

'Building Blocks of Faith Series'

Sermons in the Book of Nehemiah

Message 22 - 'Righteous Reforming' Nehemiah 13: 1 - 9; 23 - 31



In previous weeks the Scriptures made clear that a great revival and spiritual awakening had taken place, a covenant had been agreed as a result, and there had been celebration in a time of great practical and spiritual blessing. It was truly marvellous to see the Lord work, and grant the people such joy, yet, when Nehemiah returned after a time away to begin his second governorship of Jerusalem, he finds both a practical and spiritual mess. We can see in these verses the record of his righteous reforms to get the people back to where they should be:

Superficial Separation (v1 - 9; 23 - 31)

If you were to look at chapter 10v28-29, in the light of conviction from the Scriptures, the Jews had decided to separate from the people of the land, and devote themselves to obeying the Law, and walking in a manner pleasing to the Lord. Yet, following an initial stand, it seems that this vow of separation had become increasingly superficial as the reality was that separation ceased to happen.

Mixed Multitude - We can see in the first three verses that there are Ammonites and Moabites within the congregation, and this was certainly not in keeping with the Law. As one commentator describes, the mixed multitude still causes problems for churches even today, 'the *'mixed multitude'* is composed of unsaved people who want to belong to the fellowship of God's people without trusting the Lord or submitting to His will. They want the blessings but not the obligations, and their appetite is still for the things of this world.' So many churches are looking to entertain, to make people feel good, promising a better lifestyle. What this church is about, is proclaiming the Gospel of grace that proclaims the glory of God, our separation from Him by our sin, our need of a Saviour whom without we have no hope, the Lord Jesus Christ who died as a ransom to save all those who will trust in Him, peace with God, a lasting joy, the blessings of a right relationship with God, and a confidence of eternal life. Nothing else in this world can begin to compare with the riches that are found in Christ Jesus, in the grace of God bestowed upon a sinner.

Embracing the Enemy - Yet, the mixed multitude was only the tip of the problem, for as we see in verses 4-9, there was an Ammonite living in the very temple itself. It wasn't just any Ammonite either, but it was one of Nehemiah's main opponents who had previously sought to kill him, and here he was nestled in the very spiritual heart of the city. He was not only defiling the house of God, but he was robbing the servants of God at the very same time. The enemy will look to attack the very heart of the people if he is able. He is always on the prowl looking for an entry, looking to take advantage. We, as a church need to be alert and awake, and pray for the Lord's protection here. What is Nehemiah's reaction to this imposition? One of righteous anger! He throws them out and all their possessions, rededicating the room to the Lord. In this manner, Nehemiah is a forerunner to the Lord Jesus as He too cleansed the temple in righteous anger, Nehemiah has to act alone, and so it was with the Saviour. It was not easy to take such a stand, and I am sure many criticised him for being rash, hasty, uncharitable, and extreme. The reality is that whenever a stand for truth is made, as the Lord blesses His Word, and those who faithfully proclaim it and stand upon it, the mixed multitude will not like it and their opposition will intensify.

Mixed Marriages - There was also another difficulty with the separation, as the people had promised in chapter 10 not to engage in mixed marriages. He sees Jews married to women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. He also heard their children speaking in foreign languages. The concern was that if these children were not raised to speak the language of Israel, how could they read the Law? How could they participate in the holy services? Nehemiah was so concerned as they were losing the future generations!

Lesson 1 - DON'T LET THE FIRE GO OUT - As we said right at the beginning, a fire needs to be tended to, stirred, and allowed to breathe. If you are a believer this morning as you submit yourself under the gracious hand of God, you need to make sure that your fire does not go out. The church has experienced this, the fire seems to be at low ebb, and so they turn to other things, things of the world, and they think their fire has been rekindled, but it is not the awakening from heaven. That is why we must not let our fire go out! Feed it with truth, the reality of God's Word, the wonder of saving grace, pray and commune with God, worship with the Lord's people, ask the Lord to keep you, we must stir one another up. Let us guard against complacency! Keep your fire stoked.

Lesson 2 - DON'T LET THE WORLD COME IN - What do I mean? Are we going to become a holy huddle? Certainly not! The purpose of this place is the glory of God and to proclaim the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world. Let the world come to hear, let them experience the love of God's people, let them see the offence of the cross, let them see their need of the Saviour, let them come, and let us go to the world with the Gospel of grace. That is not the lesson, the lesson is this, we must not conform as a church to do as the world wants us to do. The Lord has given to us in His Word the principles and practice that we must heed. Our desire above all is to please Him and not man. Christ-centred, Bible-based, gospel-ordered, and united in the love of the Saviour, those elements give to the world a glimpse of something that this world can never give in itself, for their origin is in heaven.



Penzance Baptist Church

'Upholding the Ordinary Means of Grace'

Pastor Jonathan Stobbs