

outside by the arm and say, “Come on outside dad and watch what I can do.” They wanted their Father to see what they had done. They wanted my words of approval. Jesus, in John 17:4-5, said to His father, “I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which you have given me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with yourself...” I did this for your interest and for your glory. There is tremendous strength in the middle of the battle knowing one day our faithful hero will say the words, “well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master.” It is a call to faithfulness.

So how are we doing? Am I faithful to the commitments I have made? Have I neglected the house of God? Has there been a drift? Have I become too focused on my own home and my own life? Have I promised God to serve with the gifts and talents He has given me, but I have been sitting on those gifts and failed to use them to serve others? Have I been faithful to show up and worship with other believers? Or has it been far too convenient just to watch it on the internet even when I’m not sick? Have I been abandoning the house of God and worship with His people? Have I been intentional and consistent in my giving? Have I been faithful in my commitment to pray for certain missionaries, leaders who serve in the church? What commitments have you made but neglected at home? At work? In your relationships? With your physical body? Feeding your spiritual part? As we sing this last song together I’d like us to be asking God, “How can I better honor you in the commitments that drive from my heart? If you are struggling, confess it to Him. Ask God to change your heart in such a way that it reveals the change in the way you serve and give. The more faithful we are in giving, the more we have to trust God to provide. The more He provides, the more our faith relationship continues to deepen. Giving to others is one secret of staying alive and fresh in our spiritual life.

“Catch My Drift” - Part 2

Sermon Series: Nehemiah

NORTHVIEW BIBLE CHURCH



Catalog No. 376  
Nehemiah 13:10-14  
Pastor Norm Schwab  
July 8, 2018

Three men were in the church parking lot discussing their method of giving. One said, “I draw a circle, throw the money in the air and whatever falls outside the circle is God’s.” The second man said, “Well, I draw a circle, throw the money in the air and what falls in the circle is God’s. The third man said, “My giving is much more spiritual than that. It doesn’t depend on the size of circle. I draw any size circle and throw the money in the air... whatever God catches, He can keep.

Giving is always an interesting subject... especially for pastors to preach on. There may be some that enjoy it, but frankly I feel kind of uncomfortable. It can so easily come off as self-serving and money grubbing trying to squeeze the congregation for another buck. So I’d rather not preach about money and giving, but the Bible has a lot to say about that subject and when it comes up in the book section we are working through in our sermon series and God says, “Preach the Word”...I feel that is what I must do. If I am to faithful in my task as preacher.

So I asked myself this week, “Why do I feel so uncomfortable preaching about giving? For me, part of that answer is that practically I must not really believe that all I have really comes from God. For me, I must practically think that it’s people who are ultimately responsible for meeting my needs and not the Lord. That is a distorted view of money. Could that be the source of some of our discomfort when talking about money? A skewed view of God’s provision, that we aren’t totally convinced that everything we have comes from the Sovereign hand of God? We are prone to drift when it comes to giving because it’s not a cause; It’s a symptom. It points to a deeper spiritual drift.

I want to welcome our guests this morning to listen in. I want you to listen for God’s heart in looking out for our best interests, but really this message is directed to those who have experienced salvation in Christ and are committed to following Him. I do not want this to be a guilt trip or pressure laden, but I do want to follow what the Spirit of God and Word of God would say to us in regards to Biblical giving. When you go to a doctor for your annual physical, they will begin to poke, prod and press on various parts of your body while asking, “Does this hurt? How about this?” If you yelp and draw back in pain, one of two things have happened. Either the doctor pushed too hard, without the right sensitivity, or possibly there is something wrong. So when the Pastor preaches on giving, certain folks may cry out in discomfort criticizing the message or the messenger. One of two things just happened. Either the pastor pushed too hard, or

perhaps there is something wrong. If there is genuine pain then we need the Great Physician to do His work....because its not supposed to hurt there.

Chapter 13 in the book of Nehemiah does not finish with a fairy-tale feel good ending. Nehemiah is a leader that gets inducted into the hall of reality, realizing that it is so much easier to build a city wall than it is to spiritually reform the lives of people. Before Nehemiah had left to go back to the capital city of Susa for an extended time, in chapter 10, the people had seemed so committed, and dedicated themselves to the Lord. They even signed a vow stating (10:39) “We will not neglect the house of the Lord”. They committed to provide wood for the sacrificial alters, to give their tithes, and to faithfully worship at the temple. Chapter 13 exposes that we tend to be great promise makers but not very good at promise keeping. A vow is not strong enough. A larger than life leader isn’t strong enough for us to keep our promises. Our motivation needs to be tied to God and His Word. In the first 9 verses of chapter 13 the people rediscovered God’s truth by reading God’s word. They re-sensitized themselves to what God wanted of them. When they heard God’s word, they became more serious about holiness and what God had to say. It’s a good thing too, because the high priest had prepared a luxury suite inside the temple for Tobiah, an enemy of God. A place that had been built for what is holy had been filled with the unholy. The storehouses that kept the grain tithes, wine tithes and oil prescribed for the Levites, Singers, gatekeepers and priests had been filled with Tobiah’s furniture. The reason there was space for Tobiah’s stuff was that the storerooms were empty. The storehouses were empty because the people had stopped giving. The temple workers depended on these offerings in order to live and feed their families and there was nothing in storehouses because people failed to give. If you fail to put in what should be in there, then be sure it will get filled up with something, and most likely it will be something you don’t want in there.

Read this next area of drift that Nehemiah recognizes and must address. The temple is at the very center of their life as a nation and it is not being maintained. It’s also an area that we are tempted to neglect, but it both reveals our heart and regulates our life. (READ Nehemiah 13:10-14.) Verse 10 says that Nehemiah “discovered” the reason for the empty storehouses. That meant he had been looking for the reason for the problem. That is what leaders do, they keep their eyes open to drift. They see crucial things that the rest of the people may dismiss as unimportant. Leaders must be able

This message from the Scriptures was presented at NORTHVIEW BIBLE CHURCH, Spokane, Washington.

Scripture quotations are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE (“NASB”), © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995, 1996 by the Lockman foundation. Used by permission.

to sift the truly crucial from the mass of trivial things including the things that looks big, but really aren't and the things that look little but are really crucial. The Levites and singers, those who served in the temple had gone away. In verse 11 he reprimanded the officials, the leaders. "Hey, why is the house of God forsaken? Abandoned? Deserted? Given up on? Nehemiah sees that when the giving came to a halt, it was an indication of the lack of spiritual health.

Did you notice he doesn't rip on the common people? He holds the leadership accountable. They were the ones who allowed the drift. They were the ones who failed to model giving. They were the ones who failed to teach and correct and challenge the people about the importance of giving to the Lord and following through on their commitments. God takes it seriously that the leaders model and teach His heart and so calls us to challenge people even when it feels uncomfortable to do so.

So **what stopped the giving** in Judah? There may be a number of presenting reasons. I can only guess they were probably some of the same reasons why we drift in our giving and drift in fulfilling our commitments. Perhaps some of them stopped giving when other people stopped watching, stopped encouraging and challenging giving. They may have had the "look at me" syndrome. Nehemiah had been gone for at least several years. He had set the pace for modeling sacrificial giving generously at the temple. He wasn't a priest, but he was an influential leader in the Jerusalem community. He was a cheerleader for providing for the priests and temple workers. But when he was no longer there, some people lost interest. There are people who will use their wealth to give large sums of money to building projects that will be named after them or have a brick placed in their honor. They use their money for power and influence. It makes me think of that story in Mark 12:41 where the Pharisee paraded by the offering box with a great show dumping in a ton of money. Jesus pointed these people out and said those types have received their reward. All they get is temporary awe from others while here on earth. Jesus calls us to not let our left hand know what our right hand is doing. Giving is a personal act of worship. We don't do money drives here at Northview where people are encouraged to stand up and publicly make a pledge. We keep giving private. We don't want to foster pride in those who have money and give money. We try very hard here at Northview to keep the giving as anonymous as possible. There are only a couple of people whom we have chosen for their faithfulness and confidentially, who know who gives what. We must do that for accountability and tax records. I am not one of those two people. I do not know the specific amounts of what you give. I do ask the two to let me know if regular givers have suddenly stopped giving because it gives me an op-

portunity to minister to them. They may be having a financial crisis that they don't want to talk about, but perhaps we as a church could partner with them during this time. The change in giving could also be indicative of a spiritual drift. The drop off giving is one of the first indicators of a problem, then they stop serving, then they stop coming. It could be they are having a problem with Northview. Ok. Let's talk about it. But far worse, it could be they are having a problem with God and their spiritual condition is in danger. I need to be able to shepherd them if the sheep are willing to be nudged back to God's heart.

Some people struggle with giving because it's always been under compulsion for them. They have the "twist my arm" syndrome. They live compelled by the should. They feel guilty when they're reminded. They only give when they feel pressured. One of the reasons I feel freedom in teaching on giving is that the Bible strongly insists that giving should not be done out of compulsion. We will present needs. We will challenge and encourage people to give, but we will never twist arms. If you are feeling a dislocated shoulder, we are either doing it wrong or God is convicting you.

Maybe you are convinced deep down that it's all a rip off. In verse 13, when Nehemiah returns, he put "reliable, faithful people in charge of the collections. That tells me that while Nehemiah was gone those left in charge were not reliable, not faithful, not trustworthy, but corrupt, skimming off the top to line their own pockets, using the funds for their own personal gain. The fact that high priest's relative, Tobiah had a luxury suite in the temple tells us things were not right with the leadership. People do not want to give when they cannot trust the leadership and cannot know that the money they are giving is going to the purpose it is intended, for God's work. Here at Northview our financial secretary and treasurer keep accurate accounting of all the money that comes in and goes out. We have double signing on checks. We have monthly and annual reports that are available to anyone who would like to see them. Just last month we had a membership meeting to vote on the budget as to where we will spend this money. God has been so good to our church. You can be assured that the money you give is taken in trust and used for the purpose of ministry. We want to be good stewards of what is entrusted to us.

Some people don't give because money has become a security blanket to them. They are trusting in their bank accounts rather than God. Some drift in their giving because they need the control, that it is their money. Certainly, there are those who do not give because they face financial hardship. They are barely having enough money for food and shelter to live on. But even the widow gave something. Even a mite, to remind her of her dependence on God. It may not make a big difference

in the temple budget, but it makes an enormous difference in her heart. God loves those who give even just a small amount which is sacrificial to them.

I would guess most of the others neglected the house of God in their giving because they were simply too focused on their own homes and their own lives. They got caught up in the cares of life, other things became a bigger priority. God was not as important so they worshipped Him with leftovers. We will drift toward whatever captures our attention. Maybe you have noticed that when driving. Something at the side of the road catches your eye and your arms move the steering wheel instinctively toward what you are looking at. Someone in the car notices your drift and yells, "hey, watch where you are going!" That is exactly what the driver is doing, we tend to go where we are watching. We tend to drift toward whatever we are focused on.

Matthew 6:21 reveals the deeper root problem as it says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The eye is the lamp of the body, (if your eye is focuses clearly on good things then the rest of the body will also follow). But the eyes will only look where the heart is attracted to. Your treasure, your talents, time and money are both a thermometer and a thermostat of your Christian life. Our giving both measures our own spiritual temperature and it also serves to regulate it, set it at the right level. When people decline in their giving it can be indicative of a deeper spiritual problem, a lack of spiritual vitality. In his book, "I talk back to the Devil", A.W Tozer wrote, "Money often comes between men and God. Someone has said you can take two small dimes and shut out the view of a panoramic landscape. Go to the mountains and just hold two coins closely in front of your eyes... now the mountains are still there, but you cannot see them at all because there is a dime shutting off the vision in each eye." It doesn't take large quantities of money to come between us and God, just a little placed in the wrong position will effectively obscure our view.

When you are feeling spiritually flat with God, you will have difficulty seeing the blessing that God has placed in your life. When you can't see God at work in your life, you will have difficulty seeing any need to commit resources in worship to Him. Spiritual deadness dries up our heart for giving. Spiritual indifference will show up in our giving. **What are the results?** Not only will it affect our spiritual health, but lack of our giving opens us up to make room for evil to squirm its way into our life. An evil like Tobiah can take up residence. If you give Satan an opportunity...he'll take it every time. Lack of giving also means that ministry will be adversely affected. (V.10) Levites, Singers, gatekeepers and priests had to go home and get a second job. The temple couldn't provide for the basic needs of

those who served. Ministry is affected when people fail to give.

The opposite is also true. The more resources we have the more we can free up people to serve. I love that you people are so very giving and it's your desire to provide for our family as well as the needs of all the ministry that goes on here at Northview. And here is a **call to faithfulness**. The more faithfully we give, the more we have to trust God to provide. The more He provides, the more our faith relationship continues to deepen. Giving to others is one secret of staying alive and fresh in the Christian life. Dr. Karl Menninger wrote, "Money giving is a good criterion for a person's mental health. Generous people are rarely mentally ill people." If all we do is receive than we will become stagnant, like a lake that only takes in water but has no outlet stream to give water. One said, "The world is full of two kinds of people, the givers and the takers. The takers eat well, but the givers sleep well." A believer who is happy in the Lord has a generous heart. Anyone can give without loving. Every April 15<sup>th</sup> by law we are compelled to give to the government. I give to the IRS without loving, but I cannot love without giving. That is what love does. It gives. It serves. It sacrifices. It forgives. While spiritual deadness dries up resources, spiritual vitality causes resources to overflow. In J. Oswald Sanders book "Intimacy with God" he writes, "If the true Spirit of grace has gripped my heart, I will not be calculating the minimum of what I can get away with, but the maximum I can give to my Lord." The more intimate we are with our Savior, the more dependent we will be on His provision, the more willing we will be for Him to place them wherever He wills.

So in Nehemiah 13:13 reliable or faithfulness is set forward as a trait that is needed for service. Nehemiah put people in charge who were found faithful. People who followed through on their commitments. People who were consistent, steadfast and loyal, will not quit when it gets hard, and did what they promised they would do. I Corinthians 4:2 says, "Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." In verse 14 Nehemiah says, "God, that is my heart too." I want to prove that I too am faithful. "Remember me O my God and do not blot out my loyal deeds..." Nehemiah is not praying for selfish, boastful vain glory like a Pharisee, not asking God for a special blessing because his loyal work merits God's attention. Nehemiah is asking God to remember him and his work in mercy. He is pleading with God that his work at spiritual reforms would not unravel again. He is asking God to see him, remember him, not allow his work to go to waste much like a child would desire the attention and approval of his father. When the kids were young whether they had learned a new trick on the trampoline or a skateboard flip or a fort they built, they would pull me