

Nehemiah 5:14-19 – Being a Generous Leader

JFB, Clarke, TSK, HebrewLexicon, Armstrong, Gaebelin, Handfuls, Barnes, Poole, Delitzsch, Gill, Geneva, Henry, Expositor, Trapp
Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: I know some of you grew up in countries run by dictators. I did.

What is characteristic of most dictators is this love for power and money. So they oppress people to get what they want. You can see this especially from the 1950's when abusive European imperial powers started to give independence to their colonies around the world. Many of those countries started with optimism, hopeful things would get better with freedom.

But most of those countries are poorer and more corrupt that during colonial times. The new leaders became abusive and started to steal. Billions of dollars have been stolen from the poorest! And the richer those leaders got, the more they wanted. Their appetites were insatiable.

Isn't that how it always is? That's what the governors and leaders of Judah did! They abused their own people.

In doing so they **posed the threat of destabilizing of the nation**...causing division...and even causing foreign occupation again. How would that help when Jerusalem was the land from which Messiah would come?

Nehemiah showed how leaders should lead. Hear about this today.

Our headings are:

Greedy Leaders of the Past

Generous Leaders of the Present

Gracious Rewards in the Future

Our goals are: **That you will be a generous leader (or support a generous leader) so Christ's kingdom will grow and praises of the Redeemer will go up.**

Greedy Leaders of the Past

14 Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year until the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, twelve years, **neither I nor my brothers ate the governor's provisions.**

1. Nehemiah, even though he was governor and he had a right to it, did not eat the food allotted to governors.

He did not take his allotment throughout his 12 or so years in Jerusalem.

15 But the former governors who were before me **laid burdens** on the people, and took from them **bread** and **wine**, besides **forty shekels of silver**. Yes, even their servants **bore rule** over the people, but I did not do so, because of the fear of God.

2. On the contrary, the governors who were before him demanded the people provide for their food, drink, and cash.

This was a severe burden on the people. (KJV says it “was chargeable” to the people, but that is poor translation. The stem of this verb requires the translation to be “made it heavy.” It is a strongly negative. It is “causative.”

“Laid burdens” is good.

Israel was suffering under famine-like conditions for a long time too and having extra burdens on their backs was crushing them.

3. Even the servants of these former governors demanded payment from the people and ruled them in an unkind way.

“Bore rule” is **the idea of domineering.**

This meant the governors allowed their servants to rule God’s people in an arbitrary way, likely abusing them.

4. These governors and their servants did not have the fear of God in their hearts.

Yes, a worker is worthy of his hire, but at a time when the people had great need and the governors had excess, God expected them to show mercy on the people.

Nehemiah had money, so he used it so the people would not be burdened more.

And notice Nehemiah did not speak of his good works to heap praises on himself. Rather, he said this to show that **he was simply obeying what God said.** He was afraid of violating God’s law. **He knew charity to God’s people was giving to God!**

5. Lessons:

a. Learn to hold loosely to the things of this world. Share and God will provide for you. Cast your bread upon the waters and after many days it will return to you.

Don’t live to “**feather your nest.**”

b. Don't be close to those who are tight-fisted – who like to hoard. Don't marry them.

c. Look at what the fear of God makes you do! The one who is saved by Christ learns to sacrifice himself, as Jesus did, for the good of others.

Use your gifts for the good of the other members of Christ's church.

This will strengthen Christ's church.

d. Look at what the lack of the fear of God makes people do!

The one who does not know the Savior is not concerned about the welfare of others...and certainly has no care about the people of God. He only cares about himself.

e. Look how their action hindered Jerusalem from surviving, the place from which Messiah would come to die for the sins of the world.

Don't make it difficult for people to work for the kingdom. Help them. You have the same goal.

The King would not look at you kindly if you hindered his kingdom by your greediness.

Generous Leaders of the Present

16 Indeed, I also **continued the work on this wall**, and we **did not buy any land**. All **my servants were gathered there for the work**.

1. Nehemiah did not demand the payment to which he was entitled because he knew the people were suffering.

2Thessalonians 3: 8 **nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge**, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that **we might not be a burden to any of you**, 9 not because we do not have authority, but to **make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.**

Apostle Paul knew he was entitled to the food, but he did not want to be cruel. He taught self-sacrifice.

2. Nehemiah, instead continued to work on the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem – even with opposition.

He worked for people who couldn't pay him. The Jews owed the debt they could not pay, and Nehemiah paid the debt he did not owe.

He was a beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus. (That's not the point here, but it is a beautiful picture.)

3. Nehemiah did not give out loans to acquire other people's land or foreclose when they could not pay the interest.

It was natural to look for a bargain when people are poor and desperate. We are told to buy low and sell high. Not here.

4. Nehemiah made his servants work in repairing the wall as opposed to the previous governors who let their servants abuse their fellow Jews.

17 And at my table were one hundred and fifty **Jews and rulers**, besides those who came to us **from the nations around us**.

5. Nehemiah, because he was a generous man by reason of his renewed nature, shared of his abundance.

He fed 150 Jews and their leaders each day, and even those visitors who came from the surrounding nations. (The visitors likely brought intelligence or were diplomats.)

Nehemiah would have learned the art of keeping peace with neighbors when he was back in Susa, and he would have learned the art of **hosting foreign dignitaries**.

That cost was a large amount for one man to cover...but he had the resources and he wasn't reluctant to share.

18 Now that which was prepared daily was one ox and six choice sheep. Also fowl were prepared for me, and once every ten days an abundance of all kinds of wine. Yet in spite of this I did not demand the governor's provisions, **because the bondage was heavy on this people**.

6. Nehemiah describe the details of his provision for the officials and foreign visitors.

He provided oxen, sheep, chickens, and wine for his guests.

While the surrounding people would have indulged in unclean animals,

Nehemiah maintained his faithfulness to the ceremonial laws that were still in force.

7. Nehemiah maintained modesty by limiting the use of wine to once every ten days.

8. Lessons:

a. Let God be pleased with your record of your honesty and generosity.

You must never be found to be abusers of the poor. Don't let them cry out against you. That is a reproach to God.

Buy low and sell high might be good for business, but you must never take advantage of God's people, economically or in any other way.

b. Let the poor people testify of your honesty and generosity.

c. Stand behind and support those who are not abusing the church of Christ, and stand in opposition to those who are crushing the kingdom by their cruelty.

Oppose those false TV preachers who poach on Christians who are weak and rob them.

d. Find a husband who is generous – not just to you – but to others.

Especially **be worried if a potential husband only wants to give things to you** and not to others. That man is not a good man!

e. Don't grumble about helping others. 1 Peter 4:9 *Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.*

f. Modesty in all things...food, drink, clothing, fun... Godly living will always advance Christ's cause. (Wine every 10 days?)

Gracious Rewards in the Future

19 **Remember me,** my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

1. Nehemiah, who was neither seeking the praise of men nor the rewards from men, sought the blessing of God for what he did.

He wanted blessings that were out of this world, eternal blessings. There was nothing wrong with that!

2. Nehemiah did not take credit for what other people did, but what he himself did for God's people.

3. Nehemiah was *not trying to buy forgiveness of his sins through good work.*

He knew forgiveness of sins was only found in Christ.

But good works were done by those who were in Christ.

He knew good works were the fruit of the Christian life.

4. Lessons:

a. Lay up treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and thieves cannot break in and steal.

God will never forget your good works and will never forget to repay you.

Hebrews 6:10 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

b. Don't expect to buy your way to heaven by good works. (Many still try to do this.) Your good works are nothing. The only way to heaven is through the blood of the Lamb of God.

c. Even as a Christian, your good works are tainted with sin and are only rewarded when received through the merits of your Savior.

d. It is more blessed to give than to get.

Acts 20:35 "I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, '**It is more blessed to give than to receive.**'"

e. Proper Giving (which is essential for the building and preservation of the kingdom) only takes place when you recognize all you have received in Christ.

Conclusion:

Greedy leaders of the **past demanded more from the people than they were able to give.** They craved wealth. No wonder Jewish leaders during Nehemiah's time, took advantage of the weak. They followed their leaders!

But **Nehemiah was generous,** not only not taking his payment, but he gave of his own substance to the people.

He then called for God to remember his obedience and bless him in the future!

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Christ's kingdom must expand and be protected. God is pleased to use you for this! You are either a leader or one who supports a leader. You must work well together to achieve this.

2. Be generous in your support! This includes your time, your tithes, and your talents.

Don't be found wanting when God examines how well you supported his kingdom.

Keep in mind, money is the easiest thing to give. Others may need your time more. God wants your time and talents too!

He will use these things to help save and sanctify others.

3. For the praise of God, work to build the kingdom.

Remember **you were saved by his Son.** This is your motivation.

Don't help others so they will think you are good, or for those around you to say nice things about you.

This is much bigger than you. **This is to promote the cause of Christ.**

Finally: Life without God will make you insensitive and abusive. But God demands you love his children. **How can you come to that point where you are able to love?** You **need a heart transplant**, something only God can do. Ask God, if you are not his child, to change your heart. He will do so if you claim Christ's death as yours.