

## NEHEMIAH 5:1-19

### A. Introduction

1. Three reasons why Nehemiah is a relevant book for us to be spending time in at our elder's meetings:

It is a book about building a community of people who will reach the community around them.

It is a book about God's provision for His people as they wait for King Jesus to come.

It is a book that will be helpful for us as we approach 10 years since the formation of Banstead Community Church.

2. What have we seen so far?

In Nehemiah 1-2 we saw that God's provision for His people as they wait for King Jesus to return, which He gives to His people to build them up so they will reach the community around them are elders of local churches.

In Nehemiah 3 we saw that the building up of the church in order to reach the community around them will not be effective without the involvement of both church leaders and church members.

In Nehemiah 4 we saw that when the church is being built up and reaching its community there will be opposition but God's people should expect this and pray and press on with the work God has given them to do.

3. But opposition to the work doesn't always come from outside of God's people; it can also come from within.

"Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers." (Nehemiah 5:1)

Problems had arisen because the rich Jews were taking advantage of the poorer Jews in the community.

Those in need were being exploited and were powerless to do anything about this.

"Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain." Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine." Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our countrymen and though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others." (Nehemiah 5:2-5)

This threatened the unity of the community and would distract them from the work that God had given them to do.

How does Nehemiah respond? What do we learn?

### B. Leaders must speak up against sin

1. Nehemiah confronts the members of the community who were sinning.

"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." (Nehemiah 5:6-7)

Nehemiah was not afraid to address those who were disobeying God's Word and damaging the community by their actions.

Note: This wasn't a rash judgment – he pondered what he heard in his mind before confronting them.

## 2. Nehemiah speaks clearly against the sins being committed.

"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." (Nehemiah 5:7-8)

He is not afraid to say strong words to people – especially those in the community who are more privileged and powerful.

## 3. Nehemiah appeals to them to repent and outlines what this will look like.

"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." (Nehemiah 5:9-11)

He says stop doing what you are doing.

He says give back what you owe immediately.

Notice that the issue wasn't the lending of money and grain but the charging of interest.

"We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say." (Nehemiah 5:12)

The people repent and Jerusalem became a place where the poor could find help.

## 4. Nehemiah demonstrates the seriousness of failing to repent.

"Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, "In this way may God shake out of his house and possessions every man who does not keep this promise. So may such a man be shaken out and emptied!" (Nehemiah 5:12-13)

Failing to repent puts you outside of God's people.

But genuine repentance will lead to praising God.

"At this the whole assembly said, "Amen," and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised." (Nehemiah 5:13)

The people understood that God used Nehemiah to keep them from danger, and they gave God the praise He deserved for this.

## 5. Application

Church discipline is vital – we mustn't avoid or be afraid to do this.

Church discipline is for everyone who sins – no-one in the church is exempt from discipline if they fail to repent of their sin.

Church discipline has the aim of repentance.

Church discipline preserves the unity and mission of the church and its witness to the world.

## **C. Leaders must model obedience**

### 1. Nehemiah was sacrificial in his service.

"Moreover, 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. But the earlier governors – those preceding me – placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. 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." (Nehemiah 5:14-16)

What a contrast Nehemiah was.

He was a giver not a taker.

Nehemiah because of his position could have made demands of the people, but chose to make sacrifices instead.

"Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. Each day one ox, six choice sheep and 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." (Nehemiah 5:17-18)

Nehemiah was kind and generous in his hospitality.

He used his own food to feed others – he held a massive feast every day.

He did this for a long period of time – 12 years.

## 2. Nehemiah was sacrificial because he feared the LORD.

"But out of reverence for God I did not act like that." (Nehemiah 5:15)

"Remember me with favour, O my God, for all I have done for these people." (Nehemiah 5:19)

He did everything he did out of reverence for God and it was God's approval that he sought.

## 3. Application

Church discipline will only be effective if those who are doing the disciplining are modelling right behaviour.

We must keep a watch over our lives – not just in the realm of sexual behaviour. How we treat other people and how we use our money are just as important.

We must be willing to make sacrifices to demonstrate obedience – in our time, money, homes, emotional energy, family.

We must be willing to do this over a long period of time.

We will only do this if pleasing God is our highest priority.

A Christlike leader will both speak up against sin and model obedience – Jesus did both.