

## **“Let’s Build Again” Nehemiah 13**

Last year, we spent time as Pastors and Staff to wrestle with the fundamental question: “If our mission is making disciples of Jesus, what does a growing disciple look like?” This led us to identify “The 7 Pursuits of a Disciple.” The 7 Pursuits are relevant from your first breath as a believer until your dying breath. We hope everyone in our church will eventually make their way through the discipleship material we’re putting the finishing touches on.

We believe the first two Pursuits capture the fundamental commitments of a follower of Jesus. If you live these two pursuits, pursuits 3-7 and everything else we’re called to in the Christian life should follow. I want you to write these down.

### **The 7 Pursuits of a Disciple**

**1. Seek God daily with passion and joy.**

**2. Surrender daily to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.**

These two commitments really form the heart of Nehemiah 13. This morning we are going to hear one final call to Build Again...

### **Nehemiah 13:1-14 (text displayed)**

#### **1. Let’s build again by prioritizing worship. (13:1-14)**

Once again, we find the people going back to the Word of God. (Have you been “Bringing the Book” day by day).

- They were reading Deuteronomy 23:3-5, which prohibits Moabites and Ammonites entering the assembly of God’s worship for two reasons.
  - 1) When Israel made the exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land, the Moabites and Ammonites would not even share a loaf of bread or a cup of water. Instead... #2
  - 2) They hired a false prophet named Balaam to pronounce a curse against Israel, but God exposed their scheme and turned the curse into a blessing! You can read about this in Numbers 22-25.
- God would not allow their “infectious idolatry” to enter into the worship of Israel.
- But there were exceptions for those who completely turned away from their false worship to worship the one, true God. The eighth book of the Bible captures the redemption story of a Moabite woman named Ruth. God not only welcomed her into the assembly, he, in his wild and extravagant grace, made her one of the great, great, great, great... grandmothers of a little boy from Nazareth named, Yeshua. Yes, Jesus.

God wanted his people to separate from them in order to maintain their “pure and sincere devotion” to him. (See 2 Corinthians 11:3)

T: We see how deep the problem went in vv. 4-9.

Verse 4 provides the context for why the people were reading Deuteronomy 23.

- A priest named Eliashib was in charge of the chamber rooms in the temple. These were essentially storage closets. Maybe we need to consecrate some of our Venue Team Leaders as RHC priests :)... but listen... don’t be like Eliashib! Why?
- Eliashib remodeled the large room that held the items for worship listed in verse 5 and turned it into a condo for Tobiah the Ammonite.

- Not only did this break God's command in Deuteronomy 23. This is the same Tobiah who showed up multiple times in chapters 2, 4, and 6 in fierce opposition to Nehemiah and the people of Israel in rebuilding the wall and their covenant with God.

Verses 6-7 tell us this happened while Nehemiah not there. After spending 12 years rebuilding Jerusalem, he returned to King Artaxerses, just as he promised in chapter 2. 10-15 years likely past before Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem. When he returned, he found Tobiah, one of Israel's greatest enemies, sleeping in God's house.

Nehemiah took action, like the True and Greater Nehemiah would take four centuries later. Just as Jesus turned over tables in the Temple because they turned God's house into a marketplace, in the same way, Nehemiah displays righteous anger, throwing out Tobiah's furniture and purifying the chamber as a place of worship.

T: But that is not all...

Verses 10-14 tell us the people did not follow through on their commitment to support the work of worship. In fact, they stopped contributing their tithes for so long, the Levites and singers had to go home and work their fields in order to eat!

That led Nehemiah to confront the officials. Look at his question in verse 11: "Why is the house of God forsaken?"

He is asking: "Why haven't you prioritized the worship of our God, the God of Heaven and Earth, the Great I AM, the Creator and Sustainer of everything, our Deliverer, our Peace, our Banner, our Shepherd, our Shield, our Rock, the one Worthy of ALL PRAISE?"

This should be our concern as well. We will build again only as we prioritize worship. Yes, on Sunday. Yes, in Community Groups through the week. Yes, in times of Prayer (would love to see you Wednesday or Friday morning for as long as you can make it!), but also in daily worship as we offer our bodies to God as living sacrifices!

Like Nehemiah, we need to restore our worship.

- He reordered temple responsibilities in verse 11.
- Generous provisions from the people return in verse 12.
- In verse 13, he appointed reliable treasurers who would contribute to worship, rather than shady side deals with Israel's enemies!

And then Nehemiah prays. Should we be surprised the Book ends like it begins. Verse 14. He asks God to look upon his courageous efforts with favor and remember his service, likely looking forward to final judgment.

T: Let's build again by prioritizing worship, and...

## **2. Let's build again by keeping God's commands. (13:15-31)**

### **Nehemiah 13:15-31 (text displayed)**

- Nehemiah encountered another problem. People were working their wine ON THE SABBATH.
  - People were transporting their business goods (grain, wine, grapes, figs and other items) ON THE SABBATH.

- People allowed foreign people from the seaport city of Tyre to sell their delicious fish ON THE SABBATH (Something like buying a lobster roll from Perkins Cove in Ogunquit!). Look at the emphasis at the end of verse 16: “to the people of Judah, IN JERUSALEM ITSELF!”
- In 17-18, Nehemiah calls out their sin. He reminds them that this was one of the chief reasons the people were taken into captivity in the first place!
- Why was the Sabbath so important? Why does the 4th of the 10 Commandments say: “Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.”?
  - God is a God who works! God is a God who rests!
  - The word “sabbath” means “stop.” The Jews were to stop working, so that they could rest and worship.
  - Now, as Pastor Jon would tell us in his dissertation: Jesus, as the Lord of the Sabbath, has fulfilled the Sabbath. We do not need to necessarily take Saturday off work because Jesus is our true rest on Saturday and every day. That said, I believe practicing the principle of a “Sabbath day” is a wise rhythm God baked into creation that allows us to experience more his blessing.
  - I take two days off: Saturday and Monday. Monday is my Sabbath. On those days, I want to do four things.
    - 1) Stop. Stop working, no emails, no slack, no quick tasks... and actually...
    - 2) Rest. Sleep in. Take a nap. When the weather is nice, maybe go to the beach and just do nothing. But also...
    - 3) Worship. Spend time with God. If you take a Sabbath day on a Sunday, worship with your church family.
    - 4) Enjoy. God’s good creation. Do something you enjoy that brings you life. Spend time with the people you love. Eat a really good meal.
  - If you want more, you can buy a copy of my friend Adam Mabry’s book: *The Art of Rest*.

Nehemiah so valued the Sabbath that...

- He shut the gates in verse 19. No more commerce coming in!
- In verse 21, he warns the merchants to stop selling outside the gates. He even tells them he will remove them by force if necessary.
- In verse 22, he commands the Levites to keep the Sabbath holy. Set apart in devotion to the Lord.

T: In verses 23-29, Nehemiah once again addresses intermarriage.

Pastor Jon explained this well two weeks ago. To recap...

- The issue with the intermarriage of people from two different backgrounds is not an ethnic concern but a worship concern.
- If God moves us from the gifted season of singleness to the gifted season of marriage (one is NOT better than the other - go read 1 Corinthians 7), then God’s intention for us and command is that we marry someone who loves him and follows Jesus.

So let me go on record, once again. If God moves my children from the gifted season of singleness (thank you, God, they are all single right now - I think Titus is being a little too friendly with a couple of preschoolers, but we’re working on that), BUT if and when that day comes: I do NOT care about the color of their spouses’ skin. I care about the condition of their souls.

Nehemiah’s response in verse 25 does not provide an example for us to follow, but it is important to note the cultural differences between 4th century BC Israel and 21st America. Alexander Nykolaishen says, “This should not be seen as an angry outburst from Nehemiah. Inflicting bruises and plucking out hair was a culturally recognized way of dishonoring men (2 Sam. 10:4; Isa. 50:6). Nehemiah want[ed] to display visually that intermarrying with foreigners is an act with shameful consequences.”

## Two Lessons About Our Sin

1) Don't assume the sin you conquered yesterday won't tempt you today or tomorrow.

- This whole chapter reveals that the people of Israel were breaking three commitments they made to God during their covenant renewal at the end of chapter 10.
  - Verse 30... "We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons." (Ezra also addressed this same sin thirty years earlier in Ezra 9-10)
  - Verse 31... "And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. And we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt."
  - Verse 32... "We also take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third part of a shekel for the service of the house of our God"
- We must remain vigilant. 1 Cor 10:12, "If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall."

2) Don't be okay with sin in your own life or the lives of people you love.

- Most of us do not love hard conversations.
- It's not easy to go to someone and say: "I may see (or "I do see") something in your life that does not line up with God's heart, and I love you too much to not say something."
- This is our privilege and responsibility as family in Christ. Galatians 6:1-2 says, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Let's build again by prioritizing worship: "God, we worship you above all. We will seek you daily with passion and joy!"

Let's build again by keeping God's commands: "God, whatever you say, we will do. We will surrender daily to the leadership of your Holy Spirit."

*Conclusion:*

God set a great work before Nehemiah...

**"And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. . . . And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work." Nehemiah 2:12, 18**

**"I am doing a great work and I cannot come down." (Nehemiah 6:3)**

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God is doing a great work in our day! Jesus promised in Matthew 16:18,

**"I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18)**

And the mind blowing reality is that he invites us into his great work... Our journey through Nehemiah, leads us to the ultimate invitation to...

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**The Point: Partner with God in the great work of building his church.**

You say, "Tanner is that really for us? Tanner is that really for me?"

**"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." (Ephesians 4:15-16)**