

Walk the Talk (Nehemiah 5:14-19)

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[0 : 00] Moreover, from the twelfth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor.

But the earlier governors, those preceding me, placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people, but out of reverence of God, I did not act like that.

Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work. We did not acquire any land. Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations.

Each day, one ox, six choice sheep, and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days, an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.

Remember me with favour, my God, for all I have done for these people. And that's the word of God. Moxie? Thank you.

[1 : 19] Thank you. All right. We're in Nehemiah chapter 5. Remember what Pastor Barry spoke to us last time? It was quite an action from Nehemiah, right?

He rebuked the wealthy Jews for oppressing their own fellow people. And the amazing thing was, they responded.

And they repented. And the things just changed. The whole situation changed. Now I wonder, if Nehemiah did all the talking, but his life does not exemplify what his talks were.

And I wonder, how would the Jews have responded? All right. So, walking the talk as a person of integrity is very, very important.

As a Christian leader. I don't think it's just only for leaders, but for any Christians. You know, sometimes people accuse Christians. Oh, these guys talk, talk, talk, talk. Talk a lot.

[2 : 28] But do they actually walk the talk? You know? There's four different kinds. Some people just do all the talking, but no walking.

We call them hypocrites. And there are people who actually, they just worked and gave and loved and served, but no talking.

These are the gems of the church, right? I'm sure you know, and I know in the church, there are a lot of people who do quiet things.

And just lovingly serving others without saying anything, without blowing their trumpets. These are gems, right? So, treasure them. And there are those who talk, like me.

And we all try to walk our talks. Leaders, I think these are the challenges for us, you know. There are opportunities for us to talk a lot.

[3 : 31] But do our lives actually match what we talk? And there are those ones who do not talk at all and do not walk at all.

They are on the fringe, right? All right? So, who are you? And today, in Nehemiah, who, what do you think? Where is Nehemiah? Here or here?

All right? Let's have a look. Let's have a look at the passage, right? Thanks, friend, for reading that for us. Now, Nehemiah 5, 14 to 19. Now, this is comparatively a short, short passage.

Only six verses, right? Next time, I've got to get to preach chapter 7. I've got to preach the list that Pastor William is very good at doing it.

But it's going to be a headache for me. All right? But this is comparatively short. And this six verses, right? Nehemiah, out of his reference to God, and seeing the needs of the present time, he actually voluntarily gave up certain benefits as a governor of Persia.

[4 : 51] All right? Now, what does it mean for us today? We're not governors. We're not Nehemiahs. But somehow we do have an identity, maybe even greater than Nehemiah as a governor.

You know? We are ambassadors. Ambassadors for Christ. We are an ambassador of the gospel. So I believe as the ambassadors for Christ, we can learn to let go of some of our privileges for the sake of the gospel that is entrusted to us.

I believe it's a learning process. I do not claim have learned at all. And often it's challenging. It's not easy to give up my rights.

Because this secular world can continuously, you know, teaching us this is my right. I don't stand for it. I have to hold on to it. But actually the Bible is the other way around.

To give them up for the sake of the gospel. Just like Jesus, he gave up his rights as the son of God. He came down to us and served in order to redeem us.

[6 : 10] Right? So let's have a look. Now, that was what happened last time when Pastor Barry preached. Nehemiah called a meeting. And because there were people complained, they protested, well, we have nothing to eat.

We have sold our children to labor, to slavery. And these, our countrymen, these are better to do people. They oppress us.

So Nehemiah, being a governor, he had the power. And he invoked the meeting and called him to repent. And he actually did something. He raised his, what do you call it?

The rope, okay? He shook out his rope and said, God will shake out the house and the possession for those who do not comply. Now, that was quite a symbolic action.

All right? I like these images because it's a kind of contemporary description. All right? Now, you can see, if you can see it, actually, these guys have glasses.

[7 : 15] Of course, at that time, there was no glasses. All right? But I like the impression because it's very vivid of describing the situation at the time. Now, what does it mean for us today as we look at this?

I believe as a leader, Nehemiah, he enforced restraints for himself, for himself, not others. And then he enhanced generosity.

But he also endured in reference to God. His whole of his time serving as a governor.

Let's have a look at them one by one and how these will apply to your life and my life, okay?

Enforcing restraints, okay?

Verses 14, 15. From the 12th year of King Artaxerxes, he was appointed as a governor. All right? And until the 32nd year, that's 12 years.

[8 : 23] How? How did he enforce restraints? He did not receive the food allotted to the governor.

But his predecessors did. And how much was that? You can see it in verse 15. All the food and all the drinks and also 40 shekels of silver in addition to all the food and wine.

Okay? All right? First, now he did not start restraining himself then.

He started 12 years before. As soon as he arrived, Judah, Jerusalem, right? Because he went to this place and he looked at the situation.

People were poor. People had nothing. But he knew that he had to encourage them to stand up and rebuild the walls. So, he knew the situation was harsh.

[9 : 31] From then on, he decided, I will not receive these allowances. All right? Now, these food, these 40 shekels of silver, they were not his salaries.

He would have received salary from the king as a governor. But these, these, these, these were food allowances that was, that was contributed to them by the local people.

And because he saw the harsh, harsh situation, he did not want it. He, he restrained himself from receiving these allowances. Now, how, how much was 40 shekels of silver?

Now, it may be hard for us to understand today. And, and, you know, the currency would, would differ from different eras, right? But, just, just for, for reference.

Now, in the time of, the best of the Israel, in King Solomon, a chariot with a horse would cost 650 shekels of silver.

[10 : 42] That was in, recorded in 2 Chronicles. And a horse, a horse, for, for soldiers, 150 shekels.

Now, imagine, four days of allowances will buy you a horse. Would that be good? Now, today, someone tried to, try to, describe, I mean, what is 40 shekels of silver in today in New Zealand currency?

Very rough, very rough estimation, right? About \$700. That's one shekel. 40 shekels is about \$30,000 one day.

I don't even get that for a six-month salary. Right? Now, imagine, it would be quite, quite a bit of sum. I could do a lot with that.

But, Nehemiah, he wouldn't have nothing of that. All right? And that's why his life as a, as a, as a, leader, he demonstrated justice and mercy.

[11 : 59] And that's, that's why his ministry, his leadership was effective. But, he had to enforce it.

I mean, 12 years, not a short time. Every day, denouncing these rights, giving up these rights. But, your action, our actions will speak louder than our words.

Right? I came to New Zealand when I was about, in, in the 70s. When I was a kid in Hong Kong, all right, these were the Hong Kong police, the Royal Hong Kong police at that time.

The uniforms looked a bit weird, right? But, that was, that was in the 70s. But, you know what? They had a phrase at that time in Hong Kong.

In Cantonese, if you can understand Cantonese, ho, jai, m, don, chai. What did it mean? Good kids won't be cops. Because, the cops were the most corrupted forces in Hong Kong.

[13 : 14] And, did you know that? Yeah. But, somehow, the governor of Hong Kong, because, hadn't had enough of that, so he established this independent, what do you call it?

Independent, something, against crime. And, independent commission against crime. And, that changed.

They said, it changed the most, most, corrupted police force into the finest in Asia. But, I don't know what happened now.

Okay. But, it did, it did for two or three decades. Right? It really changed it. And, when the ICAC established, he was the first guy who was caught.

And, it was an English superintendent, chief superintendent, because he was very, very corrupt. And, there was a lot of, you see some Chinese Hong Kong film you made, and, you know, you know, these kind of movies, they would all describe that as, as, as, as real history.

[14 : 27] Alright? And, the fact that, when the ICAC was established, you know what? All these cops, protested.

And, they even assaulted the people, in ICAC. You could see how corrupt it was. How corrupted they were. Alright? It's not easy, in this world, in this sin-sick world, to, to maintain justice, and to practice mercy.

But, this is for us. If we really want to serve effectively, if we really want to have impact, as a Christian, in the society, we need to give up certain rights.

I wonder, they actually do have a police fellowship, even today, they call it Enoch Fellowship. Right? True, yeah.

I, I went to, and I went to, to some of these, these meetings. Genuine guys, good guys. But they said, very hard, very hard, to be a good, Christian, testimony, in, in, in, in the police force.

[15 : 48] You know? There were, there were many disciplines, disciplinary forces in Hong Kong. But those, I mean, even the fire service was corrupted. I've heard, actually, you know, when the house got fired, burned up, and the fire, and fire engines came, the five or six of them, and, they went, they went, arrived, but they would not, start the host, and, and, and put up off the fire.

They said, no water. You know what, in Chinese? Money. If you know, no, no water, we have no water. It was that bad, you know?

And, it's a constant thing. We, in this secular, sinful world, we need to stand up. And we need, we need to, to, yeah, to give up certain rights as a Christian in order that we can be good, effective witnesses for Christ.

Are we willing? As ambassadors, do we, are we willing to give up our rights? And, secondly, not only giving up our rights, but to enhance generosity.

Now, instead, I devoted myself to the work of the wall, and all men were assembled there for the work. Now, my effort was put into rebuilding the wall.

[17 : 19] But also, I realized there are other needs that I need to fulfill. Now, I don't, I gave up my rights not to receive allowances, but the needs and the people I still need to look after.

Okay? There are 150 Jews and officials. I, as a governor, I need to feed them. Right? And look at the amount of food.

Each day, one ox, six choice sheep, and some chickens, dogs, and all these kind of birds, you know? Now, on our love face, we have 279 people.

I wonder one ox, six sheep, and ducks, and chicken would feed, would be enough to feed us all. Of course, there's an ox.

Now, who's going to slaughter the ox? Right? And ox is a big thing, right? Now, someone said, actually, this amount of food would feed 600 plus people.

[18 : 34] Okay? But look at it. There's only 150 Jews and officials. And what's, who are the rest that came to the table?

people. I'm sure, as we look at Nehemiah, he did not only fulfill his obligation as a governor, I believe he also fed those poor and the needy.

There are always people in his home coming to eat. And each day, each day, and then every 10 days, an ample supply of wine.

Now, that's hospitality. That's generosity. And they did it all out of his own pocket. Now, if an ordinary leader, less Christian, he would say, I have all these to feed.

Why don't I actually get money from the people? I'm feeding them, right? But he had nothing of that. He was truly practicing, exercising generosity.

[19 : 48] And I believe, really, you have to really understand the grace of God before we can do that. Generosity must come out from my heart.

You know, some people, have you seen people like, let's go for a yum chai, you know? At the end, I say, I'll pay, you'll pay. Actually, at the end, I was so slow in response and eventually you have to pay.

And when you pay, you're paying so unwillingly and just maybe complaining, why you say you want to pay, but why you act so slowly? If we're really being generous, you don't need to.

You just go and pay and come back, oh, it's already paid. if you really want to host people, we need to really come up from the heart and experiencing the love and the grace of God, and then it will be very, very natural.

Now, for Zacchaeus, we read about his repentance, he went to seek for Jesus, and Jesus said, come down, I'll be dining in your home, and he knew that Jesus would have received him, and he has received Jesus as his Lord and Savior.

[21 : 19] He would have experienced repentance, and what he said to Jesus, okay, I'll give back four times for those that I cheated.

That's true repentance. and I will give half of my wealth to the poor. That generosity got to be from God.

It's not him trying to make up something, to exchange something with Jesus. Right? And if we're truly experiencing the love and the grace of God, God, and as we show hospitality, as we show generosity, you enjoy, and they will enjoy.

It's giving and receiving will be such a blessed thing. Right? In our earlier days, when we came back to PCBC, there was a lot of overseas students at the time, and there are a lot of younger folks without parents here.

So, every Christmas, every Chinese New Year, or maybe some autumn moon festivals, and Simo was younger at that time, so we try our best to invite, we call orphans, right?

[23 : 01] So, some of the orphans were here, but they are all grown up now, and because we're getting older, and I think it's a good thing that there are others who picked up these kind of generosity and hospitality and we can kind of retire now, and you see there are people inviting people to their homes now, you know, it was hard work for Simo, you know, I did nothing, all right, just, just, yeah, enjoy the food, let's just talk to the people, so she would spend about two days beforehand, and then she would spend the whole night cleaning up, but it was so much joy, I really treasure those times, I'm sure you did too, so it's great as we give and as we take and participate together in the love and the grace of

God, generosity come very natural, because we all receive from the love of God, right, and lastly, why he, Nehemiah, could, why he, he could give up his rights and why he could be generous, because he had the reference to God, not just for one moment, not just for one day or a year, in the past 12 years, I believe even before he came back, he went back to Jerusalem, he was, he was, had this reference, this awe to this awesome God, and all along, if you read the book of Ezra and Nehemiah, you know, fearing reference to

God was a very prominent thing for Nehemiah and for Ezra. And the fact that when he called the people at the time, what you're doing is not right, you're oppressing, you're depriving your fellow people, this is not right, Leviticus said, if you lend money, you don't take interest out of the fear of God, because the year of Jubilee is actually born out of this fear to God.

The obligation for celebrating the year of Jubilee is because we are to fear the Lord. So, in verse 15, he said, out of reference for God, I did not act like that.

I did not take any of these allowances. And in verse 19, he solely just put himself place himself before God, he prayed, he said, remember me with favor, my God, my God.

[26 : 11] I mean, he was not fearing other people, all right, and all he was concerned was how God would see him. How do we respond to situations?

How do we, what kind of attitude if we want to give up our right and try to practice generosity? Do we want to win favor from people?

Do we concern how people see us? Or do we actually, out of reference to God, and out of concern of how God sees me, that we give up our rights and we generously share the blessings with others? God is not to know how God is perfect. He's quite different from Ezra. I believe Nehemiah is not quite an easy guy to get on with compared to Ezra.

It's like Paul and Barnabas. I would rather get on, I would rather co-labor with Barnabas because he was a good guy. And he was willing to, yeah, it was easier to get on with.

[27 : 34] But Paul at that time, he had his mindset. He was not as easy to get on with. I believe Nehemiah was that, you know, he has been a high official in the king's court.

He would have all these years missing with other cunning, crafty officials, high officials in the king's court.

You know, it was very, very true in a sense. There was, this is, this is some seminary students was describing Nehemiah.

It was in a book, actually, the president of this Chinese seminary in Taiwan and produced this book. And this was the image that put together by his students.

Now, it was in Chinese, but let me read some of them to you. Like, Nehemiah was a good, fine admin person.

[28 : 42] So, he would, he planned, he was a good planner, he was also a good executor. Alright? But, he was pretty, what's dook choy.

He, he, it would be very hard to change. Once he made up his mind, it would be very hard to change him, because he knew he had put much effort into it.

Alright? But, he was God-fearing. That's the best thing for this guy. Alright? And, but something like, he was arrogant.

And, I don't know, how do you translate that? If you can read it, ma-lat, what's ma-lat? Huh?

That's Taiwanese, that's Taiwanese kind of expression. It's not just hot, it's not just hot-headed. Alright? Imagine, in chapter 13, he would beat up people.

[29 : 44] Now, imagine, you come beat you up, you know? And, he would pull someone's tears. Alright? He was that kind of a leader. But, somehow, God used as long as he was willing to be used by God.

Now, we don't, we don't, I mean, we don't expect these kind of leaders all the time. But, I think he had a heart. Especially, he feared God.

And, God can still use with this imperfect figure. God can use us as imperfect as we are.

But, we have Jesus, the servant king, who is perfect in every way. And, Nehemiah served as a reminder for us, but Jesus as a faith, a perfecter of our faith.

and he has accomplished everything for us. And, in him, we can, we can offer ourselves and be used by him. It was interesting, this morning when you had the baptismal class, someone asked, why, why, the Protestants, you know, Christian churches, when we, when we have the cross, why the cross is empty?

[31 : 14] Good question. And then I thought a bit and I, I told him, I said, because we, we, we celebrate, we believe Jesus is not on the cross anymore.

He has resurrected and he, he has ascended to heaven. And one day he'll be back. And she, indeed, this is our Christ, our servant king.

Yes, he died on the cross for us, but he's not the poor guy who still hangs on the cross. He has triumphed over sin and death.

He has ascended to heaven. And he'll come back one day. And this is how we as his ambassadors, we can follow him. We can, we do have the power to triumph over sin and death as well. yes, not easy. No one said it's easy. Me as a pastor, I, at times, you know, I have to repent to God. I talk a lot, but do my walk actually balance my talk.

[32 : 28] You know, I need to be accountable to God and myself. But we all do. But somehow the victory is not me. It's not by what I do, but for what he has done.

So let me encourage you. Let's practice that. Let's ask God to help us to enforce restraints upon ourselves.

And ask God to help us to practice to enhance generosity. And ask God to help us to, yeah, just to endure and to reference to God.

To finish, I'd like to share my testimony. Now, this was a Christmas card I received from an inmate in, actually, this is a weary prison, Oakland South Correctional Services.

I believe this will be my last Christmas card received from this guy in prison. It's a good thing. He's not dying, all right? He's actually got parole after seven years.

[33 : 40] Poor guy. He's only about, when he, he's about 38 now, but he will have a hard job to start again back in Hong Kong. Eight years ago, he was a fine guy, actually.

He was earning \$30,000, something like that, in Hong Kong, eight, nine years ago. Not bad. But the problem, he got into gambling. He lost about \$600,000 in Hong Kong.

And there are people, friends, say, hey, just go two or three trips, you'll balance out, you know, bringing drugs in to New Zealand.

But the first time he was here, he got arrested. Right? He was only, what, two kilograms. Yes, a lot, but compared to, you know, at that time there was a lot of Hong Kong young people at that time committed that and got arrested.

And actually it was that time we started reaching out to these youths, Hong Kong youths that came over, got arrested, and that's how I, I actually did not meet him first, I was meeting other guys first.

[34 : 53] It was actually one guy that referred by your uncle, Hugo, right? And then it was indirectly I got to know this guy. And it was about six or seven.

And all these, you know, somehow, you know, these guys were, yeah, they were not, they were not innocent, right?

They were shrewd, they were cunning. So I had to, you know, as I was visiting them, I had to be careful, you know, trying to balance myself. I didn't want to get sucked in, you know?

But somehow, when I met this guy, he was, I think he was in his 30, yeah, somehow God placed this, yeah, just gave me this heart, this passion, help this guy.

I didn't know, what can I help? I don't, I don't have much. But somehow, as I talked with him in Mount Eden at that time, I was, yeah, I said to God, yes, God, whatever you want to do.

[36 : 03] Whatever you want me to do. And then I started connecting with his families in Hong Kong, and I went back to Hong Kong at that time, about three months later, I went to see his family, and try my best to, yeah, just to look after him in prison, and he had no money, the family had no money, and somehow God said to me, well, and during this time, don't know how long, maybe you want to just contribute something, or loan him some money, no interest, of course.

And I started like maybe \$200 for about three months, and then I didn't know how long it was, right, and then seven years, no, you can count, you work your maths.

And the problem, in the middle of the thing, he was trying to get legal aid, and the lawyer cheated him, right, and through me, he had to give \$5,000 to the lawyer.

I didn't know why, but that's what the instruction was. And today, after seven years, now I share that because Nehemiah shared it too after 12 years.

I thought, oh, I can talk, and I want to let you know that I walked as well. And I don't know if he goes back to Hong Kong, hopefully he goes back, he leaves New Zealand in October.

[37 : 44] And will he be able to pay me back? I don't know. right? It's five digits. For a poor pastor, it meant a lot.

I will hope to get it back. All right? But if it can't, if it doesn't, well, we'll just have to pray, Lord, you know.

Now I share that, I just say, I'd like to encourage you guys. There may be opportunities God will lay before you. We can't help everybody.

The needs are just so great. Maybe there are brothers and sisters in front of you, beside you. There are others, or maybe on Saturday, maybe on Sunday morning, or maybe at your work, there are opportunities that God will open up for you, for you, to be a good witness, not just talking, not just teaching them, preaching them about Christ, but we act as Christ's ambassador.

Now this guy, after all these years, he's still not a Christian. I gave him a Bible. Every time I talked to him, I tried to pray with him, right? But he said, oh, you're a good guy, but I don't want because you're a good guy, you know, I don't want to become a Christian, because you're caring for me.

[39 : 10] But that's fine. We just leave it to God. But if I was just talking and talking and talking, but I did not actually help, what kind of witnesses there are?

people. So let me encourage you. Because our king is Jesus, he came to serve. And he is our greatest example.

And because of him overcome sin and death, we can receive this amazing life that we can say no to this secular world.

and we can practice generosity. We can restrain ourselves from so-called rights. And we can be good witnesses for him. Let's pray.

Father, I just want to thank you. Nothing we can boast, nothing we can brag. Thank you for opportunities that we can serve, we can try, and we can, at times, we fail.

[40 : 18] that's exactly, that's why we cannot boast before you. But thank you for opportunities that we can exercise restraints, we can practice generosity, because we want to please you, because we want to, we refer you as our Lord and Savior.

So, read our hearts and minds, and help us, Lord, as in our Christian walk, that we truly will demonstrate your goodness in our lives, just like what you have did.

In Jesus' name, Amen.