

Sermon Sunday 20th September 2020

Nehemiah 5: 1 – 12 'The cost of rebuilding; justice/helping the poor.'

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, help each one of us to follow your law and the teachings of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ in all we do, say and think.

Amen

I quote from a column writer in this weeks Times about the rule of six people introduced by the Government. She writes 'I am still icky about the government telling us to shop our neighbours if they break the rule of six, as the Home Secretary Priti Patel urged us this week even though she voted in the Commons to breach international law hours earlier.' Our lives and our very democracy are governed by Laws which we can't pick or choose to obey. It's all or nothing. As a retired lawyer and teacher of law I am appalled that the Government can even think about proposing to breach the rule of law; the first lectures drummed into us, as students, was the importance of the rule of law and it formed the first lessons to my students. Nehemiah followed the law of God in his life even when the going got tough.

When difficulties come along there is a human tendency for conflict and discouragement to set in; when problems arise, we have to face them square on and press on to finish the job. This applies first and foremost in Gods work and its completion by each and every one of us.

In our series from the Book of Nehemiah we have heard his first-hand account of how he was led by God to leave a safe environment and a good job and go to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls and again we have heard the opposition he encountered. But how did Nehemiah start this process and his journey to Jerusalem? **In Chapter One verse 4 he tells us 'For some days I mourned and**

fasted and prayed before the God of Heaven.' He prayed before God and received his blessing; he gave space to God to work in him and allow him to achieve his aim. Prayer has to form the very centre of all we do and it is through prayer that Gods mighty power and force can and will solve problems today, a theme I will come back to later in this sermon.

So, Nehemiah has encouraged the various Jewish groups in and around Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls, he has encountered opposition to this from established Jewish business men and Governors of the provinces but with Gods power he has overcome these people. Yet we hear once more in today's readings how he encounters opposition from this group especially his fellow Jews, when famine hits the land. This group are still charging their fellow Jews interest on mortgages for money lent to buy food and live. They have forgotten the second commandment 'To love their neighbour' by forcing them into poverty and slavery. Nehemiah accuses them of the practice of usury and tells them to stop charging interest and return the property taken. Why, because God never intended people to prosper from other people's misfortunes. Contrary to the values of the world God tells us that caring for one another is more important than personal gain.

Proverbs 28: verse 27 tells us 'HE WHO GIVES TO THE POOR WILL LACK NOTHING.' Like Nehemiah we must mirror God's love and concern when we help others, even when it is difficult or seemingly impossible. The Old Testament Books clearly spell out the responsibility of the Jewish people and us to care for the poor; for example, Exodus 22:22-27, Leviticus 25:35-37 and Deuteronomy 15: 7-11. And, of course, there are constant reminders in the New Testament to do this.

By obeying Gods calling through prayer as I have said we can overcome any obstacles in our paths; I know from personal experience that those obstacles sometimes seem insurmountable but by constant prayerful conversations with God He will always show me how I can overcome those obstacles. I received a letter from Sightsavers, a charity dealing with cataract problems in poor children, in India; I just thought another letter asking for a donation but as I read it I was drawn into prayer and asking what can I do God I get so many of these letters and I can't give to all? After this short prayer a donation was made to enable basic equipment to be purchased for five operations.

In our world today we constantly hear about the poor who Jesus told us we would always have and must look after, so we have a duty to do so. We may not be able to give money but we can offer prayers, intercessory prayers, for them and the organisations trying to help them. God will listen to these prayers and bless the work of such organisations. We also hear much about injustice around the world; Belarus, Hong Kong, Zimbabwe, the Uighur people in northern China to name but a few. Please include these countries and their people in your prayers. A fair justice system is something I have found we take for granted in this country but we all have a duty to protect it and must never let it be watered down in any way.

Our Laws are not a pick and mix selection, as this Government seems to think, and more importantly Gods Laws or Commandments are definitely not pick and mix. These must be obeyed and followed by us all no matter how tough it gets. Justice for the poor is about caring for them, helping and advising them, ensuring they receive what is legally due to them, feeding them the list is endless. All this and more are done daily in the Community Project; please hold them and their clients in your prayers.

Nehemiah shows us how we must behave; to rebuild our lives, overcome opposition and help the poor and he achieved this in prayer and faith. Walk in the way of God and in faith and in the words of verse one of Psalm 119 **'O GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD FOR HE IS GOOD; HIS STEADFAST LOVE ENDURES FOREVER.'**

Let us pray Help us Lord to seek you in all we do and say; when we face problems show us how we are to deal with them by following your Commandments and the teachings of your Son our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.