

March 9, 2025

Nehemiah 5:14-19

14 Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor. *15* The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God. *16* I also persevered in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. *17* Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. *18* Now what was prepared at my expense for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds, and every ten days all kinds of wine in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on this people. *19* Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people.

Scriptures for further study:

Colossians 3:23-24

Matthew 26:47-54

Isaiah 53:7

Isaiah 53:5

Philippians 2:3-4

Hebrews 4:13

“There are no overt miracles in Ezra/Nehemiah, but one imperial decision after another is quietly initiated by the Lord, who ‘stirred up the spirit of Cyrus,’ put a certain thing ‘into the heart’ of Artaxerxes, and again saw to it that ‘it pleased the king to send’ Nehemiah...God’s sovereignty is apparent throughout.”

-Derek Kindner



The Hand of God Over Our Rights Nehemiah 5:14-19

BIG IDEA: May our understanding of the One who forfeited His rights to redeem a people lead us to leverage our rights for the welfare of others.

OUTLINE

1. Verse 14 -Calling
2. Verses 14-18 –Restraint
3. Verse 19 –Prayer

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These "Sermon Discussion Questions" are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. Has someone at work or in your home done something for you that would take them away from what they needed to do because you needed help? What did they do? How did you feel when they helped you?
2. Refer to the historical context and read Nehemiah 5:14. What was Nehemiah's title? What had God called him to do? What about you? What are some of your titles? Read the quotation by John Calvin. How can the reality that God has called you to your job reframe how you approach work (refer to Colossians 3:23-24)?
3. Read the quotation by Mervin Brennen and Nehemiah 5:15-18. What restraint did Nehemiah use in order to lead his people well? Read Matthew 26:47-54. In what ways does Nehemiah's actions point to Jesus? Do you have an opportunity to lay down your rights for the welfare of someone else?
4. Read verse 19. What are your first thoughts when you read Nehemiah's prayer? Is Nehemiah seeking to glorify himself? Refer to Nehemiah's prayer Nehemiah 1,2 and 4. Nehemiah was a man of prayer. How can Nehemiah's prayer be seen as a plea for God to be glorified? What can you apply to your life from Nehemiah's example?

"The theological roots of this concept of 'vocation' are found in the biblical doctrine of creation and divine sovereignty. We are by God's creative decree shaped in His image and thus designed to reflect in all our endeavors the purposeful activity of God Himself. All Christians, therefore, should ideally embrace their 'work', however secular and uneventful it may appear, as a calling of God, a responsibility for which they have been uniquely endowed that is designed in its own way to glorify God. One's 'job' or 'career' or 'occupation' thus has a meaning beyond mere personal fulfillment. 'Ministry' is therefore not what the majority of Christians perform as 'a discretionary time activity – something done with the few hours that can be squeezed out of the week's schedule after working, sleeping, homemaking, neighbouring, washing and doing the chores.' It is, rather, all of life when discharged in faith."

-Sam Storms

"The Lord bids each one of us in all life's actions to look to His calling. For He knows with what great restlessness human nature flames, with what fickleness it is borne hither and thither, how its ambition longs to embrace various things at once. Therefore, lest through our stupidity and rashness everything be turned topsy-turvy, He has appointed duties for every man in his particular way of life. And that no one may thoughtlessly transgress His limits, He has named these various kinds of living 'callings.' Therefore each individual has his own kind of living assigned to him by the Lord as a sort of sentry post so that he may not heedlessly wander throughout life."

-John Calvin

“The governor, under Persian policy, had the right to receive taxes from the people to support his own household, servants, and diplomatic expenses. But Nehemiah did not use this prerogative; he forfeited his ‘rights’ in order to help the people.”

-Mervin Breneman

Praise to Jesus. Praise God for His Son Jesus, who was God Himself, became the perfect man. He is able to give us mercy and grace when we come to God through Him. We are to come boldly before God’s awesome heavenly throne—which through Christ has become for us “the throne of grace”! And we do so assured that Jesus, as a man, understands our struggles and as God is able and willing to help us in our distress. - adapted from the ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible

Repentance through Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead a time of confession and repentance. Confess the times when we wake up each day and forget that God has placed us where we are in life with our various callings. We have lost sight that our callings are from God to help us live with Gospel purpose and have forgotten the reality that God is at work in us and through us in all aspects of life.

Consecration for Jesus. Let us then, with confidence, draw near to the throne of grace in light of our high priest, God’s son, our Savior, Jesus. And because of the goodness of His life, death, and resurrection, we can be assured that God will remember us and is working all things for the good of His people. And as we reflect on all that Jesus has done for us, let it move us to do good for others. May our understanding of the One who forfeited His rights to redeem a people lead us to leverage our rights for the welfare of others.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Nehemiah and the Jews learn that their problems are internal as well as external. While the men are building and preparing to fight, their families are starving. The people are borrowing to pay Persian taxes, and those with property are under temporary debt slavery. Others without property are even worse off, and the nobles and officials within the Jewish community are accused of oppressing their own people. Documents from Babylon suggest its occupants, too, were mortgaging their fields and orchards to pay taxes. Nehemiah declares a general amnesty.

This is the first indication that Nehemiah held this official post in the province of Yehud (Judea) within the larger satrapy of “Beyond the River.” He governed for 12 years, from 445/444 to 433/432 BC. Governors apparently had the right to raise taxes for their own use, but Nehemiah declined due to the Jews’ economic trouble. Instead, he supplied sustenance for those who worked with him during this time, implying considerable personal means.

-ESV Archeological Study Bible

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

These questions are written to aid parents in leading family devotions with their children.

1. What does it mean in verse 15 that Nehemiah feared God? (This is not the fear of something frightening like a shark or a bear. The fear of the Lord can be described as awe or reverence. You could explain it to your children by talking with them about how they feel when they see something amazing, such as the Grand Canyon or the vastness of the ocean. When we have a proper fear of God, we realize who He is as the Almighty One and that we are not God. Those who love God first and foremost will also have a healthy fear of God.)

2. What does it mean that Nehemiah did not lord over the people the food allowance that was due to him as the governor? (Remind your children that Nehemiah had an important job with the king in Babylon before he moved to Jerusalem. Now, he is the leader of the Israelites, and past leaders took a food allowance for which the people would pay. Our passage makes it clear in verses 15 and 18 that this was a burden for the people. Nehemiah is showing that his leadership style was that of servant leadership, which was seen in Jesus during His earthly ministry.)

3. Describe in your own words the prayer of Nehemiah in verse 19. (This prayer could be incorrectly mistaken as a selfish prayer for the good of Nehemiah. But what we know of Nehemiah from this passage (see verse 15) and from this book is that he was a man of God who wanted God to get the glory for this rebuilding project. So, Nehemiah's prayer is seeking God's good for his life.)

Scriptures for further study:

Proverbs 1:7

Mark 10:42-45

John 13:1-20

Philippians 2:5-11

FOR STUDENTS

Scriptures for further study:

Proverbs 1:7

Psalm 111:10

Mark 10:45

Philippians 2:5-11

John 13

1. Have you ever seen someone give up their own comfort or rights to help someone else? How did their actions impact you?

2. In Nehemiah 5:14, what was Nehemiah's title, and what had God called him to do? What are some of your own titles (such as student, friend, sibling, teammate), and how can you live out God's calling in those roles?

3. Read Nehemiah 5:15-18. How did Nehemiah show restraint as a leader, and how does this reflect the way Jesus led? What are some ways you can practice servant leadership in your own life?

4. In verse 19, Nehemiah prays that God would remember him for the good he has done. Do you think Nehemiah was trying to glorify himself? How does his prayer show his dependence on God?

5. Read Philippians 2:5-8. How does Jesus' example of giving up His rights for the good of others challenge the way we live? Is there an area in your life where you need to lay down your own desires to serve others?

FOR SEEKERS AND NEW BELIEVERS

1. Earlier in Nehemiah chapter 5 (verse 10), we see how Nehemiah is determined to refrain from doing anything that would harm others by taking advantage of them. Here, in 5:14-19, Nehemiah is willing to practice self-denial by giving up his privileges in order to ease the burdens on others.

Question: How do Nehemiah's actions give us a good picture of how righteousness works? i.e. Righteousness is not just a matter of not doing harm, but also a matter of actively doing good unto others.

2. How does Nehemiah show us a great example of an even greater leader (Jesus) in terms of how he gave up his rights and privileges out of reverence for God and the good of others? (Read Philippians 2:5-8)

3. In verse 15, we see that Nehemiah's actions are motivated primarily by "reverence for God."

Question: Is this the same driving force in your life as well?

4. As the cupbearer to the most powerful man on earth (Artaxerxes), Nehemiah was accustomed to great privileges, wealth, and power. And yet, in this passage, we see how he is able to have compassion for people who live on the "other side of the tracks."

Question: How can we, too, develop more of this heart of compassion for those who are less fortunate? How does this kind of compassion also reflect the ministry of Jesus as well, who gave up his riches for the sake of others?

5. In verse 19, Nehemiah asks God to show him favor for the things he has done for people. In so doing, Nehemiah is not claiming merit before God, but he is simply professing sincerity.

Question: If we are saved only by grace through faith, then what is the relationship between faith and works? Reflect on the statement: "We are saved through faith alone, but not through a faith that is alone."

Scriptures for further study:

Philippians 2:6-7

Matthew 15:29-39

2 Corinthians 8:9; 9:7

2 Thessalonians 3:13-16

The Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People



The Ancient of Days, William Blake, 1794.

About the artwork and artist.

The Ancient of Days, found in prophecies of Daniel, is the subject of William Blake's engraving in which he shows us the Hand of Our God and His Divine Sovereignty in the Return and Renewal of God's People, the sermon series title for Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Ancient of Days is the cover art for Blake's Poem Europe: a Prophecy (1794). The Ancient of Days is a name for God the Father, whom the prophet Daniel spoke of in Daniel 7, where he saw Jesus, the Son of Man, "given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

Blake's poem "Europe", depicts a world filled with suffering based on the political climate of Europe and politics in England in the 1790s. It is appropriate in light of the suffering of God's people described in Ezra and Nehemiah. The artwork by Blake serves to remind and encourage God's people to know that He is still active and on the move with His plan of redemption despite their surroundings and circumstances. William Blake (1757-1827) was committed to connecting the prophecies and visions of the God of the Bible with the events in his country; the poet, printmaker, and painter was unrecognized and died impoverished. Despite their circumstances, William and his devoted wife Catherine, whom he taught to read and write, enjoyed a happy marriage and life together.

Today, William Blake is considered one of the greatest poets in the English language and one of the most original visual artists of his day.

Barker, (2004) (Barker, William Blake 1757-1827, 2004)

Introduction to Nehemiah

From January to May 2024, we heard sermons from the Book of Ezra. The introduction to Ezra, recorded sermons, and discipleship resources can be found on our church website at this address: <https://www.fpcrome.org/pdd-ezra/>

Ezra and Nehemiah were, for centuries, received as one book narrating the return of God's exiled people to their land, as under Persian rule they were allowed to resettle and rebuild Jerusalem. These two books cover three different waves of returning exiles, from 538 to 433 BC. But they tell one story: the restoration of God's covenant people according to his Word—which they are now called afresh to obey.

This restoration required, first of all, the rebuilding of the temple and the reinstitution of ceremonial worship. The first leader, Zerubbabel, led the initial wave of exiles back to Jerusalem to accomplish this goal (Ezra 1–6). The second wave came more than half a century later, led by Ezra, who rebuilt not the temple but the people, teaching them—and calling them to obey—the law of Moses (Ezra 7–10).

Thirteen years after Ezra arrived, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. He first led the people to rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 1–6). Then, along with Ezra, he sought to restore the people (Nehemiah 7–13) as God's holy nation, followers of his Word.

The restoration was not complete, however. These books picture God's people regathered but struggling; they are poor subjects of a foreign king; their city is devastated; enemies oppress from without; sin threatens from within. We see the faithful hand of God mercifully preserving his people according to his promises. We also see the dire need for the perfect fulfillment of God's promises in the salvation accomplished by his Son. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible.)