



Series: Nehemiah, Healthy Walls	Reference: Nehemiah 5	Title: A Great Work, A Great God, A Great Cry	Date: 6.4.17
Website Writeup:			
Sometimes a great work, for a great God, reveals a great cry, due to a great sin. In our communal walk, sometimes our work uncovers longstanding wrongs which need to be dealt with in order for us to get back on task of kingdom building among the nations. But with sacrificial leaders modeling well, we can recover and get back to what God has called us to - today we look at Nehemiah 5 seeing this in action.			

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

UPG Prayer of the Day... The Acehnese are a people group of 3.5 million strict Sunni Muslims who have been very instrumental in spreading Islam throughout Indonesia & other parts of Southeast Asia. Islam began in Aceh & spread across the country given its proximity to the Middle East. The door was opened for outside influence including Christian after the 2004 Tsunami which hit Aceh hard - pray those Christians still living there would be a strong loving witness.

Sermon...

Church Fight Video

Unchecked pride leading to rampant greed culminates in fistcuffs. Things like this don't just erupt, they fester for years. This fight is just the uncovering of a deep wound. The name of Christ is tainted, and a church can't be loving its neighbor when it's fighting its brother. Everything's spiritual. Much more so our relationships. Christ should lead to attitudinal & behavioral change - growing up in the faith as we grow old.

Many claim to not care what others think. Yet, while it's true *as a Christian I can't base my personal worth on what you think of me, I still must be concerned about my integrity before you.* Captain Kirk wore the Starfleet insignia on his chest which identified him as part of Starfleet Command - the United Federation of Planets. Kirk was always very careful to represent Starfleet well in his speech & behavior. If I wear the badge of Christ, I'm an ambassador or righteousness & don't have the luxury to say, "I don't care what you think."

If you only represent yourself (an impossibility), and truly don't care, you could say that. Although I've never met a person who doesn't truly care. And, if it's Christ you represent, then you're on display - you're an ambassador & *Scripture says in Hebrews 12:1-2a, Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders & the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer & perfecter of faith.* Anything which hinders walk & witness should be thrown off.

In Indonesia, we lived near a large Pentecostal church positioned in the middle of a struggling business district, surrounded by poor fishermen, where the average person



made \$300/year. The pastor drove a brand new Mercedes, had a mansion with many servants overlooking the city, houses throughout the country, including one in Bali as a vacation home. He preached only once a month. To see him you'd have to wait hours & were usually turned away. People estimated he made around \$12k/month which to Indonesian standards was a multimillionaire. And the church did nothing for it's Muslim neighbors surrounding it.

The reason being that as a Pentecostal Church they subscribed to the Health & Wealth Gospel which states that if you're sick, suffering, or poor you must be in sin & God isn't blessing you. In order for their theology to work, the pastor must be rich, because if the leader isn't blessed, God isn't real. What do you think the witness of that church was like?

As we read Nehemiah 5 consider the integrity of our witness as a church. Since, Christ is glorified when the Church acts like Jesus. What does that mean in community? Let's read this in segments together.

5:1-5 ¹ Now the men & their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers. ² Some were saying, "We & our sons & daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat & stay alive, we must get grain." ³ Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards & our homes to get grain during the famine."

⁴ Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields & vineyards. ⁵ Although we are of the same flesh & blood as our countrymen & though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons & daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields & our vineyards belong to others."

Last week we saw attack from the outside. When that doesn't work Satan begins to attack from within utilizing the selfish nature of some. Getting us thinking only about ourselves, he wins before we realize he's working. So in the midst of this great work (4:19) for a great God (1:5), was a great cry (5:1). Jews crying out not against Samaritans, Ammonites, or Arabs, but against other Jews exploiting Jews.¹ It seems, people had been freed from Babylonian captivity only to be subjugated by other Jews.

Four different groups are represented here. (1) The poor with no land or food due to increasing population & famine. (2) Landowners who'd mortgaged their property to buy food with inflation & debt bleeding them dry. (3) People who had to borrow money to pay high taxes leveraging property & losing it. And finally, (4) The wealthy Jew exploiting their own people by lending money while taking land & children as collateral.

God had guarded against such behavior in the Law, both people & land belonged to Him - He'd not have anyone exploited for personal gain (Deut. 23:19-20, 24:10-13; Ex. 22:25-27;

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, [Be Determined](#), "Be" Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 58-60.

Lev. 25:35–46; Isa. 56:9–12; Jer. 22:13–19; Amos 2:6–7; 5:11–12).² It's almost easier to fight an outside threat, an internal evil is much harder to deal with. When family betrays family, brother attacks brother, the wound cuts deeply & hamstring forward progress unlike no other attack. An outside enemy we saw last week does a lot to unify people. An internal enemy separates causing disillusionment & hopelessness - how does Nehemiah deal with it?

5:6-12a *When I heard their outcry & these charges, I was very angry. ⁷ I pondered them in my mind & then accused the nobles & officials. I told them, "You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!" So I called together a large meeting to deal with them ⁸ 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.*

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 & my men are also lending the people money & grain. But let the exacting of usury stop! ¹¹ Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves & houses, and also the usury you are charging them—the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine & oil."¹² "We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say."

Politicians ask, “What’s popular?” Diplomats ask, “What’s safe?” Leaders ask, “What’s right?”³ Which is what Nehemiah asks. A man of means, addressing the greed, of men with means. And we’ll find he’s a living model to them. The rebuilding of these walls didn’t create this issue, but it did reveal it. These were longstanding sin patterns in this community which needed to be addressed. Much like that church we saw in the video. Sometimes when a church endeavors to do a great thing for a great God, our great sins are revealed - do a building campaign & we find out where people really are in faith. Community can bring out the best & worst in us, and it’s good, since we can’t hide & we’re forced to move more closely towards Jesus.

God had redeemed Israel from Egypt, then from Babylon, and Nehemiah & others had even helped redeem fellow Jews using personal funds...but these men were openly undoing all God & Nehemiah had been working towards. Nehemiah shows great restraint & leadership. He’s righteously indignant, and allows his heart & his head to rule together - appealing to their heart & minds, he publicly invokes Scriptural Truth, since their sin was public. **Freedom is life governed by truth & motivated by love - but they’d been living the opposite; life governed by foolishness & motivated by greed. A selfishness which led to bondage for everyone involved, even themselves.**

² Warren W. Wiersbe, [Be Determined](#), “Be” Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 60–61.

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, [Be Determined](#), “Be” Commentary Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 61.

God's call for Israel was to witness to the nations (Isa. 42:6; 49:6), but their conduct was certainly anything but to the people groups surrounding them. You can always earn money, but a damaged witness is unrecoverable. In their pride & greed they were focusing on self, disregarding witness. For a generation or more this would be remembered among Jews & non-Jews alike. How many people have we met who are disillusioned with 'religion' due to the negative witness of church in society. Videos like the one I showed, pedophilia in the Catholic church, disregard for the poor & marginalized, etc. Kingdom building is derailed when the church is in sin, and it takes years of rebuilding of reputation to get back on task.

Oswald Chambers once wrote, "The remarkable thing about fearing God, is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else." Nehemiah exhibits great faith & fear of the Lord in his fearlessness in confronting these men - he just says it well. He models well *Matthew 6:33* "*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*" Nehemiah had lent money, but his was motivated by love, not greed. He'd not participated in usury, rather was a blessing.

5:12b-13 Then I summoned the priests & made the nobles & officials take an oath to do what they had promised. ¹³ I also shook out the folds of my robe & said, "In this way may God shake out of his house & possessions every man who does not keep this promise. So may such a man be shaken out & emptied!" At this the whole assembly said, "Amen," and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

Nehemiah didn't want these guys to walk home & think, "Wait, who's Nehemiah anyway...?" They must realize, it wasn't Nehemiah they were promising, but God himself. So they took an oath with this act of shaking out his robe which was a significant act of condemnation. *Sort of like someone throwing the shoe at George W in Iraq, if you remember that. In middle eastern culture to throw a shoe at someone is a deeply offensive thing - these actions have significance. Body language is a strong communicator. We have our gestures which mean something (giving the finger, crossed arms vs open arms, rolling our eyes, etc.) It was like saying, "May God shake you off if you do not obey in this area."*

They confirmed this with an AMEN, which literally means, "So be it/let it be." Then they worshiped!! Freedom & redemption had returned! A public repudiation of sin, confession & reiteration of commitment, all lead to praise. They'd found their true purpose again! They could now be the ambassador's to which God had called them among the nations! They could now walk with God within his purposes for them, instead of just playing the role. Have you ever confessed a longstanding sin & come out of hiding with it? And, all the time you love Jesus, but you can't really enjoy him or community due to this thing which had been standing in the way. But with it gone comes rejoicing! You can worship & passion returns.

5:14-19 ¹⁴Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—



neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. ¹⁵ But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people & took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food & wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. ¹⁶ Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.

¹⁷ Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews & officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. ¹⁸ Each day one ox, six choice sheep & some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people. ¹⁹ Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done for these people.

In his first 12 year term & following, Nehemiah didn't indulge in what could've been considered rightfully his! In a time when leaders would take all they could to further themselves, Nehemiah acted selflessly. This is not to say that he went poor, or was 'anti-rich', rather ethically this was just not the time to take what normally would've been considered his. The people were in a bad state, and this leader gave back out of his own pocket. If he'd taken the food allowed for the governor it would've come back on the people in tax. So, instead he bought everything by his own means, and furthermore, fed 150 at his own table daily!

But understand, the amount of food he describes would've been enough for 500, so scholars believe he shared the leftover with workers on the wall! This guy was amazing. In a culture where self aggrandizement of leaders was commonplace, this guy was practicing humility, and giving back. This was extremely countercultural!

*Rick Warren, the pastor who wrote, *The Purpose Driven Life/Church*, could've kept it all to himself & been a multimillionaire. But Rick told the 2006 TED conference that (1) He & his wife decided "not to use the money for ourselves." (2) They decided to "stop taking a salary." (3) They made the radical decision to "pay back 25 years of salary, 'cause I did not want anybody thinking I'd done any of what I've done for money." (4) They established "a foundation to fight poverty & HIV/AIDS" (called the P.E.A.C.E. plan). And (5) they began "reverse-tithing", giving 90% of what they make in tithe & living on the 10%. These are incredible decisions reflective of Nehemiah.*

Now, I'm unsure if Rick is still doing this 90/10 tithe, but he did it, at the very least, during a time when it was needed. A time when Pastors were viewed as just money grabbing hogs & church reputation was low. He did his part to rebuild witness & care for those in need. No matter what we think of him, it's more than we've done. Can't argue that. We remember what *Hebrews 6:10* says, "*God is not unjust. He will not forget your work & the love you have shown him as you have helped his people & continue to help them.*"



At the end of Chapter 24 of Luke, when Jesus is taken up, it says the disciples went back to the Temple & Worshipped God - a good thing to worship together. We should be at church & in Bible Study together, but it's not our end goal. It's where we're fed to branch out into the world - to glorify Jesus by witness in word & deed. When faith becomes self-serving it becomes incestuous, wrong & hurtful. When pride goes unchecked leading to greed or other such sin running rampant - witness is destroyed. Which pastor could preach on Nehemiah 5 with integrity, the pastor in Lampung, or Rick Warren? I think we know they answer.

What does that mean?

1. Choices Matter
 - 1.1. Christ is glorified when the Church acts like Jesus.
 - 1.2. Our choices either glorify or degrade the name of Jesus
 - 1.3. How we treat each other is a witness either negatively or positively
 - 1.3.1. A church can't be loving its neighbor while fighting its brother
2. Think in terms of the whole
 - 2.1. The Body (Christian Community)
 - 2.2. The Unreached (People Groups)
3. 'Kingdom', not self-preservation, nor self-indulgence, should drive our decisions

**Community Group Leader Questions:**

1. Who do you know who embodies the spirit of Matthew 6:33 *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be give to you as well.”*
 1. Do you? And what does it mean to live this way?
 2. What does it mean as far as your vocation & choices?
2. Oswald Chambers once wrote, *“The remarkable thing about fearing God, is that when you fear God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.”*
 1. Compare this with Proverbs 1:7, *‘The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom & instruction.’*
 2. What does it mean to pursue God in this way, and how would life change for you?
3. Politicians ask, “What’s popular?” Diplomats ask, “What’s safe?” Leaders ask, “What’s right?” - What’s the difference between these?
4. *‘A church can’t be loving its neighbor while fighting its brother’*
 1. Discuss how kingdom purpose, witness & work is derailed when we become selfish & experience infighting
5. What does the statement, *‘Freedom is life governed by truth & motivated by love’* mean to you?
6. We said, *‘as a Christian I can’t base my personal worth on what you think of me, I still must be concerned about my integrity before you.’*
 1. If that’s true, then are you more concerned about your integrity, or being liked?
 2. How do we find our worth in Christ?
 3. How do we live with integrity?
 4. Why is it unhealthy to find our worth in what people think of us?
7. Discuss & challenge to memorize Hebrews 12:1-2a, *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders & the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer & perfecter of faith.*