

an opponent can get up again, but a man flattened by conformity stays down for good. Men and women wake up and get up. Get up safeguards that will keep us on track.

Trust me says God. Receive my provision of rest. Receive my protection for you in relationships. This book sure ends with a thud doesn't it. It reminds us that none of us can follow God's laws. We all fall short. We all will screw up at times. This book reminds us that the Old Covenant based on the Law just didn't work. No one can get saved by doing works, obeying the Sabbath, the Law. We can't do it. We need more than a great leader like Nehemiah. We need more than rules and regulations and vows. We need a Savior. We are sinful people who need a whole new arrangement where someone will fulfill all the demands of the law of God. We need a new covenant where His law is written on our hearts and His Spirit is placed within us so we can walk in loving obedience to Him. We have that in Jesus. He is the One who brought us the Ultimate Sabbath rest. Every Sunday, the Lord's Day we worship our risen king. We worship the One who kept the Law we could never keep. We worship the One who died to be our Savior. He was crushed so that we could be made new. Our self will and our desire to be our own God is crushed so that we can turn to Him and become new wine. If any be in Christ he is a new creation. Old things past, behold new things come. Will you receive His salvation rest? Will you surrender to His refining? Our need to do it all must be crushed so we can turn to the One who turned the water into wine. Our need to do it all to gain identity must be crushed so that we can find our identity in Him. If anyone by in Christ, identity in Christ, is a new creation. Old things pass away behold new things come. As we sing this song, I invite anyone who would like pray to come forward.

“Catch My Drift” - Part 3

Sermon Series: Nehemiah

NORTHVIEW BIBLE CHURCH



Catalog No. 377

Nehemiah 13:15-31

Pastor Norm Schwab

July 15, 2018

I remember as a kid in grade school being sick for an entire week of school. Now being sick wasn't much fun, but the first day or two it was kind of nice getting vacation from school. Then by day three I was so ready to get back. I didn't want to miss out. I didn't want to miss information I needed for the big test. I didn't want to miss connecting with friends especially when I heard about the fun things they were doing. I didn't want to slide any further down the bench on the basketball team.

We don't like to miss out on things. We don't want to lose out on opportunities. And that may be one of the reasons we drift away from following what God says it best for us. He wants to provide rest for us and we are suspect that if we follow His plan we may miss out. He wants to protect us from pain and hurt relationally and we fear that we will miss out and get ripped off and left out. We drift from following God's truth about real living because we fail to trust God to provide. We fear that God will not provide for us relationally because it's not coming as soon as we want it to. So we force things. We do business the way we want to get things done, even if it's not the way God want us to do it. We pursue relationships for marriage the way we want to without any regards for the protections that God has set in place for us because we fear we will get ripped off and left out. We fear God will not provide.

This morning we study two more areas where upon Nehemiah's return, the people of Jerusalem have drifted. These are two areas God has provided for the people as a blessing not a hardship. One area provides rest for our stressed out, over worked, go, go, go burned out life style. The other provides protection for us from hurt and pain as we pursue close intimate relationships like marriage. Will we listen to what God has to say for our blessing when it looks like limiting our opportunity to make more money and will put us in danger financially? Will we listen to God when he asks us to intentionally limit our options, narrow the field relationally? It may look oppressive and confining, but really, they are the exact opposite. God gives us life truths for our benefit to bless us. He is saying, "I love you guys. I really do want the very best for you. I created you. I created your heart. Will you trust me to provide? Will you trust me to protect?"

Turn with me to Nehemiah chapter 13. As we near the end of our study in this book it almost feels like having to say good-bye to a good friend. The leadership principles and passion for God and challenge to obey God's Word has been a great model to strive after. Nehemiah has just returned

from an extended time away from Jerusalem, presumably to finish his service to King Artaxerxes back at the capitol, Susa. He returns years later to be shocked by the culture that has changed, drifted from where he had left it. He is shocked to see Tobiah, his arch enemy, be given a luxury suite apartment inside the temple buildings. He is ticked and chucks his furniture out into the street. Nehemiah is not passive. He is not afraid to confront. He refused to live with wrong in a place that was built for right. He empties the apartment then fills it up with good stuff that should be there. Nehemiah then addresses the lax drift in the way they failed to support the temple ministries. They stopped giving and so the priests stopped serving. The very life of the nation was "abandoned", given up on. He called them to faithfulness in their commitments and use of their gifts, time, talents and treasure. It wasn't the amount that made him angry, it was a reflection of the condition of their hearts, it was the drift in their hearts away from God that saddened Nehemiah. Now we will read about the other two areas of drift that Nehemiah must strongly address. Let's read about the first area in Nehemiah 13:15-22.

The people were ignoring the Sabbath. V.17,18 says they were "profaning" the Sabbath. They were treating that which God called holy as common and irreverent, and had even commanded them to observe as one of the ten commandments. Exodus 20:8. Now this is the only one of the ten that is not repeated in the New Testament. The Sabbath was a special command for the Jewish people to observe. The Sabbath has always been on Saturday. It never will, never has been on Sunday. Sunday is the Lord's Day where the early church worshipped and remembered the resurrection of Jesus, the One who is the Lord of the Sabbath, the ultimate rest is in Jesus. The Sabbath started at sundown on Friday evening. They were warned it was about ready to begin by three trumpet blasts about three in the afternoon. It was given not to oppress the people but for their refreshment. It was the Pharisees who added the 1,521 detailed laws that defined "work" not to be done on the Sabbath. Women were even forbidden to look in the mirror on the Sabbath for they might see a gray hair and be tempted to "work" at plucking it out. God knew we needed to work hard, but also knew we needed rest. The Sabbath was built for the benefit of people. People were not created to benefit the Sabbath. It was to be a blessing, not a slave master. Though this law was not repeated in the New Testament as a commandment for God's people to follow, God's principle truth of rest for us is still valid today. We need rest. Choose a day of rest. Don't treat it like

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.

any other day to earn a living. Rest, recharge. God says, "I love you guys! I have provided something for you to refresh and refocus your life." Step off the habit trail of life and enjoy recreating, enjoy my creation. Enjoy each other. Enjoy and worship Me. Will you stop your work one day a week as an expression of trust in Me, that I will provide?

Studies have shown that people are far more productive in their work when they spend time in rest. The US army did a study that observed soldiers in various conditions to determine at what stage they achieved the maximum level of performance. They found out that after the soldiers had worked hard for 7 straight days, their performance dropped significantly. The interesting part of their study was that even though the performance level dropped, the soldiers themselves were unaware it had. They still thought they were performing at maximum levels. If athletes need time outs; If even dirt needs a rest from farming to produce; If Jesus himself, during His ministry, took little mini-vacations and got away for times of rest, then perhaps we too need rest.

I sure do. The last few months my rubber band has been stretched pretty tight. Tighter than is good for my health. God gives me a little signal that it's time to take a break when I get canker sores breaking out in my mouth. It's a sign I haven't been taking the breaks that God wants me to have in order to operate in maximum efficiency. I may fool myself that I'm running my best, but when I snap at home at those I love, or cut off someone in a meeting people around me know I'm not running at my best. Secretly they say, "I wish that guy would take a break!"

Sabbath rest has its roots way back into Genesis when God created the world. He exercised His creative powers on days 1-6 and on the 7th day He rested. It wasn't because God was tired. He had finished. His creative work was done. By resting one day a week, we give God credit for all the blessings He has given us the rest of the week. By resting we are saying that spiritual things are more important than physical things. We take a day off to say that God is creator. We declare that all we have is from Him and in Him and through Him.

Deuteronomy 5:15 connects motivation to observe the Sabbath rest with remembering Israelites were once slaves in the land of Egypt and God delivered them from slavery. I rest because I am no longer a slave. Stop working like you are still a slave. Remember what he has done for you. Every Sabbath day is a mini-reenactment of the freedom from slavery you experience out of Egypt. You are not a slave to work. You are not a slave to fear or money or things or success. Your identity is no longer in what you can produce as a brick layer. We are far more than what we can produce. You are a human being not a human doing. When your identity is wrapped up in what you do, you will be

overly crushed by any failures and overly impressed by your successes. Your identity is in Me, not what you can fill your storehouses with, not in things. Not in bank accounts. Rest in simply being mine. You don't have to work, or "do" to gain approval. You are much loved by Me. Trust me. Trust in me. Stop scrambling to try and make life work apart from me. Apart from me what you do will be meaningless, you can do nothing.

But I can't rest, it's so competitive out there in the marketplace. I've got to work while it's here. People are calling. People are emailing. I can't take a break or I'll miss out on the work. Look at verse 15. They were trucking in sacks of grain, grapes, wine and figs (V.16) and importing fish from the sea port city of Tyre. Hey, this is big business. We can't just let those fish rot outside the city gate just because of the Sabbath. We have to fulfill our customers' orders. If we don't ship our goods on Saturday then there is always going to be the guy who does and we will lose out on that profit. I'm sure there were many reasons why the businessmen of Judah did not do what they promised God they would do... they just didn't think it was all that big of a deal. They let pagan belief system, culture, decide what was important to them. They drifted.

God says, "Stop". Just stop. I love you guys. Will you trust me to provide? Will you intentionally take one day a week and rest, refresh, refocus? There is no command to observe the Sabbath today, (it just becomes goofy and legalistic) but it is still a practice that provides the same benefit for God's followers. It's Matthew 28:11 says, "Come to me you who are weary and heavy with the weight of the world on your shoulders. Come and I will give you rest. Learn of me. Learn from me. Enjoy me. Draw your identity from Me and you will find rest for your souls. Trust me to provide and come find your rest in Me. Psalm 46:10, Cease striving and know Me... know that I am God. Stop trying to save yourself. Trust He will provide for you. Psalm 23 says, "He makes me to lie down in green pastures, He restores my soul." He provides rest for me in green pastures and restores my soul. Rest comes before restoration. He can provide. He can lead us to the provision of green pastures, but we must actually lie down and rest...then flows in the restoration of our souls. Receive God's provision for rest. When will you receive rest?

The second thing that angered Nehemiah involved marital disobedience. In the last section (verses 23-31) Nehemiah writes about God's desire to protect us in our relationships. We must understand these verses within the cultural context. The nations surrounding the people of Israel were pagan and bent toward evil and worshipped idols and some even sacrificed their children to gods like Moleck. It was not a race issue, it was a spiritual issue, a faith issue. God wanted to protect them from negative and evil influences, relationships that

would break their heart and draw them to drift away from God. Listen for God's desire to protect them in their choice of close relationships like marriage. (V.23-31)

Receive God's protection for your relationships. When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem he discovered that the men of Jerusalem were ignoring their vow to not marry pagan women. They went to find a wife among those who lived east of the Jordan river and Dead sea, Moab and Ammon and those who lived over along the coast in the middle of Philistine territory like Ashdod. Perhaps the men liked the exotic look of those women. Perhaps they just wanted to expand their options for finding a mate and wanted the freedom to give affection to whoever they choose. They didn't want to limit the choice of who they would love. They may have rationalized, "What's the big deal? She's nice. He's cute. I like her. He is more kind than the guys in my own neighborhood. I'm having a hard time finding gals who like me and are like me in my faith. They don't share my love for God, but I won't fall. She won't cause me to drift. It won't affect me. It won't affect my kids. Oh yeah? Look at verse 26. If a king like Solomon, who was much loved God and had every advantage, could sin due to outside influences, "even him", Then how do you think you will be able to withstand the temptation to drift? If the wisest man in the world can't handle it neither can you. This wasn't about God being against interracial marriages. This was a faith issue, a spiritual issue. It does not matter if I marry a person who has the same color or from the same culture. What matters is that I marry someone who shares the same Christ. The New Testament continues with this principle (II Corinthians 6:14), "Don't be joined closely together with unbelievers". Don't marry people who are heading a different direction. Trust Me says God. I love you guys. I want to protect you from heartache and pain. Yet to choose to marry only those who are heading the same direction as we are spiritually we must trust that God will provide for us and bless us. Will you receive God's protection for your relationships? Will you trust Him to provide relationship and rest for you?

As Nehemiah walked the streets of Jerusalem, he listened to the kids playing and half of them were speaking Ashdodian. None of them could answer his questions in Hebrew. They couldn't even speak the language (V.24). The only language they knew was what their mommy spoke at home. So they weren't being taught the Holy scriptures. They weren't taught about Jehovah. They couldn't even read God's Word for themselves. The Hebrew language was essential to understanding God and His ways. All they knew were the pagan religious practices taught to them by their mothers. Nehemiah was so angry that the next generation of kids knew nothing about God, that he blew a cork. The children were innocent, but not the men who married

pagans. (V. 25) He "contended" with the men, punched them and pulled out their hair (probably bearded hair which was a symbol of shame.)

That sure doesn't sound like a godly leader does it? It seems pretty violent, yet Nehemiah's expression of rage was an expression of love and justice. Concern for children were at the center of his strong reaction. He wanted them to follow God and at least have the chance to learn of God. Nehemiah was concerned that God's justice would fall again on Judah because this was the very same thing that had them sent into Babylon captivity in the first place. Nehemiah would rather punch them and pull out their hair than have them hauled back off to slavery again in Babylon. Perhaps what he did needed to be done. He saw the future of the nation was at stake. "If you won't grieve over sin, then I will help give you something to grieve about." He saw wrong for what it was and dealt with it.

It certainly wasn't passive. I am shocked when I read verse 25, but I wonder if we are sometimes too passive, too careful, too afraid to confront. Passivity can be a great enemy. Sometimes we need to face wrong head on. What is leading our kids into following false gods? Do I have a passionate heart to defend the children? How grieved am I by the lies, the immorality and sexuality that is being hurled at our children through the TV screen? Movies? Internet? I had a friend that was so ticked at what was invited into his living room he physically picked up the TV and hurled it out the front door! How grieved are we about the rise of child abuse? How saddened are we at the moral compromise within the church? Have I grown comfortable with what should grieve me? John Stott rightly places the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of society where it belongs He writes, "When any community deteriorate, the blame should be attached where it belongs; not to the community which is going bad, but to the church that is failing in its responsibility as salt (to live the truth, preserve and flavor life with God's ways,) to stop it from going bad."

In verses 19-23, At sundown on Friday Nehemiah shuts the gates to the city. No movement in or out of the city. He puts his own guards down there to make sure no one bribes his way in. (V.19) He places safeguards and gatekeepers to keep them on track so they don't get pulled away from corrosive outside influences. He kicks out the traders from Tyre. Don't even hang around outside the gate. You are not getting in and I don't want anyone tempted to sneak out and bribe the guards to do business with you. Scram. No more access. You are not coming in this city. Are there gates? Are there safeguards you need to put up to keep corrosive influences from coming into your own city? Your own mind? Your own family? Stop allowing outside influence to take over your rest and relationships. The world is continually trying to squeeze us into its mold. Romans 12:1-2. A man who is flattened by