

Nehemiah 10-11

“You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly,” was the gist of the cry of Judah and all those who’d returned from exile in ch 9 of the book of Nehemiah as they were repenting, reviving, and renewing their relationship with God. The walls have been built; they celebrated the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles throughout the course of the 7th month. And every day of the Feast of Tabernacles Ezra would read to the people from the Word of God for hours at a time, there was a real revival and renewed interest in God’s Word, and as he would read, the Levites would mix and mingle through the crowd at designated times ensuring the people’s understanding. On the 23rd day they held a solemn assembly whereby they just sorta soaked in all they’d been hearing, reflected on the goodness and grace of God. And on the 24th day they assembled again in sackcloth, with fasting, they read once again from the book of the Law for 3 more hours, they worshipped the Lord for the following 3 hours, then a group of the Levites stood up and began to cry out to God in confession and repentance, “God You have dealt faithfully with us, but we have done wickedly against You.” And they were really seeking God for deliverance from the bondage that they were in, even though they’d been freed to return to their land, they were still under Persian rule, they still paid heavy taxes to the king of Persia.

And as they were seeking the Lord, crying out *to* the Lord, confessing their sins *before* the Lord, they came to a decision. And that’s the way it is when we’re seeking the Lord, we’re always brought to a point of decision, because it’s not about God’s being there for *us*, it’s about our devotion and dedication to *Him*. And we have to decide if we’re going to commit to Him, consecrate, and dedicate our lives to Him, or if we’re going to be content in compromise, or even status quo, because one thing for sure, He’ll never leave nor forsake you, so if there’s been a problem in the relationship, it’s not on His end. So they decided to make a covenant with God, and they placed it in writing and signed it.

And we mentioned this last time, it’s interesting how reserved we are to commit when it comes to serving the Lord isn’t it. Try buying a house, or getting a job, or dealing with any other person on the basis of, “I’m not going to give you my word, or really commit because I’m not sure that I’ll be able to follow through on that,” and see how far that relationship goes. You aren’t going to get a loan if you aren’t willing to commit to the payments. You aren’t going to get a job if you aren’t willing to commit to being there, yet when it comes to our dedication/devotion to serving the Lord, we’re so non-committal.

Now am I pushing you to make a vow or a covenant with God on your end? No, we realize according to what Jesus taught and the Holy Spirit through James confirmed that we're to simply let our "Yes" be "Yes", and our "No" be "No." And the fact of the matter is (as we discussed Sunday morning) that our relationship to the Father in Christ isn't one of a legal binding contract, it's one of a loving Father to a son or daughter. Our obedience should be out of the overflow of our love *for* God, not out of legal obligation *to* God, and the fact of the matter is that it's not about our promises to God and our trying to perform them, it's about the promises of God to us in Christ that He's already performed. But here's the deal, it seems that most of us as believers aren't simply willing to say, "Yes" to God. We're unwilling to commit, there is no other relationship in the world that allows for such inconsistency, try proposing on that level. Do you think your wife would've married you, or your husband would've followed through on a, "Well, we can give a go but I don't really want to say, "Yes" or commit because I might not be able to carry out my commitments,"?

We serve such a merciful God, He loves us and continues to be there for us even though we're so flaky with Him. Here in ch 10 they're signing their name on the dotted line, and they're committing to the covenant. And again I'm not pressing you in that direction, but God honors you when you honor your word. Aren't you glad He honors His Word? He desires us to be people of our word as well, unafraid of commitment, how much more worthy of your commitment is Christ as opposed to your mortgage company, or the lender on your car?

Vs1-2

And on down the row it goes with the various names of the leaders of the people, a select group of Levites, 84 people in total who (in representing the nation as a whole) placed their seal on the deal. Sort of like the Declaration of Independence, 56 guys signed it but the rest of us as a nation are represented therein, notice.

Vs28-29

You remember that we read that those who were apart of the service (regarding worship and the reading of the Word) were those who could hear *with understanding*. I don't know if they had some sort of children's ministry, or what they did there but those in the assembly were those old enough to understand what was going on and what was being taught. That's why we have this mention in vs 28 of everyone who had knowledge and understanding, because it's a reference to the fact that these people weren't entering into this covenant blindly, they knew what they were doing.

So though there were only 84 people who actually placed their seal on the covenant, they all agreed to it, and they did so publicly and unreservedly. And though the strength of the covenant would be found in the resolve of the individuals personally before God, in committing publicly it no doubt helps to strengthen that resolve through accountability. If I make a commitment privately before God that's *commendable* but if I make my commitment publicly, that's *accountable*.

And it obviously always goes back to the heart, we're not to do what we do to be seen of man, but yet some good godly accountability is always a healthy thing. If there's no one to help keep me accountable in a given situation the odds of me in some way not fulfilling the fullness of my word are much greater than if my commitment is known by others, sad though it may be, such is the tendency of human nature. So they all agreed to the covenant publicly.

And they entered into a curse and an oath in regards to God's Word to what? "Observe it, and walk in it," that is, they were committing to not be a hearer of the word only but also a doer. As James said, "*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*" James 1:22 Which is another way of saying that if you're only hearing the Word, but you're not doing what the Word says, you're only fooling yourself if you think it's somehow commending you to God or being a benefit to your life. It's not in just coming to church, or hearing the Word, we're to be doers, obedient, saying "Yes" to the Word of God. And I would imagine that as they were spending all those hours in the Word of God that one of the portions they went over was there in Deut 27 where Moses instructed that a certain group of the people were to stand on Mt Gerizim pronouncing blessings of obedience, and on Mt Ebal another group was to stand pronouncing the curses of disobedience, so that group of people would stand and shout, "Cursed is the one who treats his father and mother with contempt" and all the people would shout, "Amen!" "Cursed is the one who moves his neighbors landmark" and all the people would shout, "Amen!" And so they're entering into a similar type thing here whereby they're saying, "Cursed is the one who doesn't keep the covenant being cut this day, and we're taking an oath saying that we will."

And verse 29 is the principles, "To walk in God's Law, to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and His ordinances, and His statutes." These are the principles, the practicals pick up in vs 30, the hands on ways that they're going to honor God are spelled out in these vs that follow. So we have, "This is what we intend to do, and this is *how* we intend to do it." They're not just speaking spiritual linguistics or making these lofty yet ambiguous gestures, they're spelling it out right down where the rubber meets the road. "This is what we're going to do, we're going to honor the Lord and keep His Word, and this is how we're going to do that."

And they select 3 things primarily that they're going to do in order that they might begin to honor God, because I would suspect that these are the 3 areas that were the most greatly neglected in their lives personally and as a nation collectively before God. And I'd say they're not too far off if at all in the lives of believers today as well, because such is the nature of humanity. That's 1 of the things I love about the Word of God, what other book could you read that was compiled of writings 2,3,4,000 yrs old from cultures thousands of miles removed that would have any relevance to you today? Try treating disease from medical books from 300 yrs ago much less 3,000 yrs ago, that's one of the things that testifies to the veracity, or legitimacy, authenticity of the scriptures. Because it transcends time, because it deals with the heart and nature of man, culture may change, times change, hairstyles and cool clothing changes, but the human heart remains the same, and the bible deals with the inner man of the heart.

3 things that these people see as a desperate need to get in order before God, if you take notes you might want to jot them down. They saw the need to submit to God's Word in #1 Marriage, #2 Making Money, and #3 Supporting The Ministry.

And what you'll find is that these things are of importance to anyone who has separated themselves from the World, and unto the Lord. That's what we're seeing in vs 28, this was the commitment of those who'd separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God. The Lord was at work *in them* and they were being obedient *to Him*.

Vs30

In that day marriages were arranged by the parents, but the point remains and that is this; as believers we're not to marry just *anyone* for any *reason*. Our marriages are to be sacred, and set apart to the Lord. And obviously this carries the idea, and preserves the need to be equally yoked in the marriage union. We're to marry someone who has a like passion and an equal commitment to Christ, if you've given your life to serve Christ, it's going to be a radical strain on your relationship if your would be spouse has given their lives to the pursuit of something else. Now if you're presently in a similar circumstance, perhaps you came to Christ after you were married but your spouse still hasn't, don't freak out, stay there God can do great things. But the point here is that we should never knowingly/willfully choose to subject ourselves to such a position. But rather you should be of one accord one mind in Christ, and your objective in the marriage is at that point to grow closer to Him and to one another together. It's like the old illustration of the triangle, you're on one side, your spouse on the other and Jesus is at the top, the closer you both get to Him, you naturally get closer to one another. But if it goes any other direction it strains the relationship. So they're committing here (in essence) to Christ centered marriage relationships. Their marriages would be sacred, centered on the pursuit of God. They're not looking to base their relationships on any other foundation other than that of consecration to the Lord, and to His Word.

Vs31

What's this telling us? That not only would they maintain a sacred pursuit of God personally, but also *professionally*. The OT Law had forbidden them to work on the Sabbath, or various holy days throughout the year. But this particular law had been overlooked now for sometime, why? Simple, you can make more money in 7 days than you can make in 6. But what we're finding here is that they were committing themselves professionally to the acceptable parameters of God's Word. They weren't going to make a dime if it couldn't be done in a way that was in accord with the Word of God. And this is so important for us, living in a day when there are lots of ways to make an extra buck, and we so easily can slip into that slick business deal rather than being carefully to be above reproach, refusing to enter into a situation that compromises the standards of God's Word. And as I said, it can happen so subtly, and at 1st we feel perhaps like we were in a need to situation, bills needing paid, food needing to be bought, so we just kinda cut that corner, or find a slightly off colored loophole in the system.

But somewhere in there a transition is made and once we discover it works, it becomes a practiced habit, I'm able to make good money this way. That was the situation here, "Why would I close down shop on Saturday, that's when most people go to the market, I can make good money that day." But what they've discovered through the word of God is that their lives *personally* and *professionally* are intimately intertwined. If your personal ethic is different than your professional ethic, than there's a problem.

Every now and then you'll run across that person who seeks to differentiate between their personal life and their professional life or business ethic, as though professional ethics and personal ethics may vary. But the point here is that we're to honor the Lord 1st seek 1st the kingdom both personally and professionally, be it in the way we draw up contracts, deal with employs, or whatever. If you can't make money in a given situation within the acceptable parameters of the Word of God, then don't enter into that situation. Because in essence we're saying that we don't trust the Lord to meet our needs, but rather we'll rely on our own ingenuity (shaded though it may be). Be an individual of integrity when it comes to making money, don't be so quick to do whatever it takes to make a little extra here and there and God will honor it. They weren't going to make money if they couldn't do it in obedience to the Word of God.

The rest of the ch deals with their commitment to support the ministry, and really it's a natural flow, if they were committed to *making* money in a way that honored God, than they were going to be committed to *spending* their money in a way that honored God.

Vs32-33

Here's the deal, ministry is a costly thing, if it's to be done right it requires provision and demands sacrifice. They realize that, and they realize that they've blown life when it comes their willingness to really be behind the work of the ministry like they should've been. And because of that the temple service had suffered, and when the ministry suffers it's like a domino effect, it just snowballs from there, because ministry exists for the people, to glorify God. But if the people aren't behind the ministry, than how can the ministry be there effectively for the people? It's the "Body of Christ" principle, we all individually make up the body of Christ collectively. But when the body is disjointed, or not functioning properly, than the cause of Christ is directly effected. Not that God needs us, but that He's chosen to work through us, so if the feet are cut off the body, it's difficult to get very far. Well, here they're saying, "We're realizing that we've taken the feet right out from under the ministry," and they're committing themselves here to some physical therapy (spiritually speaking).

Time to learn to walk effectively in the name of the Lord again. And so they revert back to honoring the temple tax instituted under Moses, which was 1/2 a shekel annually from all the males 20 yrs of age and older but since they were in an economic recession they seemed to have cut it back to 1/3 for a period of time.

We all want to freak out over this 10% thing, but when you study the OT they were giving in reality more like 30% plus an annual temple tax. But not only would they give of the fruit of their finances, but also of their time and labor.

Vs34-37

What's the emphasis here? 1st Fruits, God is deserving of our very best. We make light of it from time to time and this hasn't happened in a long time. But every now and then that person comes along and says, "I was going to throw away this old raggedy couch, but if the church wants it you can have it." Newsflash, the church doesn't want it, because God's worthy of your *firstfruits* not your cast offs. I have an idea, you keep the old one and give God the new one. You see we want the best for ourselves, and whatever's leftover God can have. That's not the way it works according to the biblical standard. God gets the 1st fruits, be it of our resources, our time, efforts, energies or whatever. In Malachi ch 1 you find God rebuking the people because they were bringing all these lame/maimed/sick and blind animals to the altar. It's like they weren't good for anything else so we'll toss em' up on the altar of sacrifice. And God says, "Offer them to your governor, would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" And God says, "But you're offering them to Me, guess what? I won't accept them from your hands either." It's an insult to God to offer Him what's no longer of value to us anyway. Now I'm not saying that if something is in great condition that it can't be offered to the Lord just because it doesn't have a new price tag on it still, the point here lies in the position of the heart. What is it costing us to give to God? Because if it costs nothing, it means nothing. Remember David said that he *refused* to offer or sacrifice to God with that which cost him nothing. So here they're speaking of the priority not only of their income, but their out go as well, God comes 1st across the board. "*Honor the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; So your barns will be filled with plenty, And your vats will overflow with new wine.*" Prov 3:9-10 We're to give to the Lord of our 1st fruits.

Vs38-39

You might underline that last phrase, "...we will not neglect the house of our God." If you're reading from the KJV or the ASV it reads, "...we will not *forsake* the house of our God." I like that as well, of course we read in the book of Heb that we're not to forsake, or neglect the assembling of ourselves together. If things are where they need to be in our lives spiritually as individuals, that'll reflect in the corporate gathering as well. Ironside said this, "Depend upon it, if the Lord's people get right individually, that which is corporate will flourish, and there will be abundant provision for maintaining a visible testimony. Lack of spirituality closes up hearts, and purses. Godliness opens both." You see wherever the love of Christ and the love *for* Christ reigns, such people will not neglect the house of our God. I'm not saying that God dwells in temples made with hands, but the point is well taken. (Ch 11 quickly)

Not only did they want to make sure the ministry was provided for and the temple well cared for, but they also wanted to make sure that the city in which the Temple sat was well taken care of as well. So in ch 11 we find that they made a tithe (not only of their property) but of their persons to dwell in Jerusalem. Doesn't do a whole lot of good to have a well-fortified city if no one is living in it, so.

Vs1-2

We've noted this before but we see that the leaders lived in Jerusalem. The point we've noted is that the standard is to be set by the leaders. If you're the overseer of a particular project, but you're never showing up to be apart of it, doesn't send me the message that that particular project means very much, or else you'd be there. I realize we all live busy lives and that none of us can be apart of everything, but if you're overseeing a particular project or area of ministry, than you better be putting your hand to that area of the plow. That's what these leaders did.

As for the rest of the people they submitted to a lottery of sorts, they cast lots and 1 out of 10 men (with their families if that applied) would be selected to live in Jerusalem. So 10% of the population. And it met up with special challenges, being a freshly established fortress it was more open to not so much bands of raiders as in an un-walled city, but military attack. Plus there was a lot of work that needed done, and the economic situation was rough because they were primarily an agrarian people, but you wouldn't be farming in the city so you had to depend on supply and demand, trade skills, hired labor for pay, those sort of things. So you had to reprioritize your view of material gain, be willing to endure certain stresses, enemy attack, it was a social relocation as well.

So those who went willingly were really blessed, and esteemed by the people, and by the Lord as he recorded it here. And this is really what serving the Lord is all about, willingly and from the heart. But unfortunately its for many of the same reasons that people don't want to serve the Lord, there's a need to endure certain stresses, enemy attack, a reprioritizing of our view of material gain. A lot of people would just rather stay out of it, and that's really too bad, because God blesses, and honors all who *come* to Him and submit their *lives* to Him willingly, from the heart.

Vs3

They kept meticulous genealogical records so they knew which portions of land they'd been allotted from way back when they 1st came into the Promised Land. The rest of this is pretty much a bunch of names that don't mean a whole lot to you or me, but serve to remind us that God keeps record of our works done in His name and for His name, vs 11 mentions the leader of the house of God, who overseen all the work to be done.

There had to be administrative duties, scheduling, people had to be paid, there was janitorial type work, maintenance, grounds work, all kinds of things that people never think of so that what people see might run smoothly, well this was the guy over all that.

In Vs 17 is the guy who kicked off services with thanksgiving and prayer, in vs 19 we see the gate keepers to the temple who were a type of security watching over the store houses and various supplies of the temple.

Vs22-24

And from there a list of some of the people dwelling outside of the city. So, a lot going on and such is the nature of ministry, and people may never see what you do, but we see here that God does, so don't grow weary in your doing good, because due season you're going to reap if you don't lose heart. God's got a record of it all, and in Him your reward is sure.

Prayer Points: God help us not to lose heart, it's so ez to get frustrated and overwhelmed in the goings on of ministry. But may we serve you willingly, and from the heart. God work in us a heart that's separated unto You, submissive to Your word, and supportive of Your Work. May Your love reign in us and through us for Your glory.