

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 2/9/11

Series: *“Facing the Past, Moving Ahead for God’s Honor: Nehemiah”*

Current study: Nehemiah 13 “Getting Serious about Obeying God” part 1

Life is messy at times, and that includes the Christian life. On the best of our days we are still sinners living with other sinners in a sin-cursed world. If we know Christ we have the capacity to respond differently to our sinful bent and to the sinful situations we face, but nonetheless, we must face them.

One of the necessary marks of God’s kind of leader, to put it bluntly, is a willingness to “get dirty.” He cannot ignore the mess he’s seeing, but by God’s help and grace, take action to deal with whatever displeases God.

Which leads to another reality. A leader must be willing to make unpopular decisions. There’s no escaping that fact. That goes for bosses, presidents, school administrators, and presidents. That’s also true for pastors and other church leaders. In fact, it’s mandatory for fathers in the home.

It’s impossible to honor God as a leader and be unwilling to make unpopular decisions.

The following statement may surprise you, but I believe it to be true based on Scripture. God does not want His people to function as a democracy. Based on democratic principles, perhaps, but a strict democracy where decisions are made by popular vote? Hardly.

Did Moses poll the Israelites at Kadesh Barnea to see if they wanted to enter the Promised Land? Did Joshua pass out ballots after Achan sinned to see what the Israelites felt was the best way to deal with this sin problem? Did Paul tell the Corinthians to take a vote to determine how to handle the man in 1 Corinthians 5 who was involved with his step-mother?

A few years ago a man came to my study, upset about what he’d been hearing in sermons on Sunday morning. “I don’t think you should be teaching that doctrine,” he said to me. “It’s divisive. I think you should take a poll to see if the people want to hear that doctrine.”

Beloved, we don’t determine whether to teach something based on popular opinion, but based on what? Is it in the Word? Does God’s Word say so?

In fact, we don’t determine God’s will by 51% votes. How do we? On the basis of God’s Word. God holds leaders responsible to examine and teach His Word, and then insist that the people of God submit their lives to it.

God’s way is so good. His Word is good. He knows what’s best for us. He knows we don’t know what’s best for us, and left to our own devices, we’d mess things up royally! So it’s in our best interest when leaders insist we do things according to God’s Word.

That doesn’t mean it’s always easy. Not for the leader, nor for the people. Case in point—Nehemiah’s example in Nehemiah 13.

The book of Nehemiah concludes with Nehemiah the leader insisting on four painful, though vital confrontations. Chapter 13 records four reforms that Nehemiah led God’s people to make.

Believe me. He wasn’t a popular man in the eyes of some. And it wasn’t easy for him. Why then did he make the decisions? You’ll notice a prayer he repeats four times in the chapter...

Remember... (14, 22, 29, 31).

Q: What does that prayer indicate about Nehemiah? On what basis did he make his decisions? Not to please men, but to please his God. He was willing to be unpopular with men in order to be “popular” with God.

Review: What’s happened in the Book so far?

--Wall rebuilt

--The city repopulated

--The people made a commitment to put the Word back at the center of their lives. That occurred in chapters 8-10.

It’s easy to say that verbally, isn’t it? We say it often ourselves on Sunday. “We want to be a biblical church.” But the real test occurs on Monday. It’s one thing to say we’re going to be biblical. It’s another thing when we’re confronted with *unbiblical* things in our lives that need to change.

Q: When did it happen? Verse 1—on “that day.” What day? On the day they dedicated the wall.

Here’s what happened in Nehemiah 13. Nehemiah made four hard, no-doubt unpopular decisions that day. He initiated four reforms...

I. Nehemiah confronted ungodly associations (1-9).

A. Problem #1: The Israelites had formed compromising relationships (1-3).

Q: How so? See Deut 23:3-6

Q: What had the Moabites and Ammonites done to the Israelites?

Here’s what brought about the change for the Israelites...

1. *God’s Word revealed their sin (1-2).*

Q: What portion of God’s Word? The Law

2. *The people responded in obedience (3).*

Q: How so?

B. Problem #2: The priest had formed a compromising relationship (4-5).

Q: What was this particular priest’s responsibility? Verse 4

1. *Eliashib became close to Tobiah.*

Q: Who was Tobiah? See 2:10

2. *Eliashib gave Tobiah a room in the temple area.*

Q: What does this action indicate?

C. Nehemiah took action (6-9).

1. *At first, he didn’t know about the problem.*

Q: Why not?

2. *When he found out, he was greatly displeased.*

We can learn from Nehemiah here. What does the term *greatly displeased* indicate about true godliness?

3. *Then he made things right.*

Q: How so? He both *put off* and *put on* (in Eph 4 terminology). Both are key in God-honoring change.

Discuss: What other New Testament passages come to mind that shed light on how to deal with ungodly associations?

II. Nehemiah confronted ungodly priorities (10-14).

A. Here was the problem (10).

It was twofold...

1. *The officials failed to support the Levites.*
2. *Instead of serving, the Levites went back home.*

Note the words, “to their *own fields*.” What’s wrong with this scenario? The Levites weren’t supposed to own fields! The people were supposed to care for them with their tithes. But the people sinned by not giving. And the Levites sinned by obtaining fields. Both failed to trust and obey God.

B. Here was the solution (11-13).

1. *Nehemiah rebuked the officials (11).*

Q: What did he say to them?

Here’s what happened next...

2. *The people gave their tithes (12).*

Q: What were the tithes?

Q: What did they do with them?

3. *Nehemiah put trustworthy men in charge of the distribution (13).*

Q: Why was this a key step?

C. Here was what motivated Nehemiah (14).

Verse 14 is key. What does it teach us about Nehemiah? Plenty! It shows us...

1. *He was a man of prayer.*

Q: What did he ask of God? (again, note the word “remember” four times in Nehemiah 13)

Think about it: We can’t coast home riding on yesterday’s successes. How do the words “blot out” communicate this lesson?

Here’s what made Nehemiah tick. Here’s why he took risks...

2. *He was a man who wanted to please God more than man.*

Discuss: What would happen if there were more “Nehemiahs” in our day?

Next time...

III. Nehemiah confronted ungodly Sabbath activity (15-22).

IV. Nehemiah confronted ungodly marriages (23-31).

Implications:

1. *We can’t afford to be passive in the Christian life.*

What happens if we are?

2. *Our goal is key—are we going to please God or man?*

Discuss: How does Nehemiah 13 speak of Christ? (see John 5:39)