

'Building Blocks of Faith Series'

Sermons in the Book of Nehemiah

Message 19 - 'What Follows 'Amen'? (3) Nehemiah 10:28 - 39



After a mighty reviving amongst the Lord's people that has rocked them to their very core, they have been responding to the working of God in their lives. We have been looking at some of the main actions that they took, in other words, what followed Amen? There has been a distinct return to the Word of God, and the people have committed to living lives ordered by the principles as set forth in it. There had been a real spiritual awakening that had then produced very real practical out-workings. We have seen how the people placed themselves under the authority of the Scriptures, we have seen how they resolved to separate themselves as unto the Lord, and in these verses we can see:

They Renewed their Support for the House of God - Whilst the issues that we see here in these verses are specifically relating to the people's provision and obedience regarding the temple, the principles found here are helpful to us and certainly should be heeded. In these set of promises and commitments, the people are making a very clear statement that they are looking to obey the Lord in His desire for the up keeping of the temple by obeying the laws that He himself had set in place. There is a passion and drive about the statement at the end, and because it is important to the Lord, it is also important to them, as they declare, 'we will not forsake the house of God'.

1. The Temple Tax (v32-33) - The purpose behind this tax was such that it was a reminder of the fact that they had been redeemed, and to do this, God had paid a price to set them free. In the light of this, they should conduct themselves as people who belonged to God. Is this tax in anyway relevant to us? One of the things that struck me was this, that they place a real importance on having a specific location for corporate worship and for the service of God. It was good for them to have a fixed place where they could be seen meeting together and worshipping God. It mattered to them. In v33, a description is given as to how the money should be used. Ultimately, it would be used to provide what was needed for the regular and special ministries of the temple, all of which were a part of the 'work of the house of our God'. Now in our current situation we are not in a position where we need to provide animals, or other materials in order for the church to function in its worship. Yet, there are very practical considerations to uphold ministry and the life of the church. Including the ministry as it is delivered, provision for the people, sharing with the needy, and the key is that we are to be good stewards of all that the Lord in His mercy gives to us. If Christians do not support the Lord's work, the Lord's work will not be supported.

2. The Wood Offering (v34) - Now, obviously this meant that wood needed to be provided continuously. I think that this is a lovely illustration in that it shows that even a very ordinary and humble thing such as wood was valuable in the service of the Lord. It was to be sanctified and set ablaze for His glory. The reality is this, that not everybody was called to be a priest, not everybody was able to donate things such as the lambs for sacrifice, but I am sure that almost anybody could have brought some wood to keep the fire burning.

3. The Firstfruits (v35-37a) - It was taught to the Jews that they should give to the Lord the first and the best. This is an excellent example for us to follow. Proverbs 3:9, '*Honor the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase*'. The key principle is that the people were to render to the Lord the firstfruits before they did anything else with their harvest.

4. The Tithe (v37b - 39) - The actual meaning of the word 'tithe' is 'a tenth'. In Leviticus 27:30-34, the explanation is given that the Jews were to bring a tenth of their produce for the support of the Levites. Undoubtedly, when you consider the Scriptures, it is true to say, that when the life of Israel is not doing particularly well spiritually, that the temple received little in the way of tithes. Now, how can we apply this to our own conduct as a New Testament Church? There is no express command to tithe in the New Testament. However, it is outlined that the people of God should give proportionately. All that we have is given to us by the Lord, and in this way we are stewards, and we must be wise in how we use that which He gives us. Our giving is to Him and for His glory.

When we consider all that God has done for us, our right response is to want to give of ourselves and what we have to Him. In Nehemiah 9:31, it makes clear that God did not forsake His people when they had a great need of Him, and as a result, the people here promise not to forsake the house of God.



Penzance Baptist Church

'Upholding the Ordinary Means of Grace'

Pastor Jonathan Stobbs