

A God Who Cares

– Nehemiah 5

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

Nehemiah 5:1-6 – *I became extremely angry when I heard their outcry.*

- How do you respond when someone else's problems interrupt your plans and affect your work?
- Do you get angry with the injustice in society? What causes you to get angry on behalf of God's people?

Nehemiah 5:7-13 – *What you are doing isn't right.*

- Do you observe injustice and suffering in the world, or are you pre-occupied with your own struggles?
- How does our understanding and knowledge of God's heart of compassion and mercy affect your daily decisions?

Nehemiah 5:14-19 – *...but because of the fear of God, I didn't do this.*

- Do you expect people to meet your criteria of being 'deserving' before you show generosity to those in need?
- Are you prepared to suffer for those in need? What 'rights' would you struggle to surrender?

Sermon Overview (A God Who Cares)

Fighter pilots use a system to help them gain mission success. It's called the OODA loop – Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act. We can use this same system as we approach scripture to help us gain mission success – as we pursue all that God has called us to do. Whenever we read the Bible, we should look closely and observe exactly what is going on, pray and orient yourself, ask the question of what it means for you right now, make decisions to honour God, and then then be courageous and Act.

The Israelite's, God's chosen people, are building the city walls of Jerusalem, everyone is building their section. There is a great opposition, the surrounding nations are furious, they are looking to do all they can to stop this work, the Israelites are in constant danger as they go about their work.

Our God Prioritises People Over Plans (verse 1-6).

There is widespread outcry. This outcry is not against their attackers, or the hard work that they have been subjected to. Their outcry is against their Jewish countrymen. This is the situation Nehemiah is observing, and his response is anger. Nehemiah has travelled miles in danger to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, with constant attack from the enemy – the people are moaning about how they are poor, pointing the finger at the rich for exploiting them – all while the wall is still not finished.

Yet Nehemiah's anger is not at the delay to his task. Nehemiah isn't angry because of the complaints. He's not angry because of the disruption of the work. He's extremely angry that the people are going without food, he's furious that they've been left powerless, without money or land, he's left absolutely seething because the people have had to sell their children into slavery in order to get food from their fellow countrymen. The building of the wall takes second place to this. Nehemiah observes the cry and turns his attention away from the thing he came to do - his project - to serve God's people.

In Nehemiah we have the example of a godly man who allowed himself to weep in Chapter 1, over the state of Jerusalem - and now he's angry. He is a man in touch with his emotions. Angry, not because his achievement is being threatened but because his heart goes out for the people. He's angry about the exploitation of God's people.

God Has a Plan of Provision for His People (verses 7-13).

Nehemiah didn't just charge into action throwing his weight around, he didn't let his righteous anger spill out into unrighteous aggression, harsh criticism, ranting and raving, or mocking and sulking. He took time to seriously consider what was happening, to orient himself, to investigate, to consider the matter. We want to be a church that carefully considers our context, the context of this city, its needs and its injustices. We don't want to be a church that is paralysed by indecision, that never moves on to acting, but one that seeks to orient itself through careful consideration and faith filled pursuit of God's call.

It wasn't right that the nobles and officials were charging their fellow countrymen interest. In the Torah - the Jewish book of the law - God instituted many laws to help protect the poor and the vulnerable. In this case, what was happening is more likely that the officials had taken land off them as a pledge for their debts - that then prevented them from generating any income to enable them to pay off their debts. This was against the Jewish law. It just wasn't right. It was against God's laws, but more so, it was against God's character.

Fear of God requires a knowledge of his character, a knowledge of what he is really like. God is a God of justice, compassion, mercy, and righteousness (see ***Psalms 25:10, 86:15, 89:14 and Zechariah 7:8-10***). Nehemiah was appealing to their knowledge of who God is. Having observed the situation and orientated their understanding with the view of God – their response was a decision to praise and seek to follow God's heart – and to obey His laws.

The Fear of God Should Motivate Us to Lay Down Our Rights to Prioritise People (verses 14-19)

We do not live in cultures that honour God, and care as He does. The Church exists as out-posts of God's grace – and is God's plan of provision for his chosen people. We see this modelled to us in early church in Acts who had everything in common. Fear of God not about religious observance it's about catching the heart of God and living it out. Out of a fear of God, Nehemiah forwent his rights as governor and did not put a burden on people. Jesus gives an even clearer insight into the heart of God for the poor (see ***Luke 4:18***). Jesus could have asserted His rights and stayed in the most prestigious of places – yet He socialised with outcasts, prostitutes and tax collectors; ministered to the sick, the dying, the lepers and the demon possessed.

As we consider this passage, we should not waste our lives thinking of ourselves, and reaching out only to people like us. Observe the broken world around you, orient yourself around the compassionate love of the Father, and daily make decisions to lay aside our rights and to act out this love for the sake of this city.