being redeemed from exile only to be sold into slavery by their own brothers.

**The gospel is what leads us to repentance:**

- Jesus died for every one of your sins.
- Jesus freed you from slavery to sin.
- Don’t go back there. Live in freedom!!!
- When our sin is revealed, confess, repent and turn.

**This is a great picture of repentance:**

- It means a turning away from sin to God.
- It means making wrongs right no matter the cost.

**When we fear God, we are compelled to hate and turn away from evil and sin.**

- This radically changes the way we fight sin.
- Community Groups are great. D Groups are great. But if you aren’t growing in the fear of God, you can hide and cover up sin in those groups.

- Our desire to fight and kill sin must be in response to the glory of God and a growing desire to please him.

*A third truth we learn about walking in the fear of God is that we should...*

### **III. Live justly and love others sacrificially (5:14-19).**

What was most needed at this point in time was generosity and kindness to those in need!!!

- The situation required giving not lending.
- It required sacrifice.
- Nehemiah is a great example of the generous lifestyle and sacrifice that was needed.

*“Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him.”* (Proverbs 14:31, ESV)

Living justly and loving others sacrificially exemplifies what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

- Jesus: He came not to be served but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).
- The Apostle Paul: 1 Cor. 9:19-27. He forfeited his rights and made himself a servant of all.

#### **What freed Nehemiah from the enjoyment of these privileges?**

- A greater joy.
- He knew something better than money and food.
- This is why he prays the way he does on v. 19.
  - God looks with favor on those who do his will.
  - God ultimately is the one who rewards those who live for him for living for themselves.

#### **Your fear of God should be evident in how you love others.**

- God is concerned with justice and compassion, especially the weak, the oppressed and neglected.
- As we grow in our fear of God, so should our compassion and desire for justice grow.
- Love God. Love others as yourself.

*“But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”* (1 John 3:17, ESV)

There are many ways and needs to love and serve others at RHC. This past week, I’ve seen and heard about very tangible examples of how our Community Groups are loving and serving others with generosity. If you’re looking for ways to love and serve others, connect with a CG. Trust me: there will be plenty of opportunities not only to love and serve others and meet tangible needs, but also to receive love and care from others.

## **Conclusion**

Just like Nehemiah was striving to fulfill the mission God gave him, if we as a church are going to be faithful to the mission God has given us, we must walk in the fear of God. Our own personal holiness and striving for justice is essential.

*“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”* (Acts 9:31, ESV)

## **Pray**