

BaptistWay Bible Series for August 28: Nehemiah: Standing up for people

August 17, 2011

Growing up, my dad was my biggest fan, and he was my best teacher and coach. I can remember my dad teaching me about every sport I showed any interest toward. He wanted to help me enjoy the sport and do the best I could. He never pressured me or chastised me when I faltered, but rather helped me learn from my mistakes, so I could do better the next time. I remember having conversations after football and basketball games in high school with my dad that always were helpful and positive. I cherished those conversations, and I am so thankful my dad loved me enough to be my coach.

Now, before this gets too sappy, I will move on. One sport Dad and I still talk about is golf. I love golf, and I wish I could play more. When my dad was teaching me to play golf, he acknowledged he was not a great golfer, but he did know the basics of the golf swing. He would tell me, “Do what I say, not what I do.”

This made sense to me then and certainly does today. I can tell you exactly what I did wrong on a shot that ends up crashing through the window of a house off the fairway or a shot that skips across the water and slowly sinks into the mud and mire of a murky water hazard.

Even though I can tell you what I did wrong, I probably will do the same thing on the next shot. I understand the mentality of “do as I say, not as I do” in the world of golf, but should this be our mentality in the kingdom of God?

Nehemiah was a very brave and wise individual. He was willing to approach the king of Persia and ask to go and begin rebuilding Jerusalem. Nehemiah was granted the opportunity to go back to Jerusalem, and he began to rebuild the city. Many challenges arose during this process, and Nehemiah showed his faithfulness to God and wisdom in dealing with them.

One of the problems Nehemiah faced was that the Jewish people were taking advantage of the poor. What made things even worse was that this was not oppression from an invading army or country but from members of God's chosen people.

Nehemiah came to the defense of the poor and reprimanded those taking advantage of the people. The offending Jews even agreed to give back what they had wrongly taken. Nehemiah told the people what they were doing went against God's law, but he did much more than just tell them what needed to be done.

Nehemiah made sure he led by example. He gave food allotted to him to those who were in need. Nehemiah did not expect the people to simply do what he said, even though what he said was correct. Nehemiah lived out his faith and encouraged the people to do the same.

I am afraid that as Christians today, we fall into the trap of settling for a "do as I say, not as I do" mentality. This is very understandable. Teaching the truths of the Bible is much easier than actually living them out. I worry that here in America our Christian faith is being defined by what we say, more than what we do.

For example, over past few years, politicians have learned what they need to say in order for the "religious right" to support them. At times, it seems simply saying you're anti-abortion and anti-gay marriage is good enough to be considered a faithful Christian. Rather than just telling people we are pro-life, maybe we should help the single, young woman who feels her best option is abortion. Rather than protesting and boycotting organizations that

support homosexuality, maybe we should develop ministries that reach out to those struggling with this temptation. On a more local level, how many of our churches say they are against poverty, but never actively seek to help those in poverty.

The church today runs the risk of simply proclaiming the sinfulness of the world without offering and providing the Good News which overcomes sin. We cannot take a “do as I say, not as I do” example. Nehemiah led by example. He did not simply tell people they were treating the poor wrong, he demonstrated with his life how the poor should be treated. If Christians would step up and live the way Christ has called us to live, I wonder how much injustice would be done away with?

Jesus has called us to be his representatives in the world. He will help us and encourage us to live out our faith. Jesus does not want us simply to proclaim that we believe in him; He desires for us to live as he lived. We will not be perfect, just as I never was perfect in my athletic endeavors, but my dad always was there to help me learn and grow. Christ wants us to learn and grow so we will be able to impact his kingdom. He will be there to help us along the way. Be willing to stand up and live out your faith.