

Gospel-Motivated Obedience

Nehemiah 10:1-39; March 6, 2022

Introduction and Context:

- Have you ever been in a season of your spiritual walk where you just struggled with obedience in a particular area or over a particular sin in your life?
- I've been there! Yes, news flash! Pastor Jon still struggles with the presence in indwelling sin.
- Nehemiah can definitely relate!
 - As we saw last week in chapter 9 in the recounting of Israel's history, over and over they continually failed to trust God.
 - They acted presumptuously. They stiffened their neck. They did not obey God's commands.
 - As the people were confronted with their sinfulness, we saw that they decided to renew their covenant with God: Read 9:38.
 - As we look at chapter 10 today, it is going to unpack in more detail the covenant the the people renewed with God.
 - Is a covenant renewal what we need today?

Transition: there are three key questions I want us to wrestle with today.

- Who made the covenant renewal?
- What are the details of the covenant renewal?
- How does the gospel shape how we are to think about obedience today?

I. Who made the covenant renewal (10:1-28)?

Read Nehemiah 10:1-27.

- "On the seals..."
 - The "seals" refer to the signatures of these leaders and it binds them to the covenant they are making.
- Most of the names listed are representing not just individuals but families.
 - This accounts for the reason Ezra is not listed since he was a member of the house of Seraiah.
- Nehemiah, the Governor and Zedekiah
- The Priests (2-8).
- The Levites (9-13).
- The Chiefs or Leaders of the People (14-27).
 - This list closely follows the list in Ezra 2:3-30 and also represents many families.

Read Nehemiah 10:28-29.

- "The rest of the people..."
 - The gatekeepers, singers, temple servants, their wives, sons, and daughters
- "All who have separated themselves"

- “All who have knowledge and understanding”

What implications can we draw from “who” participated in the renewal?

- All groups in the community were included in this covenant renewal.
 - Leaders and servants
 - Men and Women
 - Young and Old
 - Highlight Redemption Kids Volunteers
 - Pray particular for Meg and our Grades 1-5 Leaders
 - Address the MS and HS students in the room.
 - Let’s give it up for our Student Leaders (Tyler, Larissa, Mayson)
 - Don’t underestimate what God can do in your life and how he can use you to see students at your school come to treasure Jesus.
 - Address the College Students.
 - Let’s give it up for our College Leaders (Matheus, Caroline, Conner, Faith, Pam, Priscilla)
 - With my new job, I talk to college students almost daily.
 - Don’t buy the American Dream.
 - Live somewhere strategic for the glory of God. Would you pray:
 - God, where do you want me to spend my life for the sake of the gospel?
 - God, will you provide a job there (wherever that place is)?

What’s the point in listing all of these names?

- It’s to show that the entire community was wholeheartedly behind it.
- This isn’t a bunch of individual covenant renewals. It’s a collective covenant renewal.

II. What are the details of the covenant renewal (10:28-39)?

Let’s Read Nehemiah 10:28-29 again.

1. The General Oath (10:28-29).

It can be described by:

A. Seriousness (“enter into a curse and an oath”).

- These two words together convey their seriousness to keep their commitments.
- The “curse” is like calling down punishment or judgment from God if for some reason they were to fail or go back on their word.

B. Holiness (“all who have separated themselves from the peoples”).

- Israel had been negatively influenced by the pagan nations where it had been scattered.
- This was a key point of the Law.

“You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.” (Leviticus 20:26, ESV)

- This is a key truth that Peter emphasizes in 1 Peter 1:14-16

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’” (1 Peter 1:14–16, ESV)

- Where have you let the world’s values negatively shape and influence how you follow Jesus?
- A tension we have to manage as followers of Jesus is how we are *in* the world but not *of* the world.
 - I think about the 755,000 people surrounding Medford. How are we going to reach them with the hope of Jesus?
 - There’s a good chance that you either live or work with someone in that 755,000.
 - You (non-Pastors) will be able to enter into places and spaces to reach those people that I will never be able to.
 - You are the best person to reach your co-workers with the gospel.
- What should mark our lives is “separation” in the sense that Jesus is shaping every thought and action in my life. When I speak and act, Jesus should ooze from my life. People should see in me a posture of love and service. They should see the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace...
 - This is the fruit of surrendering daily to the leadership of the Holy Spirit in my life
 - But, we need to be around people who don’t know Jesus. You might be the only genuine Christian that your co-worker even knows.

C. Obedience (“to walk in God’s Law...and to observe and do all the commandments”).

- Their language is reminiscent of that used in Deuteronomy: “to keep and to do all...”
- Their covenant renewal isn’t a new covenant. They are covenanting together to keep the covenant God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai.
- They are pledging to keep the entire law (the first five books of the OT).
 - Just to reenforce what Tanner shared with us last week: the Word of God was to be the authority in their lives.
- It’s a pledge to live completely for God. “God, we are ALL YOURS!!!”
- Let’s not forget: this commitment is coming on the heels of Nehemiah 9 and a

- fresh reminder of the covenant keeping God.
- As James Hamilton notes, “This commitment is not a legalistic covenant. They are entering into this covenant having been mercifully redeemed and as a sign of their commitment to respond to the mercy that has been shown to them” (Hamilton).

Transition:

- What follows is not an exhaustive list...but specific areas that highlight the major issues of their day.

2. Particular Commitments (10:30-39).

Read Nehemiah 10:30.

A. Intermarriage (10:30).

- Speak to the singles:
 - Singleness is a gift from God.
 - God may call you to a season of singleness or a lifetime of singleness.
 - Whatever God calls you to, use it for the glory of God.
- The problem with intermarriage was not racial but religious. God is concerned that if you marry, you marry someone who loves Him and not someone who is a worshiper of other gods.
 - Intermarriage was the downfall of Solomon (1 Kgs. 11:1-6).
 - Intermarriage was already addressed by Ezra in Ezra 9-10.
 - Intermarriage remains an issue because Nehemiah will address it again in chapter 13.
- If you are married to a non-believer, Paul encourages you to remain married if they are willing (cf. 1 Cor. 7:12-16; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).
- For those of you who desire marriage or are considering marriage:
 - 1 Cor. 7:39 that we are to marry “only in the Lord.”
 - 2 Cor. 6:14 says “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.”
 - Marriage is to be a union that is intimate and deep (soul and body). If each of you treasures something differently, how will you ever have a deep union. In fact, there is actually disunion from the beginning.
 - Who should you be looking for?
 - Don’t just someone who says they are a Christian.
 - Look for someone who is striving to be a disciple of Jesus, someone who’s striving to make Jesus their greatest treasure.

Read Nehemiah 10:31.

B. The Sabbath (10:31).

- A loophole was opened up because of the presence of non-Jews.

- Is it ok for us to buy goods and grain from non-Jews on the Sabbath?
- The rationale: “We aren’t working, it’s the non-Jews who are working. Therefore, we’re not guilty of breaking the Sabbath.”
- The problem is that this was now impacting and threatening the tone and spirit of the day.
- Nehemiah will return and address this again in 13:15-22.
- Their commitment was to refrain from commerce on the Sabbath.
- For the seventh year (see Exod. 23:10-11; Lev. 25; Deut. 15:1-11).
- Are we required to keep the Sabbath today?
 - Listen to my sermon on Mark 2:23-3:12: “Celebrate Sabbath Rest”
 - In short, Jesus has fulfilled the law which pointed to the true rest that is found in him. The way I keep the Sabbath is by trusting in Jesus.

Read Nehemiah 10:32-33.

C. Support for Ministry in the Temple (10:32-39).

- This final section is focused on supporting the work of the ministry at the temple.
- **The Temple Tax (10:32-33).**
 - Nehemiah imposes a tax to be paid yearly (1/3 of a shekel) to cover various items in the temple (see v. 33).
 - This was not a law from the Law.

Read Nehemiah 10:34-39.

- **Offerings, Firstfruits and Tithes (10:34-39).**
 - People were required to bring firewood for the perpetual fire in the temple (v. 34).
 - The people were also to bring their firstfruits which went to those caring for the temple.
 - Ground, tree, sons, cattle, herds, flocks, dough, wine, oil
 - No crop could be eaten until the firstfruits had been offered.
 - They were also to bring the tithes from their ground.
- **Is a Christian required to tithe?**
 - In the NT, we are the temple. We don’t support a physical building but God’s work through the church.
 - 1 Cor. 9:6-23; 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:6-8; Gal. 6:6, 10; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; cf. Luke 10:7
 - No. I don’t see any command in the NT that you are required to give 10%. Rather, I see a number of principles: systematic, proportional, sacrificial, intentional, motivated by love, with cheerfulness, voluntary.
 - I think 10% is a great starting point (think of it like the firstfruits). When you understand stewardship principles, I think your heart will be to try and

figure out how to give more, not less.

- **Money and RHC**
 - The way RHC functions and is able to carry out its mission is through the financial donations of our people.
 - Most people setup recurring giving through the RHC App.

A Story of Impact from Your Giving in Africa:

- A week or so ago Kevin Luce emailed me and said I've got a story that I have to share with you. So we hopped on a Zoom and this is what he shared with me.
- He reminded me that in Multiply March last year, we raised some funds (we sent \$3000) to help his friend Joel* (name changed) with an outreach that he was spearheading among an unreached people group in a major African city.
- Recently, Joel was approached with an incredible opportunity.
- There's a small business owner who employs and provides hostel-style housing for house helpers in an urban center.
 - Many of the househelps have come from difficult situations and need care, compassion and healing themselves.
 - Many of her employees work in homes of people from an ethnic group that is hostile to Christianity and the gospel.
 - She would like to provide cultural training for her employees as well as training in how to share the gospel.
 - Her clients have been so happy with the house helpers that the employer has been asked to send employees overseas, to the Middle East and into the Arabian Peninsula.
- This business owner approached Joel and asked him to design a training program to provide healing, care, compassion, discipleship and training for working in a cross-cultural environment along with equipping to be able to share the gospel. He is working with a local church to develop this opportunity as a venue for ministry.
- When Joel went to the hostel to where some of the house helpers stay to prepare final details with the owner, two of the young ladies asked if they could speak with him.
 - He was there for 2 hours with them while they poured out their hearts to him.
 - He asked them if they had ever given their hearts to the Lord, they said no... and gave their lives to Jesus right then! Joel was floored... may these be the firstfruits of many to come!
- The training program launched 2 weeks ago.
 - 25 ladies signed up. 40 showed up!
 - Joel has split them up into small groups, they are working through Discovery Bible Studies to engage with Scripture, and a small missions training program has been launched!
- The funds you gave have been used to launch the training, provide training materials and simple snacks for the ladies during the training.
- Disciples are making disciples who will be sent to make disciples in some of the most difficult places in the world to share the gospel.

- We thank God for this incredible gift that he has dropped in Joel's lap. And we thank you for your partnership in seeing this come to fruition!
- Thanks for your help! Kevin and Bridget.

Transition:

- While I've been drawing out implications for us along the way, we have to make sure we read, interpret and understand Nehemiah as part of a larger story.
- We'll find out just a few chapters later (see ch. 13) that their covenant renewal didn't last.
- As real and genuine as their renewal and commitment was, they (and we) need transformation from the inside out.
- They needed the promised savior who would not only to save them from their sin but give them a new heart.
- God is faithful and this is exactly what he does.
 - Act 4: King Jesus Comes and Accomplishes Redemption.
- This leads us to our final question...

III. How does the gospel shape how we think about obedience today?

1. Jesus does what we cannot do.

- He has perfectly obeyed and fulfilled the law.
- He is the beautiful display of God's love and grace. He took upon himself the curse that comes from not keeping God's commands and in exchange gave us (those who believe) the blessing that comes from obedience.
- He fulfills the Sabbath, the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee.
- He is the perfect high priest, the new temple and the sacrificial offering that all the offerings pointed to.

2. Jesus gives us a new identity.

- I'm a child of God (Rom. 8). I'm a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). I am now alive, raised, and seated with Jesus (Eph. 2:4-9). I am filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8) and God is gradually transforming me into the image of Jesus (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:24).
- Love and obedience at still at the heart of what it means to follow Jesus.
 - The Great Commandment: Love God and Others.
 - If you love me, you'll keep my commands (John 14:15).
 - The Great Commission:
 - Teach them to obey *everything* I have commanded you (Matt. 28:20).
 - But love and obedience flow from acceptance, not for acceptance.
 - From identity, not for identity.

3. Doing (obeying) flows from Being.

- Sizable portions of Paul's letters to the churches in the NT are given over to rehearsing the great gospel truths before there is any call for obedience on our part. In each of these, indicatives (things that are true of God and me because of Jesus) are the foundation for

the imperatives (commands for me to live and follow Jesus).

- Ephesians
 - 1-3
 - 4-6
 - *“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,”* (Ephesians 4:1, ESV)
- Colossians
 - 1-2
 - 3-4
 - *“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”* (Colossians 3:1, ESV)
 - *“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,”* (Colossians 3:12, ESV)
- Romans
 - 1-11
 - 12-16
 - *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”* (Romans 12:1, ESV)
- “However, the gospel changes my view of God’s commandments, in that it helps me to see the heart of the Person from whom those commandments come. When I begin my train of thought with the gospel, I realize that if God loved me enough to sacrifice His Son’s life for me, then He must be guided by that same love when He speaks His commandments to me. Viewing God’s commands and prohibitions in this light, I can see them for what they really are: friendly signposts from a heavenly Father who is seeking to love me through each directive, so that I might experience His very fullness forever” (Milton Vincent).

The Point: Experience the fullness of God by giving yourself to a lifestyle of gospel-motivated obedience.

Conclusion

- If you were to write a covenant renewal motivated by the gospel, which commands or prohibitions might hit your top 3 list?
- In other words, in which areas of holiness is the Spirit of God convicting you where you need a fresh commitment to gospel-motivated obedience so that you might experience more and more of God’s fullness?