

PP **Nehemiah: Bringing the Gospel to the Surface**

Text Nehemiah 5:7-13

Part 19, Nov 3-4, 2012

Illus I saw a video recently showing how Bushmen catch monkeys. This particular hunter used a hole in the side of earthen berm, and inserted some food. A monkey came along and put its hand in the hole, which fit until clenched. The hunter then came, and the monkey thrashed wildly flipping upside down in panic, but would not let go of its prize to pull its hand out. It was easily captured.

Our spiritual enemies slip those pleasures of the world into those holes, baiting the hook
Temptation works by appealing to desires within our hearts
I'm not at all tempted to smoke, or get drunk, they don't gain traction in my heart
But I am tempted severely in other ways, and it pulls at the desires already in my own heart!
We reach for these baited hooks which promising fulfillment and satisfaction, and Satan gains the victory
Someone recently told me how he had struggled with terrible, awful desires most of his life, until finally, one day, his desires just changed, and the old temptations no longer appealed
That is what freedom is, not freedom from temptation, but a set of new desires that now can say,
I'm not taking the bait, I want what God is willing to give!

Yet we often sit in prisons of sin, even though Christ has opened the doors and broken the locks

PP The gospel tells us that ***“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”*** Galatians 5:1

Yet we often slip our necks right back under that yoke of slavery and find ourselves trapped within strongholds of sin

The fact is brother and sister, we are set free in Christ and we have the power of the Holy Spirit

PP Who is ***“training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives”*** Titus 2:12

Are you struggling with your hand in that opening, bait tightly clenched?

Maybe it is greed, or worldliness, or fear; maybe it is power, position or pleasure

You hear the hunter coming, but you cannot seem to let that sin go

You need the power of the gospel to set you free and today we will see how it works!

God knows our battle, and He has provided the Gospel to set us free and it works today as it did in Nehemiah's

Last week, we saw that what the enemies of Israel failed to do, their own people succeeded: get the work on the wall of Jerusalem to stop

Internal conflict in the community of God's people does this: halts the work in the kingdom

The wealthy Jews were exploiting their poorer brothers, profiting from their circumstances

They didn't care that there was a famine, or that the poor were struggling under high taxes

They had the means to help, but instead of showing love and mercy, they exploited them

They were lending money with interest, breaking the law of God

And when those loans could not be repaid, they were taking their properties, and forcing their children to be their slaves until payment could be made

Israel, called by God to be set apart from the nations and holy, were no different than the rest

Selfishness, greed, love of money, worldliness was tearing God's people apart

Thomas Merton said it well: *“To consider persons and events and situations only in the light of
PP their effect upon myself is to live on the doorstep of hell.”*

What we’re about to see in this passage is a picture of how the gospel works in God’s people to help us be a people full of God’s mercy and love

PP 1. The Gospel Produces Remorse

The aim of the gospel is to drive us to our great need of help in Christ
The Law of God, given to a great group of former slaves was a picture of God’s holiness
A mirror if you will, showing the perfection of God
To be like God, to be in fellowship with Him, here is how you must live
But no one could perfectly keep that law, and God’s plan all along
He provided the sacrificial system in the OT to show them their great need of One Who could keep it and would die in their place
The Law was to drive the people to brokenness so they would turn to Christ in faith

The gospel’s intent is to produce remorse and brokenness in us, and it does so by laying charges against us!

“I brought charges against the nobles and the officials...And I held a great assembly against them...They were silent and could not find a word to say.” 5:7, 8

You know we are not remorseful when we are still defending ourselves...***could not find a word***

Illus I’ll never forget the person who sat in my office, admitting an addiction that was bringing God’s discipline, and telling me that he wasn’t willing to stop, spurning the help offered

The Gospel comes against the unrepentant believer, laying charges against our souls, what the bible calls conviction, or a guilty conscience, or godly grief

PP We can discern between misery and brokenness, insincere grief and real grief: ***“For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.” 2 Cor. 7:10-11***

PP 7 Signs of Godly grief:

a-‘*earnestness*’-means to make haste, to be quick to change our hearts and our ways
There is no contemplation, no time necessary to consider, no *‘I’ll deal with this sin later’*
Earnestness is not indifference or complacent about sin, rather serious and urgent to deal with it

PP b-‘*eagerness to clear yourselves*’-Godly sorrow produces in us the strong desire to make the situation right
To clear their name, mend the way, clear yourself in the sight of God

PP c-‘*indignation*’-the heart filled with godly anger that hates the sin in his heart

It is a holy displeasure, and personally-directed outrage that he has brought shame on himself, others and offended God

PP d-‘fear’-When the gospel lays bare our true heart condition, it produces the fear of God in us, the realization that my sin has been chiefly a war against our God Who loves us

PP “Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight” Psalm 51:4
Every sin is, at its deepest point, vertical!

PP e-‘longing’-how beautiful it is when God gives us the longing to want freedom from sin
To be able to say no to what we know is ruining our lives

PP f-‘zeal’-the gospel produces in us the spirit to fight, the holy effort to get rid of the sin in our hearts, to grow in the disciplines of the Lord

It is a gospel-produced determination to obey God, empowered by His grace

PP g-‘punishment’-the gospel reminds us that there is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood

It is the language of grace that reminds us God took each sin and deposited it into the account of Jesus Christ Who paid for it through His death on the cross for us

Every sin we commit-past, present and future-was poured out on Jesus Christ on that terrible day
Godly sorrow is the soul awakening to the horror of our personal sin and it has the power to move us to what we see next

PP 2. The Gospel Calls for Repentance

The Gospel lays charges against our sin to bring us to brokenness: ***“Blessed are the poor in***

PP *spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”* **Matthew 5:3-4**

Only broken people reach for God’s mercy found at the cross, and truly repent!

Repentance is an about face, a change of mind that results in right behavior

“Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the percentage of money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them.” **Nehemiah 5:11**

They were taking from their brothers suffering hardship, exploiting them in their circumstances

What are we to repent of today, here, at Cornerstone?

Is there anyone outside of our love and mercy?

Do we really think of the needs of others more than ourselves?

Do we view all our possessions as truly owned by God, and we the managers of His estate?

Do our giving and generosity reflect a detachment from this world and an investment in eternity?

Is there anywhere that we have put our necks back under a yoke of slavery?

What has a hold on our lives that God wants to free us from?

PP 3. The Gospel Moves us to Restore

“Then they said, ‘We will restore these and require nothing from them.’” **5:12**

We will set the slaves free, we will give back the poor their fields, we will loan without interest

In short, we will show mercy and love

In doing so, they will be restored to joy and unity, and effectiveness in the mission of rebuilding

and restoring Jerusalem

PP Remember David's great prayer of repentance: *"Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you."* Psalm 51:12-13

Forgiven people are restored to the mission of rebuilding others as we commit ourselves to God!

PP 4. The Gospel calls us to Recommit

"We will do as you say." 5:12a

The repentant nobles and officials promised to do what Nehemiah instructed
Oaths were made in front of witnesses, so Nehemiah pulls in God as the chief witness,
represented by the priests

"And I called the priests and made them swear to do as they had promised." 5:12-13

This is a promise to God, not just to Nehemiah, and Nehemiah made sure it included consequences if broken: *"I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, 'So may God shake out every man from his house and from his labor who does not keep this promise. So may he be shaken out and emptied.'"* 5:13

Then he performed a prophetic act of shaking out the fold of his garment, symbolizing what God will do if they do not keep their word

No one should promise God anything lightly without really thinking through the promise

PP *"When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it"*

Eccl. 5:4-5

PP 5. The Gospel Directs Us to Regroup

"And all the assembly said 'Amen' and praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised." 5:13

Do you find it interesting that *"all the assembly said 'Amen;'"*?

Nehemiah was laying these charges against the nobles and officials in a 'great assembly'

Yet all the people said *'Amen'*, meaning *"so be it"*, or *"May the Lord do all that you said!"*

Not only did they agree together, then they worshiped together

The wealthy who would not walk in the fear of the Lord, now walked worshiping Him

The gospel had done its work!

Friends, one of the main reasons so many of us find ourselves back in bondage, with our fist in that hole, is that we are trying to live the Christian faith by ourselves

I honestly have found this precise point to be the most discouraging one I have tried to teach here

The gospel brings us to remorse and brokenness so we will repent

The change the gospel brings is a new orientation where we live out love, mercy and godliness

We recommit to obey God as He has commanded

And we often have the best intentions which die in terrible defeat because we try to live after Christ on our own

The gospel consistently moves us back into the strength of community, into biblical fellowship!

I've seen Christians overcome terrible struggles when they commit to live in deep fellowship

Friends, I have never met a Christian yet who has a close walk with Jesus Christ and at the same time cuts him or herself off from Christian community

Like it or not, and some hate it, we need each other!

If you want the power of the gospel to take hold of your life and lead to lasting change, it must be in the power of biblical fellowship

Friends, we are saved by the power of the gospel, but what many people overlook is that we are being saved by that same power

Every day the faith-sustaining, transforming power of the gospel is at work in us

When we have our hand in that hole clenching that sin unable to let it go, and the hunter is coming to lead us back into a bondage that should never be, the gospel is at work

It is driving us to godly grief and remorse, true brokenness

It is moving us to repentance, a change of mind that results in new desires and new behaviors

It is restoring the joy and the strength of our salvation so we will get back to serving God

It is enabling us to recommit, to walk faithfully with God

And it is placing us right back in the midst of the community of God, the church, where we will be encouraged and strengthened to be faithful!

This is the gospel's way!

What has God said to you in this message?

Pray