

Nehemiah 5

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 15th August 2010

Intro-

- In Neh1-4 we have seen how the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and how Nehemiah reacted in a godly way, casting vision to rebuild the walls and putting the vision into action by motivating the people despite opposition from Israel's enemies.
- This week after a brief interval we are returning to see how they are getting on and we will see how Satan tries to attack them again, not from the outside this time, but from a situation within.

Read Nehemiah 5

Today we are focussing on our family relationships- those within the Church and at home- 2 key areas to excell at. We will look at 4 principles from this passage which we can apply to our lives:

Our focus must not be so outward that we neglect the inward

- What the enemy fails to do externally he will try to do internally-v1
There was a 'great outcry'. This was not from the enemy but from the Jews' own brothers and sisters. This was not the first outcry against the Jews, but it was the first time the cry had come from within.
 - Like a Roman army that has shields impenetrable over its heads against all the fiery darts of the enemy, but then each soldier kills his fellow soldiers with daggers under the shields
 - Like a football team which has defenders the opponents can't get past, but then the defenders choose to score 5 own goals
 - Like organising a holiday and fighting to get time off and everything co-ordinated and work up to date and everything right, and finally get down to the beach and end up having a family argument.
 - Like fighting to get time away with husband/wife and arranging babysitter and venue and everything and then end up having a row with each other.
- Relationships are where it is at- vision is either made or broken on the strength of our relationships, and the toughest relationships to really excell at are the ones which really mean the most to us- our nearest and dearest- because things hurt so much more when they come from your own 'flesh and blood'. We can be so tough in enduring persecution from without, but when attacks come from within there is something within us that really feels like giving up- it steals our get up and go.
- It should not surprise us that Satan targets relationships within the Church. Jesus warns that in the last days relationships between brothers and sisters in the Church will be tested, even to the point of brother betraying brother to death.
 - Jesus knew what this was like having been betrayed by the disciple He honoured at the passover table by sharing the sop (Judas Iscariot), and having all the disciples desert Him and Peter deny Him 3 times.
- How do we get through this? By following the example of Jesus who prayed blessing and strength over Peter even before he denied Him, and restored the relationship by seeking Peter out and reinstating him. Jesus said 'blessed are the peacemakers' and He left us with this command 'love one another'.
- It was the same in the book of Acts when greeks complained to the hebrews over their widows being missed out in the distribution of food. It could have led to a huge Church split- instead it led to the role of deacons in the Church- love will find a practical solution
- How is your focus? How are your most important relationships? You may be making progress in many areas of your life but are you sowing into the important relationships? When was the last time you told the people you really care about that you love them, or did an action to show them?
- WHAT WOMEN WANT IN A MAN -- Original List ... (at age 22)

1. Handsome
2. Charming
3. Financially Successful
4. A Caring Listener
5. Witty
6. In Good Shape
7. Dresses with Style
8. Appreciates the Finer Things
9. Full of Thoughtful Surprises
10. An Imaginative, Romantic Lover

WHAT WOMEN WANT IN A MAN, Revised List ... (at age 32)

1. Nice Looking - preferably with hair on his head
2. Opens car doors, holds chairs
3. Has enough money for a nice dinner at restaurant
4. Listens more than he talks
5. Laughs at my jokes at appropriate times
6. Can carry in all the groceries with ease
7. Owns at least one tie
8. Appreciates a good home cooked meal
9. Remembers Birthdays and Anniversaries
10. Seeks romance at least once a week

WHAT WOMEN WANT IN A MAN, Revised List ... (at age 42)

1. Not too ugly - bald head OK
2. Doesn't drive off until I'm in the car
3. Works steady - splurges on dinner at McDonalds on occasion
4. Nods head at appropriate times when I'm talking
5. Usually remembers the punch lines of jokes
6. Is in good enough shape to rearrange the furniture
7. Usually wears shirt that covers stomach
8. Knows not to buy champagne with screw top lids
9. Remembers to put the toilet seat lid down
10. Shaves on most weekends

WHAT WOMEN WANT IN A MAN, Revised List ... (at age 52)

1. Keeps hair in nose and ears trimmed to appropriate length
2. Doesn't belch or scratch in public
3. Doesn't borrow money too often
4. Doesn't nod off to sleep while I'm emoting
5. Doesn't re-tell same joke too many times
6. Is in good enough shape to get off sofa on Weekends
7. Usually wears matching socks and fresh underwear
8. Appreciates a good TV Dinner
9. Remembers your name on occasions
10. Shaves on some weekends

WHAT WOMEN WANT IN A MAN, Revised List ... (at age 62)

1. Doesn't scare small children
2. Remembers where bathroom is
3. Doesn't require much money for upkeep
4. Only snores lightly when awake (LOUDLY when asleep)
5. Forgets why he's laughing
6. Is in good enough shape to stand up by himself
7. Usually wears some clothes
8. Likes soft foods
9. Remembers where he left his teeth
10. Remembers when...

WHAT WOMEN WANT IN A MAN, Revised List ... (at age 72)

1. Breathing

Fear of the Lord makes us sort our relationships-v9, v15

- Steve Thomas spoke on this last week and we looked at the 'fear of the Lord' in

homegroups last week. It means being most concerned about pleasing our Father God and having an awesome respect for Him, and living in holiness. The fear of the Lord has a cost- obedience.

- Nehemiah knew that what marks a person who has no fear of the Lord is tolerating unresolved conflict in relationships, leading to a trail of broken relationships and hurting people where the Lord is not glorified and His name is brought into disrepute by those who do not know Him. He was concerned that if the godless nations saw the infighting it would bring dishonour to God. Paul was also concerned about this when he heard there was infighting in the Church at Corinth even to the point where they were taking one another to court over their disputes. Paul's concern was that the name of God would be dishonoured.
- If we truly fear God we will display it by a determination to be at peace with all as much as it depends on us. In times of revival- people sort relationships because they don't want to be out of sorts with God- e.g those who repented to John Avant.
- Jesus promised that by our love for each other all people would know that we are His disciples.
- Do we fear the Lord? Do we see the connection between our fear of God and the need to restore relationships? Are they relationships we need to sort?
- In 1981, a Minnesota radio station reported a story about a stolen car in California. Police were staging an intense search for the vehicle and the driver, even to the point of placing announcements on local radio stations to contact the thief. On the front seat of the stolen car sat a box of crackers that, unknown to the thief, were laced with poison. The car owner had intended to use the crackers as rat bait. Now the police and the car owner were more interested in apprehending the thief to save his life than to recover the car. So often when we run from God, we feel it is to escape his punishment. But what we are actually doing is eluding his rescue. What relationships are we keeping from God because we are afraid of what He will ask us to do to our detriment? God actually wants to help us as we surrender to Him.

God desires justice and mercy in our relationships

- Have you ever been truly ripped off? *National Inquirer*: "Learn how to avoid ripoffs - send \$5." (Dennis Miller joke). The real hustle looks at ways people try to rip others off- e.g. pretending to be working for hotels and parking the car for guests but stealing the cars instead. We live in an age of loan sharks and it was no different then. 'Usury' means interest (came to mean excessive interest). The Jews were commanded in the law not to charge interest on loans they gave to a fellow Jew, but could to non-Jews (Lev 25:36-37; Deut 23:19-20).
- There was famine due to the war affecting economic conditions. There were taxes to pay to the Persian government for land. As some were getting poorer the rich were lending them money at extortionate rates. Some had to sell their land and were forced to become slaves to their fellow Jews. As some went under others were prospering- the rich were getting richer and the poor poorer- the same we see in many parts of the world today.
- God is a God of justice. He will bring justice to the poor. We live in a society where some people who are truly sick are unaware of the benefits they could be and should be claiming, whilst others are perfectly healthy and making out they are ill and claiming immorally. We live in a society where some people pay too much taxes because they don't understand some things they can claim tax relief on, whilst others claim relief on things they should not and fiddle their taxes and claim extra expenses etc. For the Christian we are to be exemplary- would we want to be identified with those ripping their brothers off or those bringing blessings to their brothers (as Nehemiah did).?
- God has a real heart for the weak, poor and downtrodden. In films when the weak say 'Go on save yourself, I'll only hinder you', we love it when the hero replies, in love, 'No I won't go on without you'. We need to have the same concern for the poor, weak and vulnerable. Ministry development does not tread down the weak,

but lifts them up and serves them. Ministry development does not leave the children behind, but serves them. The gospel is good news for the poor (Is 61). That's why mercy mission has to be at the heart of who we are as church & one of the 8 purposes on our vision statement on the back of every newsletter. What is your attitude towards the poor?

- 2Cor 9:6, Luk 6:38- we reap in proportion to what we sow. What we dish out to others will come back to us, either to haunt us or bless us. Jesus said 'You cannot serve both God and Mammon'. Mammon comes from an Aramaic word meaning wealth or property. It is personified in the Bible in this passage because some people literally live for money as if it is their master. If Jesus is truly our Lord He must be Lord also of our pockets. All we have belongs to Him and we are guided by kingdom principles in our finances.
- Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Lord, Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything I will pay back four times the amount." (Luk 19:8)- Ex 22:1 -says if a man steals a sheep he shall make restitution by giving back 4 sheep.
- We are to be known as givers, but that is not simply financial, but in terms of our service. In church we live in a 'fellowship'- it is like we are all rowers and each has an oar, however, just like the world, in many churches there is only a small percentage of people doing the rowing- after a time the small percentage get burned out and drop out and a few more take their place. The church however should be the one place where each is putting their all into the team effort and the 'fellowship' moves forward at a rapid pace.
- What is God calling you to take on? What is God calling you to give up? What is your ministry oar and are you doing it? Are you short-changing others by holding back your ministry whilst benefitting from the ministry of others in the body?
- Do the phrases 'justice' and 'mercy' characterise you or, like Zacchaeus are there some things that need to be addressed to truly be obedient to Jesus? Is Jesus Lord of your pocket? "On September 11, 2001, three thousand innocent civilians died. That same day, thirty thousand children died of disease and starvation. God cares as much about the latter as the former. Do you?" Dr. Tony Campolo.

True change involves words and action

- How many sermons have we heard and thought 'mmm that really spoke to me' and a few weeks later we have completely forgotten it?
- Nehemiah would not allow this to happen. Change had to happen, and it had to be lasting change. He first got the people to pledge to change by making an oath (v12-13)-speaking out what they were going to do in the presence of God and witnesses. Jesus spoke against the taking of oaths not in the sense that it is wrong to make oaths (we do when we get married), but because people got into the habit of only believing people were telling the truth if they swore by God or the temple etc. Jesus basically said 'choose to always tell the truth and you won't need to swear an oath'. Why not speak out your plans to change in the areas God is telling you. Speak them out to a friend and ask for their help in seeing change in that area. Change starts with verbalising what you intend doing.
- Nehemiah insisted that the people make restitution. Nehemiah personally fed 150 poor Jews at his table (v17-18, not including non-Jews) and led the way in lending poor people money and grain (v10). If you were to make restitution to everyone for things you have done in this life before you meet your maker what things immediately spring to mind? Sometimes we can't make restitution because people have died etc. but is there something creatively we can do that will bring joy to Heaven?
- Me taking library books back to St. Cadocs. Rev. W. P. Nicholson in Belfast, Ireland, an evangelist at the turn of the century would preach to the dock workers powerfully, causing conviction, and insisting on repentance. Many men accepted Christ and started to bring back everything they had stolen from the shipyards. In the end the authorities had to make a public announcement: "Will all those attending the meetings of Mr Nicholson please stop returning stolen goods. "We have nowhere to

store them."

Summary

- Our focus must not be so outward that we neglect the inward
- Fear of the Lord makes us sort our relationships.
- God desires justice and mercy in our relationships.
- True change involves words and action

Song- *I give You all the honour*