

Nehemiah 13

Clean up on Aisle 6

Background: Leading up to this last chapter of this history book we see the following as Nehemiah leads a group of Jews to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls. The walls needed to be repaired for their protection. In building the wall, they had opposition. They had to overcome people who were jealous and working against them. They have a great spiritual revival in Chapters 8-9. Even though they had failed in following and obeying God, they have new hope. In Chapter 10, the people promise to do several things to include: not let their children hook up and marry folks from the land, not sell and trade on the Sabbath with folks from the land, and support the work of God with their offerings. In Chapter 12, the wall has been built and is dedicated.

Chapter 13– the story continues

On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever; ² Because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them: howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing. ³ Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.

It starts off with the reading of the Book. In the Law they find two types of people cannot be in their congregation or fellowship. The reason is because these people were against them and cursed them in times past (see Deuteronomy 23:3-4). So when they heard this word it prompted them to apply it.

How they applied it...they separated themselves from the mixed multitude. They put distance between themselves and the outside world or the part that hung around them but were not in covenant relationship with God.

Application: The Word is designed to show you how to live and what you need to do and where you might be off track. It is the living Word. The Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light (Psalm 119: 105) when I'm operating in the dark.

You are not supposed to hang out with them or around that...oh, I didn't know that until I found it in the Word.

Reading the Word, hearing the Word and even understanding the Word is important...but it won't do you any good unless you apply it.

- What good is a flashlight in the dark if you never apply it? I stubbed my toe in the dark one night. I had all kinds of electricity and yet still almost broke my toe. I blamed everyone and everything except the one ultimately responsible...me.

- Rather than continue to try harder not to stub my toe again, I surrendered and found a night light. I have never hit my toe on the bed since.
- Stop trying to feel your way in the dark. At least get a night light. Same application in your life. Stop trying to make it through life and tough decisions based upon how you “feel”.
- Get a light, a Word, powered by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, not your feelings will show you what to do.
- All that power and still hurt my toe; you have all that power inside of you...the living and risen Christ inside of you....you don't need to hurt yourself anymore or get hurt anymore....you have power! Use it.

Now let me fix something here. Somebody might be thinking if God didn't want the people hooking up with Moab, then why did he bless Ruth? Ah, she was from Moab but she left Moab and made a decision to follow after the God of Naomi. That is the difference? She became a believer and changed her allegiance. She will soon not be called a Moabite again.

Your separation should not be based upon race, culture, politics, your street address, or whether you like Auburn or Alabama.

My separation is based on the Blood. If we are not in agreement with serving God, that person, place, or thing can't get too close because it takes my focus and attention away from the things of God.

There are some things happening around me that I don't want to let get too close to me, because it draws my attention and affection away from God. I need to put some separation and distance between some things.

And before this, Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was allied unto Tobiah: ⁵And he had prepared for him a great chamber, where aforetime they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the corn, the new wine, and the oil, which was commanded to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the offerings of the priests. ⁶But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem: for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king: ⁷And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.

Let's continue. Nehemiah has been out of town for about a decade or more according to some of my commentaries. He comes back to check on things.

He finds out that Eliashib the High Priest is now friends with the very guy that tried to stop them from building the wall (Tobiah) and he is an Ammonite, the very folks that God said not to get too close to.

Not only that, he has rented out space in the House of God where Tobias is staying. Check this out, the room or space that Tobiah is staying in, is the place where offerings and tithes were stored. That space, and the Bible says it was a great chamber...not a small place....was designed for something greater and

something better, set up for a specific and divine purpose, but is now being occupied by someone who has not repented and is not occupied by God.

Basically, Tobiah is not supposed to be living in that space. He let something or someone occupy a space that belongs to God.

⁶ But in all this time was not I at Jerusalem: for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king: ⁷ And I came to Jerusalem, and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah, in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. ⁸ And it grieved me sore: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff to Tobiah out of the chamber.

⁹ Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers: and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offering and the frankincense.

Nehemiah shows up from working with the king and is grieved (verse 8). He is more than a little upset so he starts to do several things in sequence. After he is grieved he takes action and throws out Tobiah's stuff. Then he had the room cleaned....special cleaning. Then brought back in the vessels that originally belonged in that space.

So while this is a historical story....it also has a spiritual application. What does this story and this example of clean up and separation have to do with me and you?

First, these were not baby Christians or new believers. They had gone through a process and steps of maturity.

- They had already been through the first step walking down aisle #1; recognizing and seeing there was a need. They were humble and ready to listen because they knew they had gotten themselves into a situation they couldn't get out of so they needed God to deliver.
- Step 2, they had repented and were sorry for falling short of the glory and expectations of God. They had sorrow and they changed their mind about trying to work this out on their own. They gave up trying.
- They walked down aisle #3 where they put their hope in God. They rejoiced, had a revival and got new life. A fresh new start. Same place, some bad situation...but new hope and another chance.
- They started down aisle #4 in Chapter 10 where they are in covenant relationship with God. They are sealed with a promise and they start having church and they are in a contractual relationship with God.
- Now they are ready to do a work for God. The wall is rebuilt and dedicated. They put that work in and they are better protected and can live behind the wall, they went down aisle #5 because that's where you find the material to go to work.
- Now after all this, they arrive at step #6 or Yom Kippur, let's call it aisle #6. That's where you come so far, but you are not quite there yet....but you're closer.

- You may still be in the wilderness but you have made progress. Not in bondage like before, not in Egypt, not getting God's best just yet, still may have some struggles, but you are better than you ever were before.
- But while you are walking down aisle #6 – the enemy sees you are closer to victory too. The devil understands you are too close to the Promised Land. So he has to show up and try to mess you up.

It is often on aisle 6 where Christians fail. We think we are okay because we been doing this for a while. Our walls are up and we feel protected. We can get complacent because we can see our progress. We can see some accomplishments and blessings. We are not where we used to be.

Football example. There is a different kind of defense and opposition when you are in the Red Zone versus being on your side of the field. The enemy can use a different tactic as you get closer to your goal.

The temptation is to try and get you to step outside of the will of God by doing things in your own strength and knowledge. It may seem good on the outside. It may seem logical and make sense to everyone outside the wall. But if it is not led, motivated, and controlled by the Spirit you could find yourself in a mess.

It may not seem like a big deal to allow the outside unbelieving world into your inner circle. It might not seem like a sin at all to do good works and show a particular kindness to an enemy. But you better make sure you are led by the Spirit and that God gets the glory rather than what you think.

It is here on aisle 6 where we often fail because we don't see ourselves as being wrong on this issue.

Application Example: The idea of the Golden Goose came to mind during my quiet time. I asked myself the question, would you rather have the golden egg, or the goose who produced the egg? When I asked this question of my class, most responded they would rather have the goose. The same principle can be applied here. Are there things in our lives which are more important to us than God? Are there things occupying a space in your life where God should reside? Even our children could occupy a level of importance greater than God...and this would be a mess. A good example is the story of Abraham and Isaac. While he loved Isaac his son, he had a greater love for his God who blessed him Isaac in the first place. His faith in God and the source of his blessings allowed him to keep his son Isaac and experience even greater increase. Again, is there something in your life dear Christian, which is occupying a space that belongs to God? If so, you will soon need to clean up the mess being made.

How can I be sure that I don't have a mess on aisle 6?

The clue, follow what Nehemiah did. Use his steps to clean up any mess on aisle 6.

Application for Today:

1. Open your eyes. What do you see? Until you see the need, you will be okay with the current status. You won't see the mess or mistake.

2. What you see has to make you highly upset. Until you see the need to act and change, you will never take the appropriate action.
3. Throw out the old stuff that you know is not supposed to be there and can't stay there, and has to go.
4. Go through a cleansing. Just because you got rid of the old stuff doesn't mean you don't have to clean up after. It may have left some residue and stains and dirt behind that you need to remove before you move the new stuff in.
5. Don't leave that space empty, bring in things that glorify God. Bring your house back to its original purpose....which is the bring glory to God.

So I have good news. When you find yourself trying to correct a mistake on aisle 6 like the Jews in this story, the mop and bucket and cleaning supplies can be found again on aisles 1-2-3-4.

Go back there....humbly pick up the cross. Repent and change your mind about what you are allowing to get too close inside the wall or inside your heart. Put your hope back into God's hand. Use the power inside through the Holy Spirit to guide you through. Then take the action you need through the power of the God to make the right decisions. Then return to the wall....and watch. Keep those things that distract on the outside of that wall. Watch....our Savior is coming soon.

How does your temple look? Is there anything in your church....you as the temple of God? Are there some things living inside of you that you need to look for and get upset about and clean up?

The key is to watch.

This is the reason why there is always a need for clean up on aisle 6. Seven is the number of spiritual perfection and the completion. There is a significant application for every mature believer. It is not at the beginning of the journey where the deception is greatest.

¹⁰ And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field. ¹¹ Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place. ¹² Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries. ¹³ And I made treasurers over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah: and next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah: for they were counted faithful, and their office was to distribute unto their brethren.

¹⁴ Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof.

¹⁵ In those days saw I in Judah some treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. ¹⁶ There dwelt men of Tire also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.

¹⁷ Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, what evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath day? ¹⁸ Did not your father's thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath.

¹⁹ And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath: and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the Sabbath day.

²⁰ So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice.

²¹ Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? If ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the Sabbath.

²² And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.

²³ In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab:

²⁴ And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people. ²⁵ And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. ²⁶ Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. ²⁷ Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives? ²⁸ And one of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son in law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me.

²⁹ Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites.

³⁰ Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business;

³¹ And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good

The rest of the chapter. The same three things they promised they wouldn't do and would do in Chapter 10, now years later, they are doing or not doing those things they promised to do. Not going to give our children in marriage to strangers, they did it. Not going to buy and sell on the Sabbath, they did it. Going to support the House of God, they stopped it.



I know they probably meant well in Chapter 10. I'm pretty sure they were sincere and committed to it when they said it in Chapter 10. I'm certain they probably tried their best. I'm positive they did. How do I know? Because I have made promises and tried real hard to not do things and no matter how hard I try....eventually....I end up like Chapter 13. Oh, there have been some successful moments, but ultimately in the end, I fail.

Let me tell you a secret to success. Stop trying.

You can't do it or else we wouldn't need Jesus. When you stop, He starts to perform a work in you. You will find that you will be able to do things you were never able to do before because of the power that now lives in you. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Then he noticed that the servants and keepers of the House were not taken care of. Then after everything was set up and returned to their proper place, the people, Judah started bringing tithes of corn (food), wine (drink), and oil. Not old wine....new wine.

Sets up administration for how to properly handle what was given for proper distribution.

Nehemiah asks God to remember him for the good deeds he has done for the House of God.

Nehemiah doesn't stop there. He continues his observations and finds that some of the folks in Judah were not holding the Sabbath as special. Instead, they were conducting transactions and treating it like any other day. He tells them this is evil.

Notice how he addresses the problem....in the form of a question. What are you doing to profane the Sabbath Day? More questions, didn't our fathers get us in trouble before doing things like this? Do you really think God will let this go on much longer if we keep this up?

Nehemiah instructs that the gates be closed and not open for business until after the Sabbath. Then he calls out the sellers with a question because they were hanging around outside the gate. You keep hanging around this gate, he said he was going to lay hands on them. We should chase away those temptations that hang around outside our own gates that are waiting for an opportunity to throw us off.

Tells Levites to get cleaned up and keep the gates protected to set apart the Sabbath. How do you sanctify the Sabbath? By guarding the gate and making sure certain things don't come into the house on that day.

Nehemiah still isn't through. He sees something else that bothers him.

He sees some Jews are married to outsiders and as a result, the fruit coming out of these relationship are causing the children to lose some of their heritage. They begin speaking another language rather than their original language.

Nehemiah deals with them as well. Asking more questions, didn't Solomon who loved God sin through hooking up with the wrong people in marriage.

He cleansed them from all strangers. Mentions wood offering and first fruits.



Throughout this, he asks God to remember him.