



SERIES NINE: DISCIPLESHIP AND CIVIC DUTY

SESSION 3: *ECONOMIC STIMULUS: WORKING THE SYSTEM*

FOR CHRISTIAN CAUSES

The Seed

Acts 25: 11 – 12

“If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!” After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!”

Words to Know

- **Assistance:** *aid or help*
- **Faith-based Initiative:** *a program designed to expand the capacity of religious and community organizations to provide federally funded social services in order to help others.*
- **Partnership:** *an agreement between two or more parties to work toward a common goal.
(companionship, brotherhood, joint interest)*
- **Proselytize:** *evangelize (to encourage someone to convert to a faith.*
- **Subsidy:** *money granted from a government to a private enterprise for the public good. (help, support, aid, reinforcement)*

Part 1 – Cultivating the Ground

How many of you have received a stimulus from the government during the pandemic? I know I did! Even though, I was still working and had no hardships, I still wanted to get the extra money. Many of you weren't that fortunate and really needed the extra money to make ends meet. Did you complain? Did you feel as though they should do more? By receiving this stimulus, do you feel you can count on the government during hard times? We will always have the poor among us, Matthew 26:11, so is it only the governments place to solve our communities' problems? As Christian, we have the ultimate responsibility to others. Proverbs 19:17 "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done." The government is not the only body that is responsible for the poor but also the church. The church is a body of believers and as a body of believers we are instructed by the word of God to take care of the poor. Deuteronomy 15:11 "For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore, I command you, "You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.'

What do you think?

- What is your opinion on churches' seeking funding from secular sources in order to assist with ministries that provide social and human services to communities?
- How does that differ from individual Christians who received federal and/or state monies for affordable housing, healthcare, transportation, or counseling?



Planting the SEED

Paul, born a Roman citizen, was arrested and threatened with flogging. It was not until Paul questioned the legality of his being flogged that the Roman soldiers withdrew. He subsequently requested an audience with Caesar regard the matter---as this was his right as a Roman citizen. Today as Christians, we are also able to make “appeals to Caesar” on various matters. Even with the concept of separation of church and state such things as faith-based and community initiatives have been instituted by our government in order to help certain institutions meet the needs of local communities. Some believe that these partnerships are questionable at best. Can the state remain neutral after funding faith-based ministries? Can a church accept much-needed funding without compromising Christian principles?

Let's me explain how we got here. The Seed Verse states, *"If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"* After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: *"You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"*

Paul has been converted, baptized, and spreading the word of Jesus Christ. As he was going from city to city spread the gospel the Jews were getting angrier and angrier with him. Acts 21, While in Jerusalem, Paul was detained and put in chains. He told the soldier who he was ('I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city.) Acts 21: 39 He asked to speak to the crowd. Paul explained to the crowd his lineage, his training in the Mosaic Law, how he loved God, and how he persecuted followers (women and men). He shared his conversion on the road to Damascus but as soon as Paul said what the Lord instructed him to do ("Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles." Acts 22: 21) After hearing this the crowd raised their voices and shouted, 'Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!' Acts 22: 22. After the crowd's response Paul was taken into custody and ordered to be flogged.

Acts 23, the Jews are still hounding Paul after he was taken to the Sanhedrin. He spoke to the Sadducees and the others Pharisees telling them “ I stand on trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.” Acts 23: 6. At this time the Sanhedrin heard their were Jews plotting to kill Paul so they took him to Caesarea to stand trial. After being on trial with no decision being made Paul was sent back to prison. Acts 24 Paul return to court and Festus asked him if he would return to Jerusalem to stand trial for the charges brought against him. Paul said, “ I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. **11** If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them.

I appeal to Caesar!' After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: 'You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!' Acts 24: 10-12. Caesar is the Emperor of Rome, the highest governing authority. By appealing to a higher legal authority, Paul set a precedent for true Christians today. When opposers try to frame "trouble by decree (an official order issued by a legal authority, Jehovah's Witnesses avail themselves of legal provisions to defend the good news. *—Ps. 94:20.

When the government sent you your Economic Stimulus check did you return it because you are a Christian? Did you feel the government would tell you who to praise or even how to praise? Did you feel by taking the stimulus it was questionable because now you are in a partnership with the government?

What do you
think?

Write your response in the comment
section and in your journal.

Nurturing the SEED

Following the Babylonian Exile of the Jews, God's people came under Persian authority. The Lord, through the prophet Isaiah, assured Jacob's remaining descendants that they would be returned to Jerusalem. He would redeem His people and would be glorified in the process (see Isaiah 44:21-23).

God's sovereign choice was to use the Persian King Cyrus to help the people of God. The Lord referred to Cyrus as His shepherd, who would "accomplish all that I please; eh will say of Jerusalem, "let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "let the foundations be laid" (Isaiah 44:28). Later, the Lord said that Cyrus would receive hidden treasures and be victorious in battle again, for the sake of the Jews. Again, Cyrus was favored by God –who would raise him up in righteousness and direct all his ways (see Isaiah 45:3, 13).

Later, the scribe Ezra would record that God stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to build a second Temple in Jerusalem (see Ezra 1). Cyrus decreed that non-Jews, wherever they lived, would contribute silver, gold, and goods of every kind for the rebuilding of the house of the Lord (see Ezra 1:4). Over hundred years later, Isaiah's prophecy was being fulfilled. The people of God accepted what King Cyrus and the people willingly donated and undertook the task of rebuilding the Temple.

The cupbearer Nehemiah would later become the governor of Jerusalem. While performing his duties, King Artaxerxes noticed the countenance of Nehemiah and inquired about the cause of his sorrow. Nehemiah responded earnestly to the king, telling him about his grief over the condition of Jerusalem and the sacred places where his ancestors were buried. In better times the city gate the burial places of the Hebrew people were indications of the viability of a city and the honor of generations past. The wealth and power of King Cyrus and King Artaxerxes would be used by God to rebuild and restore Jerusalem.

The New Illustrated Bible Commentary uses Nehemiah as an example of how leaders should have a sense of mission. Godly leaders begin with a sense of where they want to end up then develop their strategies accordingly. They realize that no mission should be borne out of selfish ambition or personal agenda. Next, they humbly seek through prayer to know the Lord's will. After having done all these things, godly leaders seek the assistance needed to complete the mission.

Based on my knowledge of Pastor, I know he do all of the these things. He sets a vision for our community (church and New Vision) and he consults with God before he begins any mission. Pastor does not boast and gloat about what he's done but what God has done through him. After consulting with members, other church leaders, community activist and governmental officials, Pastor seek out any assistance we can obtain to complete the mission.

Read Ezra 1 and Nehemiah 2, then record your responses in your SEED Journal, noting scripture references where appropriate.

1. How did both men follow the example of proper leadership outlined in the New Illustrate Bible Commentary?
2. Was a clear mission stated for both men?
3. Do you have a sense of what motivated Ezra and Nehemiah to their calling? If so, what was it?
4. What role did prayer play for Nehemiah? Browse through the book of Nehemiah to note when and why he prayed.
5. How did each man respond to the gifts offered by their kings?
6. Make note of any other leadership qualities exhibited by Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as King Cyrus and King Artaxerxes.

If you have any questions/comments or would like to discuss any section further please email me at newhopewellsundayschool@gmail.com. These question will be explored in our next lesson.



Closing Prayer

Father, we ask You to fill us with the knowledge of Your will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that we may live lives worthy of You – so that we may please You in every way. May we never cease to bear fruit in every good work as we grow in our knowledge of You. Strengthen us with all power according to Your glorious might so that we may have great endurance and patience for the work You call us to. Lead us to the proper funding sources – and may we find favor there, as Nehemiah and Ezra did. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen