

Series: Transforming the World in which God has Placed Us

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

January 28-29, 2006

Nehemiah 10:32-29

“Facing Neglect Head On”

Israel was guilty of inattentiveness, which is largely what Nehemiah 10 is about

We often view this as a book about God building a wall

- But deeper in, we discover this is really about God building a people
- But then, this is always what God is doing

He is most interested in building people, not things

- The wall and the people parallel
- For like the wall, they were in ruins
- Burned out, spiritually decayed, vulnerable, exposed, broken
- **NEGLECTING** God, their lives were reduced to shambles
 - As our lives can become, when we turn away
- Missing what God intended for them to be
 - A mighty nation, favored by Him to share His word and His wealth with the world
 - And be the world's light so that God's salvation would be global
 - But they instead became a people the world mocked

But God never gives up on those He loves

- So Nehemiah, **LIKE US**, is the story of His work of repair
 - Rebuilding broken people
 - With the same tools He uses with us: Word, Prayer, and Spirit
 - Surgical tools, that sometimes come with pain
 - The reading of Word, the work of the Spirit, brought a profound sense of guilt
 - A deep realization of unfaithfulness

Like Adam and Eve, they suddenly realized their spiritual nakedness

- They had refused to listen to God
- They had become idolatrous
- They had turned their backs on God, His Word
- Totally neglected His ways

And God had turned them over to the nations they wanted to imitate, and it was killing them

They could have lightened this load of guilt

- By justifying their actions: "the pressures, temptations are just too great"
- By minimizing them: "okay, we're bad, but not as bad as these pagans around us"
- By overlooking them: "these are our tendencies"

Or they could come to grips with their failures, stop pretending

- Face them head on, which they did, beginning with confession
- That led to repentance, CHANGE
- Which was necessary if they were to renew their vision as the people of God
 - Experience His blessing
 - For there are certain things God blesses
 - The first being faithfulness

So they made a list of promises, three areas we must, if we are to live in God's "blessable" boundaries

1) In the area of RELATIONSHIPS - WE PROMISE TO LIVE A LIFE OF SEPARATION (verse 30)

- Not isolation, but a disconnection from the things that will only bring us down
 - For they were surrounded by pagan religions and cults, and they had embraced their idolatries
- They vowed to enter only in the relationships that honor God
 - To stay within the boundaries which honor Him

2) In the area of TIME - WE PROMISE TO ENTER INTO GOD'S REST (verse 31)

- To keep the day holy, get back in God's rhythm
- And by it remember we have been saved from the bondage of work-aholism
- We have been delivered from "shop till you drop"

Finally

3) In the area of POSSESSIONS - WE PROMISE TO NO LONGER NEGLECT THE NEEDS OF THE HOUSE OF GOD

- Read verses 32-39
- Let's break this down:
 - A) We assume a RESPONSIBILITY we have up till now avoided (verse 32a)
 - We promise to place ourselves under God's will
 - And place our possessions under His ownership
 - B) WE PROMISE to give that which will enable corporate worship (verses 32-34)
 - To use our possessions to facilitate the service of God
 - To offer on the altar the things that will get us right with God
 - C) WE PROMISE to give the first part (verses 35-37a)
 - 1. To give to God the best our best possessions
 - The best of the fruit of our work (verse 35)

- The first of our family (verse 36a)
- The first of the things we own (verse 36b)
- The first of all of our earnings (verse 37)

2. Which was all about trust

- Because it does not involve trust to give God the leftovers
- To give the last part, when all of your needs are met
- The bruised, the lame, the rotten
- Trust is when you give the first off the vine, without knowing what will come next
- Trust is giving up what you prize the most, which is often the first part

- There was a fourth promise

D) WE PROMISE TO GIVE SYSTEMATICALLY and proportionately (verses 37b-38)

- The portion due God, not hit and miss, not random
- But proportional, regular

All of this tells us two things, what all of Scripture declares, what Jesus taught when He walked this earth

1) HOW WE VIEW OUR RESOURCES MATTERS TO GOD

- Israel had come to grips with this, so must we
 - A. We can view our resources as POSSESSED BY US, OR LOANED TO US
 - B. We can view our possessions as EARNED BY US, OR GIFTED TO US
 - There's a vast difference in the two perspectives
 - C. We can view all that we have AS BY OUR STRENGTH, or realize that even the ability to earn, is God's gift
 - The ability to work, the mind to think, the hands to create, the health to get up, the energy to stay at it, are all from God
- Israel had come to grips with what they had forgotten
 - That everything we have is ultimately stamped with the words "HIS! GOD'S"
 - I love how Zechariah 14:20 puts it: "May everything be inscribed with 'Holy to the Lord'"

Point - There's only one Owner in the universe

- The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, AND ALL WHO LIVE IN IT (Psalm 24:1)
- Implication: I am nothing more, nor nothing less, than a manager
 - A financial planner enlisted to manage what is not mine

But it is more than how...

2) WHAT WE DO WITH OUR RESOURCES MATTERS TO GOD

- Returning to Word, Israel realized it matters to God what they did with their possessions
 - A. That we can choose to POSSESS OR INVEST
 - B. That it is far wiser to INVEST RATHER THAN POSSESS
 - C. And there is no investment GREATER than God's kingdom

- And so they redirected their wealth, as perhaps some of us must
- Why? There are lots of compelling reasons—
 1. WE MAKE POSSIBLE PEOPLE GETTING RIGHT WITH GOD
 - Can there be a greater encouragement than to enter heaven and meet someone who says, "Thank you for investing in me?"
 - "I'm in heaven because of your generosity to the service of God"
 - The bricks and mortar and lights and bread on the altar and hymns and screens and organs and drums
 - "I grew deeply in Christ because you invested in what enabled me to grow"

- Why should we?
 2. WE MAKE POSSIBLE OUR FUTURE WEALTH
 - When we give ourselves to advancing the cause of Christ, our efforts reach beyond time and space
 - We can choose to store it up here, but the reality is, it diminishes with time
 - And every day we get further from it, for we're all terminal
 - But when we invest in eternity, every day we are closer to an investment that is waiting for us, is secure, currently earning amazing interest, and will pay incredible dividends
 - We can't take what we have with us, but Scripture tells us we can send it ahead

Illustration - I'm losing my inhibition here

- First, because I otherwise may signal that it is possible to be spiritual and not be generous, AND THAT IS SIMPLY NOT TRUE!
- Second, what matters to me is that we will all one day be rich in eternity

- Why invest?
 3. WE MAKE POSSIBLE GOD'S BLESSING
 - For the irony of giving, is that the more we give, the more we receive
 - Blessings that are sometimes material, blessings that transcend, like peace, a more intimate walk with God

4. WE BECOME MORE INTIMATE WITH GOD - for where our treasure is, that's where our hearts are

Illustration – Uncle, all of his investments went into stocks

- All he has done for the last 10 years is sit in front of CNBC
- It's where his heart is, and now that his mind is nearly gone, he is simply a shell, leaving an empty world to an even more empty eternity

Point - where you invest is where your heart goes

5. WE MAKE POSSIBLE OUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

- For giving has incredible character building potential
- Has a way of putting to death possession obsession
- It enables us to remember it is His, not mine
- We come to realize it is never about what God needs
 - It's more about what we need
- And so it makes great sense to invest in God's kingdom
 - In people abroad, in seminaries, in the house of God
 - Not that Village, or for that matter, any church represents where God resides
 - But it represents (or should anyway) the place where we should anticipate His Presence, because the gathered church is there
 - It is the place we move from individual to corporate worship
 - The place where we live out community, where spiritual gifts are unleashed, people are healed
 - Where we gather resources to help the powerless, reach the lost
 - Be it in Washington County, or Gujarat, India
 - Where we come together to become a global influence

What keeps us from giving?

- Lots of things
 - Possessiveness, unbelief, ignorance of Who is owner, insecurity and fear
 - Perhaps the greatest one is this, the illusion this is our home