

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 2/16/11

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

Current study: Nehemiah 13 “Getting Serious about Obeying God” part 2

Sometimes the Bible doesn’t sound very Christian.

I’m kidding, of course. The Bible defines what “Christian” is, so whatever we see in God’s Word should shape our understanding of what it means to be a Christian. But I’m talking about things you read that don’t seem to square with other things you read.

For example, turn the other cheek. That’s Christian. But how about striking someone on the cheek? Is that Christian?

Here’s another. Let your words be seasoned with grace. That’s Christian. But how about calling down curses on someone?

Here’s a third example. Don’t be a respecter of persons. That’s Christian, for the ground is equal at the foot of the cross regardless of a person’s ethnic background. But how about rebuking dads because their kids don’t speak the Hebrew language?

The fact is, the three examples of “un-Christian” behavior I’ve just mentioned were given by one of the most godly men in the Old Testament. Nehemiah was a God-fearing, Bible-keeping servant of God and yet he did those things just mentioned, and did them *intentionally*, and apparently did them with God’s approval.

So maybe we’d better rework our definition of “Christian.” We’ll see.

We’ve come to the end of our journey through Nehemiah. God raised up a man named Nehemiah in the fifth century B.C. to meet a definite need. The main event in the book of Nehemiah is the rebuilding of the wall around Jerusalem.

As we approach the final section of the book tonight, let me remind you of what’s happened so far...

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.

--In chapter 12 the people dedicated the wall. It was a day of great celebration.

Discuss: How has the Lord used the study of Nehemiah to help you?

Nehemiah is an upbeat book. Ironically, Nehemiah doesn’t end on an upbeat note. It ends with Nehemiah dealing with problems.

Key: A successful church is not a problem free church. It’s a church where problems are solved God’s way. The same is true for successful families, friendships, and every other type of venture. Successful Christians don’t live problem-free lives, but rather, they deal with their problems.

And leaders set the pace.

That’s what Nehemiah did in the final chapter. The book of Nehemiah concludes with Nehemiah the leader insisting on four painful, though vital confrontations. We looked at the first two last time, and will finish up this evening with the last two.

Realize this. It’s impossible to honor God as a leader and be unwilling to make unpopular decisions. Nehemiah is a classic example.

From last time...

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

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

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

1. *God's Word revealed their sin (1-2).*
2. *The people responded in obedience (3).*

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

1. *Eliashib became close to Tobiah.*
2. *Eliashib gave Tobiah a room in the temple area.*

C. Nehemiah took action (6-9).

1. *At first, he didn't know about the problem.*
2. *When he found out, he was greatly displeased.*
3. *Then he made things right.*

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

A. Here was the problem (10).

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

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

1. *Nehemiah rebuked the officials (11).*
2. *The people gave their tithes (12).*
3. *Nehemiah put trustworthy men in charge of the distribution (13).*

C. Here was what motivated Nehemiah (14).

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

New Material...

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

A. He observed the problem (15).

Q: What did he say he saw in verse 15?

1. *God's people were desecrating the Sabbath.*

Q: How so? The bottom line in this activity was this...

2. *They did it for economic gain.*

It just makes sense. You can increase your productivity by one-seventh if you work on the Sabbath. It makes good business sense, doesn't it?

Discuss: What's the typical attitude of Christians today towards the Lord's Day?

What did Nehemiah do about this problem? According to the end of verse 15 and then in verses 16-18...

B. He warned the people (16-18).

Q: What were men from Tyre doing?

Q: What reason did Nehemiah give for his rebuke in verse 18?

C. He took steps to deal with the problem (19-22).

1. *He made it hard to repeat the sin (19-21).*

Q: How so? What specific steps did he take?

Application: That's a good idea for us, too. If we're serious about stopping sin in our lives, we need to take steps to make it hard to sin. Give some practical suggestions for the following:

- A person who struggles with alcohol
- A person who wants to overcome lustful thoughts

- A person who struggles with gossip
2. *He involved other people (22a).*
Q: Who? And how?

D. He prayed (22b).

Nehemiah asks God to “remember” him four times in this chapter. What’s the significance of this request?

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

A. He observed the problem (23-24).

Q: Who was involved in the ungodly marriages?

Q: What problem surfaced as a result?

Q: Why was the language problem such a big deal? If the people couldn’t speak the language of Judah, they wouldn’t be able to understand the teaching of the Hebrew Scriptures.

B. He took action (25-28). Severe action!

1. *He rebuked them.*

2. *He called curses down on them.*

Q: Why do you think he did this?

3. *He beat some of them.*

Is the word “some” significant?

4. *He pulled out their hair.*

5. *He made them take an oath.*

Q: What kind of oath?

6. *He gave an explanation for his actions (26-27).*

This is key. If you’re going to take drastic action, you’d better have biblical support. Nehemiah did. He appealed to history for biblical precedence for his actions.

Q: How did he explain his actions?

7. *He wasn’t afraid to tackle the hard cases (28).*

Q: What was the hard case?

C. He prayed (29).

Q: What gripped Nehemiah in his prayer?

Q: What can we learn about prayer from this petition?

D. He took positive steps (30-31).

Dealing with problems is important, but we must go further. It’s one thing to put out fires—and that’s vital if the house is on fire. But it’s another thing to take steps to insure the house doesn’t catch fire again!

Q: What action did Nehemiah take in verses 31-32?

Discuss: How does the book of Nehemiah prepare us for Christ’s coming? What do we learn about Christ from this book?

Implications:

1. *We shouldn’t be surprised when problems arise.*

2. *We should always resolve to deal with our problems God’s way.*