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Nehemiah 13:1-14 "The Need for Daily Diligence - Pt 1" December 3, 2017

Shall we open our Bibles this morning to Nehemiah 13:1? We've mentioned to you often that this last portion of the book of Nehemiah is the longest report of a revival that you have in your Bibles.

Nehemiah had come to Jerusalem on the twentieth year of Artaxerxes, the king, according to chapter 2:1. He was in Jerusalem for twelve years, according to verse 6 (chapter 13), and then he went back to Persia in the thirty-second year. We don't know how long he was gone, but we do know that he was gone long enough for marriages to take place and children to be born and some of those other things that we read towards the end of the chapter.

But the final chapter (this chapter) in this book talks about what happens when he got back, so however long he was gone. He was there twelve years, was gone for a considerable amount of time and then came back. And the great revival that ends in verse 3 of this chapter is gone. It's almost like "when the cat's away, the mice play." And if you don't have good spiritual leadership, you have not much of a chance to keep going forward. That's why we need not only good leaders but good people around us to walk with God. It does highlight the need for continual commitment, unabated. The enemy is always around. And most of us will take the path of least resistance. Entropy. You remember from physics class. Randomness. There's something about a desire to just take the easy path, the downhill kind of road. So, from verse 4 onward, Nehemiah looks back to tell us what happened while he was gone, what he discovered when he returned, and what he did about it. And that's how the book ends.

We'd like to look at the first fourteen verses this morning; finish the book, Lord be willing, next week. Verse 1, "On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever come into the assembly of God, because they had not met the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. However, our God turned the curse into a blessing. So it was, when they had heard the Law, that they separated all the mixed multitude from Israel." This is it. This is the end of the revival. It is the transitional phrase between chapter 12 and 13. It is the last words about this glorious and sustained revival in Jerusalem and the

dedication of the people, the determination of the people, to do things the way God intended.

Note the pattern. You read what God wants, you determine to do what God says. That's how revival works. We align ourselves with the will of God, learning what God wills or wants. It's a simple formula, I guess. You should be selfish in your Bible studies. You should always first seek to make sure you are aligned with the things of God. Then you're in a good position to help somebody else. But until then, there really isn't anything else that you can do but take care of yourself spiritually.

However, in verse 4, it begins with the words, "Now before this," and Nehemiah will give us a report of what took place many years later and what happened when he returned to this nation and he found not only luke warmness in the hearts of the people, but in some people open defiance to exactly what God said - the antithesis of these first three verses or, if you will, of these last six chapters. There had been a real turning around.

The main lesson, certainly, of chapter 13 is the need to daily be diligent in your walk and aware that the enemy constantly wants to take you out. He doesn't go to sleep. You do. He's always on the go, trying to destroy what God has done. If you want to know what you have to do to backslide, the answer is - do nothing. But if you want to keep going forward, that's going to require more than just a passing interest. It's going to require a daily devotion to the things that you know are right for your life. And if you'll commit yourself to that and to the Word of God, then you'll be fine.

So, from Nehemiah and the leadership we learn that, if nothing else, pastoring comes with built-in setbacks and that the work of God is never finished and that the message doesn't change much. Get to church. Stay in the Word. Stay close to the Lord. And it's a message that you just have to teach over and over again, constantly reinforcing it, because the enemy wants to remove the essentials of your spiritual well-being from your life. It's easier to not go to church than to go. It's easier to not read your Bible than to read it. It's easier to be angry than forgive. It's easier to hate than to love. It's easier to do all kinds of things. But, if you want revival, you're going to have to devote yourself to going at it God's way.

"Now before this," verse 4, "Eliashib the priest, having authority over the storerooms of the house of our God, was allied with Tobiah. And he had prepared

for him a large room, where previously they had stored the grain offerings, the frankincense, the articles, the tithes of grain, the new wine and oil, which were commanded to be given to the Levites and singers and gatekeepers, and the offerings for the priests. But during all this I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. Then after certain days I obtained leave from the king." Nehemiah, in writing this last epilogue, remembers how things had been going when he left. Verses 1-3 - they were still at it, their commitment was still strong, there was still victory over the flesh. But then he looks back to when he returned - the decline that had taken place, the struggle that he faced as he faced a people that were not at all recognizable. And Nehemiah has to be this hammer in the LORD's hand. It's not easy to be someone that would call out others to say, "Look, you're not walking with the Lord. Let's be honest. You're not doing well." And though no one, I think, enjoys that, Nehemiah was willing to be (in God's hand) that word of reason and wisdom. Eliashib was the high priest when Nehemiah took off. It was a place of tremendous spiritual leadership. Everyone looked up to this man who was to be a representative of the LORD. But he didn't do very good in his calling because he was too tied in with the world. His friendship with those around the world was too strong. It turned his head from the things of God to his own detriment, to the detriment of the flock, and he began to make decisions from his place of authority that were driven by favoritism over godliness, by family interest over the glory of God. It began to cloud his view.

And notice that we read here that Tobiah And you might remember him. He was an Ammonite who was an avowed enemy of God's people. In fact, he has been an enemy from the beginning in this book. He shows up constantly to oppose what God was doing. Even in chapter 2, when Nehemiah hadn't yet even gotten to Jerusalem, we read of this fellow Tobiah that he was grieved that someone would actually come to Jerusalem to be concerned with the needs of the people there. At the end of chapter 2, he gathered together when Nehemiah did come, and they began to taunt the workers as they began to serve the LORD. In chapter 4, he was a part of that group that sent letters of threats of violence if the work was not stopped. He was part of that group. In chapter 6, he sent some more letters of threats and murder. And even later, "How about we just be friends and have some lunch?" All to no avail because Nehemiah saw through every trick. But here's an underhanded messenger of the devil who has hated the things of God. And yet the high priest now makes room for him in the Temple, rents him a room, gives him a place.

Eliashib had allied himself with Tobiah through marriage. In fact, Tobiah and his son (according to chapter 6) had both married Jewish women, though they were Ammonites. Remember what we just read in verse 1, "no Ammonite should enter in." Well, they had married Ammonites, and they had a strong alliance, and Tobiah was a phony. His name means "God is good." This guy was not so good. But now he was living in the Temple.

Nehemiah (according to chapter 2) had never so much as let this guy through the gates. "We don't want anything to do with you. You're not a part of this work. You're not a part of this people." He was aware of their affiliation through marriage with the Jews (according to chapter 6). When he had left, the high priest himself - the senior pastor, if you will, through partiality, rather than godly wisdom - had let this God hater move into the place of worship; and not just into the city, into the very Temple grounds where no Gentile should find themselves at all. But he was there.

Here's the danger when people in places of spiritual leadership ignore the wisdom of God and set a different set of rules for their family or for their friends than they do for the congregation or for themselves, that they begin to look the other way and dismiss sin as if it is nothing because "they're related to me." And they promote a lifestyle in the church that, certainly, God wouldn't accept (and they change the standards of discernment), the things that God would hate.

And Nehemiah finds a high priest that does exactly that. When the overseers are not caring for the well-being of the people spiritually, are only using their position for self-interest, then there's trouble. "Oh, I know he's not saved, but boy can he sing. And we need a good singer. I'm sure eventually he'll come to church more regularly. You don't know him like I know him. He's a good person. He just needs a chance." And then you begin to slack off, and the qualifications for the Scriptures set forth, you begin to ignore because you're friends. And that's what he's doing. And Nehemiah was gone, and Nehemiah wasn't for it, but he wasn't there.

So we read, in verse 5, that Eliashib gave Tobiah one of the storage chambers that had previously been used in the Temple to store the grain and the oil and the offerings that were payment to the priests and the singers and the gatekeepers. They had a big staff at the time. You remember (the last couple of weeks) that people had made commitments of themselves to take care of the Temple, to be sure that there were enough laborers there. They had valued greatly the work of

God and the things of God. They put them first, even in their financial dealings. In fact, all you have to do is go back to verse 44 of the last chapter, which ends with that commitment of the people that they would appoint over the storerooms people that would watch over and protect and pay out to these singers and gatekeepers all that the LORD had told them. And it had been going on for years. But it was going on, now, no longer. It had completely stopped.

So, Eliashib now has some empty rooms to rent out, and the high priest who was in charge of these things now finds vacancy through his poor leadership. And the giving had stopped, and the worship had stopped, and (according to verse 10) the priests had gone back to their families and back to farming, and they laid aside their spiritual work because there really was no support to have them there to serve. Eliashib was renting out rooms at the Temple to make ends meet. And the things of God, and the movement of God, and the revival that had taken place for these many years - that provided all that they needed, and more, when the LORD was put first - is no longer evident. And this place that once reflected the love of God in the hearts of the people for the spiritual service and all was now occupied by an evil man, and the work of God had stopped. Such a difference from everything we've read from chapter 7 forward. Things had just disappeared. God was set aside, and the enemy of God had moved into a room in the place of worship.

Revival is best maintained when you walk with God. And the minute that you stop - you just set aside those things that have kept you strong - it really isn't long before the precious things of God are now crowded out of your life, and the deceptive things of the world have taken their place; so that the fruit of God's presence is no longer evident. All you have is an empty shell. You have a room. It's empty. What was once filled with the Spirit of God is now filled with the enemy's presence. It's horrifying. The constant threat to your spiritual life is that Satan wants to introduce to you Tobiah. He'd like him to live at your house. He'd like him to take part of your life. He'd like to put him where God should be worshipped. And when he can get that done, three cheers from hell go up.

The very sins that had brought the last captivity (from which they had returned) were now finding themselves back in the lives of the people again even though (back in chapter 9:2) it says, "We've committed to separating ourselves from the foreigners. We confess our sins and the sins of our fathers. We're going to do things right." They had great intentions. They did really well for a while. But now it has disappeared.

Why do people, so excited for the Lord one minute, find themselves turning from that commitment so readily? At least part of the problem is in verse 3. The "mixed multitude" (before this, found initially in the book Exodus - those who came out with the Jews out of Egypt) were not all Jews or those committed to the LORD. They're called just this - "mixed multitude." And you will read, as you go through the book of Exodus forward, that they were always the ones on the forefront of causing trouble. If there were complaints against God, they raised them first. They were the loudest to grumble. They led many others astray. Every church has a "mixed multitude." In the congregation, in the pews, mixed amongst the people are those who come and go, not very regularly, but they come and they go. They're louder than most. They have opinions about everything. They're not really sold out on the Lord. They're good at pointing fingers and finding fault and stirring up contention, and they are a detriment to the body as a whole. And there was a detriment here. The people that had done so well began to be mixed up with those that weren't doing so well. And, in the case of the church today, the love for Jesus from the "mixed multitude" is usually based on ease and agreement; and when trouble comes, they just simply stop following the Lord. They're usually charismatic folks, they're personable, they're folks with lots of influence. People tend to listen to them, but they're nothing more than destructive. And Nehemiah demonstrates that you can't cater to the needs or to the demands of the louder "mixed multitude." You've got to minister to those who have hungry hearts for the things of the Lord.

So, Nehemiah's about to move this guy out. There is such a thing as "blessed subtraction." God adds, but God can also subtract. And in this case, the best solution was get rid of, remove forcefully if necessary, those who are destroying the spiritual well-being of the people. Now we are told, in verse 6, that Nehemiah had been gone for quite some time. Like I said, there's no, really, way to determine how long except in the context of the verses themselves. You would say it was years not weeks or months; he said "certain days," but that's kind of a general catch phrase.

At the end of verse 6, "I obtained leave from the king, and I came to Jerusalem and discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing a room for him in the courts of the house of God. And it grieved me bitterly; therefore I threw all the household goods of Tobiah out of the room." Yay Nehemiah! This is something we can relate to - force. Wouldn't it be great to force somebody to do something spiritually well? As a good spiritual leader, Nehemiah was angry -

disappointed with the high priest, disappointed with his actions. The words "grieved me bitterly" are just that - it broke his heart. He'd been gone for just a little while. He thought, "I'm going to return to verse 3, verse 2, verse 1. I'm going to return to the revival in good stead." And it was not. His anger - and he moved quickly to correct these - was not to defend himself. It wasn't at all about Nehemiah. Nehemiah was not getting anything out of this. In fact, Nehemiah was getting opposition and hatred, but he was interested in defending the name of the LORD and to defend the honor of God.

Paul had that experience with a fellow named Demas. You might remember that he served with Paul for a long time. Demas was a guy that Paul relied on. He wrote the book of Colossians and mentioned him by name. He wrote the book of Philemon, and he mentions him as well as being someone that he's in ministry with, had great dependence upon. And yet, by the last letter that Paul writes (2 Timothy 4), he said this, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica" (verse 10). "He's left the ministry. He's left the service of God." And it just broke Paul's heart. He was moved by it. Now Paul would continue, but those around him - not all of them did.

And here's Nehemiah. He's a godly man who has to make tough choices in caring for the things of God, and his first order of business, when he sees what's going on, is to do some spring housecleaning. I think it's pretty dramatic. All of Tobiah's belongings - furniture, possessions - are now set at the curb. Drastic? Sure. But pretty loyal and robust and diligent, don't you think? Don't you like a guy like Nehemiah? What did he do? Yeah, he put all of his stuff outside. He kind of 86'd him. He evicted him. He's not staying. You know, when you have a rabid dog, you have to get rid of him; he's not going to do any good.

Secondly, verse 9, "Then I commanded them to cleanse the rooms; and I brought back into them the articles of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense." He evicted him first. Second of all, he fumigated the place and put it back to using things for God's use. Eternal things first. He went back to putting godly things, spiritual things, first. I am sure that, in the process, he made some pretty good enemies right off the bat. I don't think this was well received, especially by those who are kind of sitting on the fence; probably not by the high priest's family and all. But if you want God's blessings in your life, sometimes you have to take some radical steps to get back on track. And sometimes they take radical decisions to be made. It should, I think, be noted that our alliances will

determine our characters. And Nehemiah has made friends with those who love the LORD. And if you looked at his friends, you would say, "Here's a guy that's going to do well because he's surrounded himself by people who want to do well." Look at your friends. Who do you call friend? And what are they doing for you spiritually? Paul wrote to the Ephesians (in chapter 5:11), "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them." Paul wrote, in chapter 1:12 to the Romans, "I want to get with you so that I might encourage you and you might encourage me with the mutual faith that we both have together." He said, at the end of the book of Romans (in chapter 16:17), "Brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them." He wrote to the Corinthians, "Stay away from, don't keep company with, sexually immoral people" (1 Corinthians 5:11). He wrote to the Thessalonians, "Withdraw yourself from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us" (2 Thessalonians 3:6). He wrote (in the chapter we read this morning), "Don't keep company with those who you should be ashamed of" (2 Thessalonians 3:14). Who you pick as a friend determines your character. Eliashib, the high priest, hung out with a worldly man, and he became a worldly man. Didn't change him at all; didn't change him for the good, anyway. Pick your friends carefully, those who will strengthen your walk. Who would want to be this guy anyway? He plays spiritual leader, but in the back room, he's makin' deals. He's really hiding his true self - crowding out the things of God, one room at a time. He's a phony.

Verse 10 tells us, "I also realized that the portions for the Levites had not been given them; for each of the Levites and the singers who did the work had gone back to his field. So I contended with the rulers, and said, 'Why is the house of God forsaken?' And I gathered them together and set them in their place. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the storehouse. And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouse 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 considered faithful, and their task was to distribute to their brethren." So Nehemiah does something even more important - he doesn't just clean the place, he reestablishes it. He went to find a worship leader, and he was out plowin' the field. He went to find the priest who was going to lead in the sacrifices, and no one was to be found. There was a "Closed" sign on the place of the worship. And the cost of the sacrifice, the maintaining of the spiritual well-being of the people - that the nation had established during the time of revival - now there was an enemy in the camp, and

the people had quit giving, and they didn't trust Eliashib, and they shouldn't have. You can only guess why. And so he replaces the leadership. He puts a guy in charge who's faithful and said, "You take care to pay these guys and to gather the offerings and to be a good steward of that which God has given to us." Never place into authority those with great qualifications but their spiritual lives are a disaster. Who needs that? Eli's sons - he put them in charge, there in 1 Samuel 2. He drove the people away. Nobody came to worship God because these guys were just crooked. Well, here, the Levites had to leave their spiritual responsibility post to go feed their families, and the work of God in their hearts grew cold, and the blame fell upon the leadership; and the compromise.

Back in chapter 12, like I said, verses 44-47, there had been this acknowledgement to keep the Temple working because that was the connection place between God and the people. But now the Temple stood empty. I don't know if you've been through Europe, but there're an awful lot of beautiful cathedrals in Europe that are on city tours that are absolutely empty. Go to the Duomo in Milan - it's magnificent, and it's empty. It used to be filled with worshippers; it is no longer that. Every major city in Western Europe was built around a church. The church is usually found in the middle of the city. Go to Venice, and every road will lead right to the center of town where the church is. But there're no people there anymore. What once was is no longer. That's what it is. It's a building. Nehemiah was not going to be satisfied with a Temple. So he goes to put things back in order. It took tough decisions. It took moxie, a determined attitude. He wasn't going to dump it off on someone else. He wasn't going to walk away shaking his head. He was going to be involved and see it through. He wasn't done.

So, verse 11, he contends with the rulers. He meets with those that should have known better. He was on a tear. He throws out Tobiah. He cleanses the clocks of the leaders. "This isn't what we've signed up for. Don't you realize what you're doing to the people? Go get them back. Get them back in place. We need to get back to worshipping God. God first. God first." That was his message. And putting them, in verses 12 and 13, back in position, the offering became a reality again. The people now had confidence in the oversight, and they began to come and worship with joy, and the integrity was established, and Nehemiah was blessed by God. Fruitfulness came. You've got to love this guy. He's a tough but awesome guy.

But notice he says, in verse 14 (and it is something that we will read and have read several times in the book), "Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not

wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its services!" I don't think this was a prayer for God to bless him personally, but I think it was a prayer to say, "LORD, remember the effort that we've made" because there was a great cost attached to it. The cost for Nehemiah was great. "God, please use it to bless." And because He did, the integrity of the worship and the place of worship would be established for quite some time. It will again run out, by the way. There is no Nehemiah 14, but there's a history of Nehemiah 14, and it would last for a while. But, again, when the leader passes off of the scene, so often so does the work.

So next week, we'll pick up the last bit of crooked things. We're going to get to read that Nehemiah's gonna yank guys by the hair and start throwin' 'em around (verse 25). We're going to start that next week, and we'll see how we do.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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