

Nehemiah Sermon #24

Nehemiah 13 – We have come to the end of the line – the last chapter of a great man of God – Nehemiah

Let me set the stage for the final scene in this book. When you reach the end of a story, you have an idea of how things are going to turn out. But in the book of Nehemiah we find a tremendous turn of events from the previous chapters of celebration and victory.

In Nehemiah 8-9 – We saw Revival

In Nehemiah 10 – They made and signed a Covenant with God

In Nehemiah 11-12 – We witnessed the Dedication service of the wall – the twin processions.

But today will be a disappointing conclusion to a book full of many triumphs.

We see the same scenarios in life—people like David, Solomon – Great Starts and Poor Finishes. We see it in —businesses, in colleges, in churches, and homes.

I've entitled the concluding message of Nehemiah "Back to Square One"

God wants to bring revival

Satan works to defeat/deflate and shorten any work of God in man.

Nehemiah 13:4

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy Word

Nehemiah 13:4-31

Let us pray

You may be seated

Back to Square One

After 12 years as governor, Nehemiah left Jerusalem in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes, about 433 B.C., and returned to Persia as he had promised (2:6 – King’s cupbearer).

I’m sure when Nehemiah eventually left Jerusalem to return to his duties as cupbearer, his heart was filled with joy. The wall was built, the people restored.

How long he was gone is not clear, but Nehemiah revisits the city of Jerusalem.

The situation that confronted him, upon his arrival was devastating. He made shocking discoveries.

While the cat was away, the mice did play in that city!

Within a relatively short period of time, the children of Israel returned to their old ways of doing things—violating God’s laws and living like the world.

Nehemiah was faced with all the evidences of a profound decline in the spiritual life of the people of God.

Folks, do you think Nehemiah is going to lay down? The man who returned was not one bit different from the man who had gone away.

This final chapter details the vigor and courage with which Nehemiah addressed the failures and how he labored to recover the people.

When he returned to the city, Nehemiah discovered four great areas of wrong.

When he encountered these “problems,” he took them by the throat.

I. The first sin was the sin of a compromising companionship.

The first issue concerned the temple – God’s house.

While the wall was being built, Nehemiah had experienced repeated and unrelenting opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem – remember those men?

Tobiah, had been an enemy of God.

Tobiah had tried to stop construction of the wall and had personally criticized, attacked, and assaulted Nehemiah.

He continued to do everything else he could to discredit Nehemiah—including writing intimidating letters filled with lies (see 6:19).

Imagine Nehemiah's astonishment when he discovered that Tobiah had been given an apartment within the temple of God.

Nehemiah's old enemy had always had admirers and sworn supporters in the highest circles of Judah

Tobiah never lacked audacity. Tobiah had only foothold (6:18), now he has moved in – that is the way sin and Satan work.

Where even a toehold in the temple would have been a conquest, he obtains a room the size of a small warehouse, and has it cleared for him by the religious authorities themselves (7).

It was doubtless a special satisfaction for Tobiah, to see his personal belongings take precedence over the very frankincense for God and the tithes for His ministers; but best of all he was at the nerve center of Jerusalem, ideally placed for influence.

The person responsible for was Eliashib..

Tobiah had been given a room in the temple by Eliashib the high priest.

Eliashib is the first one named in the list of workers (3:1), and yet he had become a traitor.

On deacon boards, elder boards, our pastors – we need Nehemiahs not Eliashibs.
If we have an Eliashib as a pastor, we are in trouble.

Why? Because one of his relatives was married to Sanballat's daughter (13:28), and Sanballat and Tobiah were friends.

The high priest himself had disobeyed God in this important matter of separation.
God had strictly forbidden intermarriage with the heathen.

The priest had turned over the temple storage room to Tobiah.

They no longer brought the offerings of the people to the storage place.

These products were regarded as sacred (12:47).

It was thus an act of desecration to bring into a sacred chamber a profane person such as Tobiah. A person like Tobiah was never allowed to enter the Temple area.

In those days, the house of God was different from the church of today.

It was joined by chambers—large rooms that often held grain or utensils or vessels of worship.

Vs. 8

Nehemiah was upset. He couldn't believe his eyes. **It grieved me bitterly** (v. 8) – It was wrong to me.

Nehemiah's reaction and response was strong.

Therefore, Nehemiah went into the rooms and began to throw all of Tobiah's gear out into the streets.

Having Tobiah in the house of God was like having a fox in the chicken coop.

"Haul that stuff out!"

Nehemiah did that because he was determined he would not live with *wrong* in a place that was built for *right*.

God's people must constantly guard against compromise.

Nehemiah didn't tolerate the evil.

The house of God had been infiltrated – just like the churches have been today.

God needs men like Nehemiah who will take things by the throat and throw them out in the street where they belong.

This same scenario gives the church trouble today.

Compromising companionship—the church has stuck out its hand to all kinds of people and sin and welcomed them in.

But we must not imitate the world in order to try to witness to the world. “Today the world has taken so many things out of the church, and the church has taken so many things out of the world, that it is difficult to know where you are” . . .

This episode reminds us of the time Jesus cleansed the temple.

Jesus also was angered “by those who mock God by using sacred space for personal use.”

Once again the rooms were put into order for their original purpose in the service of God.

Nehemiah lost no time rededicating the room to the Lord, and using it again for its intended purpose.

But Nehemiah did not stop there—he had the place fumigated.

Nehemiah also ordered the adjoining “rooms” (plural) purified (vs. 9).

This suggests the desecration extended beyond the rooms Tobiah had occupied.

Sin spreads like a cancer – Christians need to be aggressive.

Principle 1. It's important to turn over the reins of leadership to spiritually qualified people.

★One spiritually unqualified leader can destroy years of work in a very short period of time.

It simply takes *one man with power to make decisions* to lead a multitude of people in the wrong direction.

One wonders if Nehemiah had not prepared other strong leaders.

Why did his reforms lapse when he was absent?

A leader must prepare other leaders.

II. The next problem Nehemiah faced was in vs. 10 – the sin of failing to support God's work.

Another abuse then came to light.

The Levites who served in the temple had not been properly supported; so they had to get a job working in the fields.

V. 11 – In Nehemiah's absence, the Jews violated their previous covenant with God regarding offerings (see 10:35-40).

The portions were not forthcoming and Levitical service was missing.

"Why is the house of God forsaken." (v. 11)

Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem and found that the singers and the Levites were living in the suburbs (countryside).

Those people who ministered derived their income from the paying of the tithe.

“We will not forsake the house of our God,” was the final statement the Jews made in their covenant with the Lord (10:39).

By neglecting the tithe, the people failed to support the Levites.

Consequently, the Levites had to abandon their responsibilities in the house of God and perform field labor in order to survive.

In Nehemiah 12:44, the people were giving their tithes joyfully.

He called a meeting of all of the officials in Israel and reprimanded them for neglecting to make sure the children of Israel obeyed the Lord.

Nehemiah’s next move was to call a meeting of all of the Levites; he “restored them to their posts” (13:11).

Some were probably rejoicing—while others were as mad as hornets!

A strong and courageous leader is often needed to restore order and bring revival. God’s people responded when Godly leadership put things in order.

Verse 13 shows how Nehemiah put persons who “were considered trustworthy” in responsible positions.

Part of the work of continuing revival is that of putting men of integrity in leadership position.

III. There is a third sin reported in verses 15-22 – the problem of the secularized Sabbath.

We must understand here that the Sabbath day has never been and never will be Sunday.

Nehemiah was walking through the city, and he saw that the merchants were back at their old tricks.

The bustling scene of verses 15 and 16 shows how rapidly the trickle which began in Nehemiah's absence . . . verse 6 had become—as such trickles do—a flood.

When the people became careless about the Sabbath, it was an indication of their indifference to God's will in other areas of life as well.

This is true of Christians as well.

Vs. 19

An aggressive plan worked! Nehemiah knew what to get mad about.

“Don't come back here on the Sabbath. Saturday is the day we honor our God.”

Just before the Sabbath, at sunset, Nehemiah commanded that the gates be shut.

The merchants came with their wares thinking they could sell them.

Nehemiah crawled up on the wall to see if the merchants had come, and there they were waiting outside the gates.

They came on the first Sabbath that the gates were closed, and they came on the second Sabbath and the gates were closed.

Then Nehemiah told them, “If you come here again, I will come out after you.”

They knew he meant business, and they came no more.

IV. There is a fourth sin with which Nehemiah – the sin of domestic disobedience – violating marriage.

When the Word of God is neglected all sorts of evils are set in motion.

Nehemiah had four specific areas of difficulty to deal with.

And we should not ignore the fact that there is a certain consequential order about these things.

For instance, the first issue affected the integrity of the temple, the house of God, and the final issue affected the family.

In our own day, we observe a similar link between these two issues. When the Church of God has gone South, families are not far behind.

Nehemiah contended with the people over this vital issue.

Much is made in the Old Testament of mixed marriages, but Nehemiah was struck by another aspect, the corruption of the *next* generation, vs. 24.

The babble of languages among the children was not only a symptom but a threat: It meant a steady erosion of Israelite identity at the level of all thinking and expression, and a loss of access to the Word of God, which would effectively paganize them.

A mixed household denies children of being in a home where faith is consistently encouraged.

A single generation's compromise could undo the work of centuries.

Vs 25

It was a fearsome attack, but a crucial issue.

When it says that he "cursed" them, it doesn't mean that he swore at them, but that he pronounced God's judgment upon them.

He was using extreme measures, but they were needed.

This may seem like violent and inappropriate behavior for a man of God.

However, when we interpret Nehemiah's actions against the backdrop of Israel's history, it's easier to understand his intense feelings.

He knew the Lord would never tolerate this sin.

If He had not allowed it in Solomon's life and had judged all Israel because of it, Nehemiah knew God would not allow it now.

Nehemiah delivered a sermon, reminding the people that Solomon, one of Israel's greatest kings, was ruined by marrying foreign women – vs. 26e (Neh. 13:26e; I Kings 11:4-8).

We are so careful, so tender, so tactful. Too much so!
We are afraid to confront.

Our lives skate along, glazed with compromise and toleration.
Often at the heart of a compounded, complex matter, we're afraid to say honestly to someone the truth.

This great evil (v. 27)

Even the family of the high priest had fallen into this error, vs. 28.

Nehemiah reminds us that the tolerance of evil leads to spiritual stagnation, which leads to indifference on doctrinal matters; the final result is moral and spiritual degeneration.

If we are careless, all sorts of "Tobiahs" will infiltrate our lives.

1. *Nehemiah faced the wrong head-on.* He faced the situation head-on.

If we have a problem in our church, our business, our home—anywhere in our life—face it head-on. Don't skirt it.

Sure, it will be painful, but deal with it. Start today.

2. *Nehemiah dealt with the wrong severely.*

If your eye offends you, pluck it out—radical surgery.

Nehemiah stood firm.

Any believer who expects to be respected must do the same.

3. *Nehemiah worked toward a permanent correction.*

It's not enough just to condemn the wrong.

You must do something to replace it.

Whenever God says, "don't do this," He backs it up with, "do this instead."

God always balances a negative with a positive.

4. All these abuses had this in common; they flowed from the same basic source.

There had been a neglect of God's Word.

The Word of God is the great regulator of all things.

It is our sole and sufficient rule in all that pertains to faith and conduct.

Detection always precedes solution.

You can never solve a problem you cannot define.

Second, *honest observation must be matched with courageous conviction.*

Nehemiah stood for God and called a whole generation of his people back again to right paths.

We began by saying that Nehemiah was a man of prayer, and we end with further proofs of that assertion.

At least 4 times in these verses, his heart is lifted in prayer to God – (v. 14), (v. 22),
(v. 29 & 31)

I think it is significant that the final glimpse of Nehemiah portrays him in prayer.

What a magnificent model of leadership!

He was a man of honesty, conviction, and devotion.

Our world is filled with a fearful and confused humanity.

Shepherdless sheep by the millions long for a voice of assurance, a cause to believe in,
an authentic model to follow.

They cry out for someone to calm their fears, to solve their confusion, to channel their
energies.

They are calling for leaders.

The history of God's people reveals a distressing (if not depressing) truth: heartfelt
passion and sincere devotion is often short-lived.

Vs. 30

This verse summarizes Nehemiah's great contributions to the spiritual well-being of
his people.

All foreigners were removed from positions of honor and responsibility, and the priests
and Levites were given back their proper occupations.

Back to Square One

Let us stand for closing invitation

Compromising companionship

Failure to support God's work

Secularized Sabbath

Violation of marriage guidelines

Salvation