

The Grievance of Greed # 11

Nehemiah 5: 1-5

As we have studied the efforts of Nehemiah in rebuilding the city walls, we have noticed one obstacle after another. Upon his initial entrance into Jerusalem he was faced with immediate opposition from without. We encountered their continued opposition in the previous chapter and Nehemiah will face them again in chapter 6. We noticed a bit of unrest among the tribe of Judah in chapter 4, but Nehemiah quickly dealt with their concerns by setting a watch, preparing a defense, and challenged the people to depend upon the Lord.

When we left chapter 4 it seemed that all was well. The people had regained their focus and appeared to be laboring well, alongside each other, even in the face of determined opposition. However, it didn't take long for problems to arise again. This time Nehemiah will face his biggest challenge yet. A great uprising has developed among the people. There was great unrest in Jerusalem due to greed and a lack of consideration for one another. This was an issue that must be dealt with in a timely fashion. It showed potential of derailing the reconstruction efforts. This problem had developed from within.

We have considered this many times in the past, but I want to reemphasize the need for compassion. It is easy to become engrossed with our own wants and needs and fail to respond to the needs of others. The basis of the problem in our text is greed, but it is indicative of many of the problems we face today. We may not be greedy regarding money, but it is possible to be greedy with our time and even our talents. Many Christians are guilty of hoarding up what God has given and never desire to share with others. I want to look at the [tragedies revealed](#) as we consider: [The Grievance of Greed](#).

I. The Cry of the People (1) – [And there was a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren the Jews](#). This single verse reveals much about the situation. Notice:

A. The Emotion – There was a [great cry](#) among the people. It is described as a great cry, revealing the magnitude of the displeasure. Many of the people had been affected and they cried out with a great voice in the midst of their suffering.

- We also need to consider the characteristics of this cry. This was a cry of distress, a pleading for help and mercy. It was a strong plea offered from a heart of lamentation. This was not just a sense of moaning and complaining, but a genuine, heartfelt burden among the people. Those who heard this cry would have immediately sensed the sincerity and seriousness involved.

B. The Humiliation – [There was a great cry of the people and of their wives](#). This must've been especially troubling to Nehemiah and the leadership. This was not just a few disgruntled workers. The women of Jerusalem had joined them in their lamentation. There is something within human nature, regardless of society or culture that compels attendance and care for women and children. The situation in Jerusalem had gotten so bad that it began to affect all of society, even those who looked to others for their well being.

- We would have to admit that we live in a society consumed with selfishness and greed. There seems to be little care or regard for those who are suffering. I pray that we as a church, and even as a people of society, will sense the needs of others and seek to ease their burdens in whatever way we can.

C. The Accusation – We also notice that this great cry was voiced [against their brethren the Jews](#). The people were not complaining of the adversity or mistreatment of Sanballat and the others, but those among their own people. Some of the Jews were taking advantage of their own people.

- I hate to admit it, but some of the coldest and meanest people I've encountered have been among the church. There are those who put on the façade of righteousness, but deep within they are only concerned with themselves. If anyone ought to have a loving and compassionate spirit, it ought to be those of like faith. We have an obligation to each other! [Gal.6:10 – As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.](#)

D. The Occasion – Keep in mind the timing of this uprising. They were in the midst of the rebuilding efforts. They had already faced enough trouble from the others, without having to deal with internal issues. That is how the enemy operated then and he hasn't changed his tactics. When God begins to bless, and the church begins to flourish, you can expect trouble, and in many instances it will come from within!

I. The Cry of the People (1)

II. The Concern of the People (2-4) – These verses reveal the great concern that the people shared. Let's take a moment to consider their concerns.

A. Their Diversity (2a) – *For there were that said, We, our sons, and our daughters, are many: therefore we take up corn for them, that we may eat, and live.* This reveals the great tragedy in all of this. The people had prospered by the good hand of God. He had brought them from their bondage and allowed them to flourish again in Jerusalem. God had been faithful to His own, and the greed of men was creating a hindrance to God's desire for the people.

- This goes along with what we just discussed. Quite often the churches and people who face the greatest adversity are those who have been blessed abundantly. How many times have we seen a church grow and prosper, only to have trouble from within and split? I pray that we will take advantage of God's blessing instead of each other. May we seek to stand together for the good of the church as a whole.

B. Their Devotion (2b) – The people were not being unreasonable; they weren't seeking wealth or great riches. They simply wanted to feed their families and enjoy life. They must've been reminded of the adversity of their bondage and desired to provide for their families in the homeland. They were devoted to each other, unlike some who sought only personal gain.

- What a challenge that presents to us as a church in our modern society. Many have lost focus of the things that really matter. We are not here to promote our personal agenda or for our own prosperity. It ought to be the desire of this congregation of believers to feed our sons and daughters. We must ensure that we provide what the babes in Christ need to receive the spiritual nourishment they so desperately need.

C. Their Debt (3) – *Some also there were that said, We have mortgaged our lands, vineyards, and houses, that we might buy corn, because of the dearth.* Some found themselves in financial turmoil. There had been a great drought; the crops had withered in the field and what was available had become very expensive. Some had mortgaged their houses, land, and even their vineyards so that they might eat. The drought and shortage of food only added to their misery.

- We have not faced a serious drought in recent years, but we have been in the midst of tough economic times for several years. The entire world is facing the impact of the economic downturn. The drought in Nehemiah's day was likely due to their rebellion and refusal to submit to the ways of God. I know that good people find themselves facing difficult situations, but I am convinced that much of what we are facing today is the result of greed and the compulsion to satisfy the flesh. The root of the problem today, as it likely was then, is sin. If there is to be any hope of physical restoration in America, there must be a spiritual awakening first.

D. Their Despair (4) – [There were also that said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute, and that upon our lands and vineyards.](#) The people also found themselves in despair due to the taxes they were forced to pay. Clearly they were in a desperate situation. Their own people sought to take advantage of them, food sources were low and prices were high, they faced a mountain of debt, and even had to further mortgage their property to pay their taxes. This problem was further expanded by the high interest rates they were forced to pay, [V.11](#).

- I don't want to get sidetracked by the frustration we all feel regarding taxes. It seems as if they continue to increase with little benefit for those who pay them. Much of what we are forced to pay is allotted to the special interests. This is yet another example of the greedy and powerful taking advantage of the poor and weak.
- We will never buy our way out of debt. America prospered as she has due to the goodness of our Lord. Unless we return to Him and seek His face, we will likely continue to see decline in every aspect of society. God will not bless a people who refuse to honor Him!

I. The Cry of the People (1)

II. The Concern of the People (2-4)

III. The Contempt of the People (5) – Here we find the range of emotion and contempt that the people felt. Consider:

A. Their Betrayal (5a) – [Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children:](#) The people were astounded by the treatment of fellow Jews toward them. They were of the same flesh; they had endured the same struggles; looking at their children there would have been little difference from the others. They felt betrayed by their own, sold out to the greed and selfishness of the prosperous.

- Isn't that tragic? We look on this account and wonder how these things could be, but I fear that many times we are guilty of the same. We have preconceived notions of whom God would save. We have a mold that we expect others to fit into; otherwise we don't pay much attention to their needs. I pray that God will move us from our prejudices. Christ died for all, not just those of a particular skin color, social class, or intelligence. I pray that we will see others as God sees them, souls in need of salvation!

B. Their Bondage (5b) – and, lo, we bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants, and some of our daughters are brought unto bondage already: neither is it in our power to redeem them; for other men have our lands and vineyards. Things were so desperate that they had begun to sell their children into bondage, some had already done so. They felt as if there was no alternative to their desperation. They were helpless to do anything about their situation.

- Those of Nehemiah's day were facing physical burdens likely due to spiritual lack, but we do find a great spiritual truth here. As we look around our world today, we see many who are in bondage. They are bound by their sin and see no way of escape. Some have been led there by parents who saw no need for the ways of God. We need to develop a burden for those who are bound by sin. They will never escape in and of themselves. Jesus is the only way of redemption and we have the opportunity to share Him with the world.

Much of what we have considered today is focused on the greed of many and their lack of compassion for others. We can relate to some of the physical and financial burdens in the text, but I pray that we have been able to comprehend the spiritual application. Our world is filled with lost and hurting people. They are looking for someone to care for them.

There were those in Jerusalem that could've made a difference and helped others, but they chose to indulge themselves at the expense of others. We must be aware of the needs around us. We need hearts of compassion for those who are less fortunate, and especially for those who have never met Christ. Have we done all we could to minister to the lost and hurting? I am sure that we would have to admit that we could do more.