

PP Nehemiah: 4D Praying**Nehemiah 10:30-31****Part 35, 5/19-20, 2013**

PP I want us to see what D.L. Moody once said: *"A holy life will make the deepest impression. Lighthouses blow no horns, they just shine."*

Two weeks ago we saw that there are three recommitments that they are making, and the first

PP one was *"By God's Grace, We will make the Word of God our practice!"* (28-29)

PP Recommitment #2-By God's Grace, We will Make Holiness our Pursuit (30-31)

Why did God choose Israel to be His people?

PP *"I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."* **Isaiah 49:6**

God loves all people, and the mission of Israel, and of the church today, is to be the lighthouse of God's love, so His salvation will spread around the globe

But here was the problem in Nehemiah's day, and it is the same problem we share

The lighthouse was not shining because they were no different than the people of the world

Christian brothers and sisters, you are saints, meaning holy ones, called out of the world and into the kingdom of God

Holiness is a distinctness from that which is of the citizenship of this world

We live in the world, but no longer of it, our citizenship is in heaven

We do not separate from nonbelievers, and form protective cocoons to live within

We live among unbelievers as the fragrance of Christ, showing love, and speaking truth

PP *"let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God."* **2 Corinthians 7:1**

But the distinctness of the God's people had blurred and in Nehemiah they recommitted to it

They *'separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God'* **Nehemiah 10:28**

God's will for His people has always been that they might maintain an uncompromised

testimony down the centuries and share His message of salvation with other nations

These two verses offer 4 ways the people of God of every age and do this

"We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. And we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt." **30-31**

PP a) *Our families will be set apart for God!*

Do you realize that the institution of the family is under attack?

PP Feminist Roxanne Dunbar said it plainly: *"Ultimately, we want to destroy the three pillars of class and caste society—the family, private property, and the state."*

PP Lesbian journalist Masha Gessen brazenly wrote *"the institution of marriage should not exist...fighting for gay marriage generally involves lying about what we are going to do with marriage when we get there — because we lie that the institution of marriage is not going to change, and that is a lie."*¹

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/lifematters/why-get-married/4058506>

The family is under attack, and marriage specifically is at the crosshairs of the devil

PP Billy Graham said it right, *“The home is the basic unit of society, and a nation is only as strong as her homes.”*

“We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land...” 10:30

It was the duty of fathers to secure wives for their sons and husbands for their daughters

They are re-committing to not mix their families with the people of the world

One of the reasons for this is that God’s people would maintain an uncompromising testimony and share His message of salvation to all the nations

Israel was no less a missionary people than we are and it was vital that their message would be uncorrupted by the way they lived their lives

By mixing their marriages, and diluting their devotion to the Lord, their witness to the nations would be destroyed

In the ancient world at that time, when two people made a marriage agreement, they normally confirmed their commitment in the presence of their gods and gave each other’s idols a prominent place in their new home

Nothing could be allowed to corrupt their love for and devotion to God and serving Him as witnesses to the ends of the earth

You see, the Lord was concerned with the purity of their faith and the holiness of their lives

The issue was not an ethnic one, but an ethical one, spiritual loyalty and doctrinal purity

Not that they were better than others, not superior

They were God’s people, and the people of the land were not, and the two cannot be joined at the deepest level!

PP Scripture is clear: ***“Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?”***

2 Corinthians 6:14

Pursuing holiness in their families required faith in God!

Marrying their daughters off to the people of the land formed alliances, secured business partnerships, granted positions of power

Both Tobiah and Sanballet, two of their greatest enemies, were related to the priests of Israel, through intermarriage

To refuse to marry their daughters off to nonbelievers forfeited wealth and security, would they trust their God to provide both?

It is a faith issue today with this as well

Will God provide a person for me that will love me if I hold to biblical standards?

The answer is, He will!

Those of you who are single, trust God, do not compromise, hold fast to biblical convictions!

He will give you all you need for satisfaction, and your message and witness will thrive!

PP b) *Our calendars will be set apart for God!*

“And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day.” 10:31a

They say a lot can be learned about who and what we love by looking at our calendars

God made 7 days in each week, and told His people to set one of those days apart from the rest, for 4 reasons:

That the people of God might honor Him, enjoy rest, help others and declare truth

When Israel was in Egypt, they worked 7 days a week, day after day, year after year

The Sabbath day was a gift to them, and only to them

No other nation on earth observed the Sabbath, as it was exclusively given to Israel

The whole household was given that day, children, servants, animals, visiting foreigners even so that they might taste and experience it, and so that Israel would not enjoy a day of rest at another's expense

It was an ancient Blue Law, where you close shops on Sundays, except this was on Saturdays

It was a day where by focusing on God, they would be a witness to all the other nations because Israel would not trade or transact business on the Sabbath

All the nations would know that Israel's allegiance to God far transcended business, domestic and social concerns

The Sabbath was one of the main ways Israel pursued holiness, yet repeatedly they let it go

They would stop honoring God, forfeit His rest, neglect helping others, and lose their witness

So it is hardly surprising that it was one of the first recommitments they made to God

But what about us today?

PP The Sabbath command was fulfilled in Christ: *"Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."*

Colossians 2:16-17

The Sabbath was to move their eyes forward to the Messiah Who would give them spiritual rest!

It was a shadow, insubstantial evidence that something greater was coming, eternal rest in Christ

Knowing it was fulfilled in Christ, the early church made the first day of the week, Sunday, a day to observe these same principles without the legal obligation

On that day they gathered to honor God; went home to rest; helped others through fellowship and remained a witness to the world who had no day off, often times ridiculed and punished

PP c) *Our possessions will be set apart for God!*

When our lives are established on God's Word (*Recommitment #1*) our desires change!

The relentless pursuit of more, the worry that God will not provide, begins to change to a heart that yields everything to God

The people recommitted to trust God: *"And we will forego the crops of the seventh year"*

Every seventh year Israel was to give the land a rest and it was done for 4 reasons

PP First, to remember that the land did not belong to them, but to its owner, God

PP *"the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me."* **Leviticus 25:23**

God is the rightful Owner of all creation, we are His managers charged with caring for it

PP Second, in order to care for God's property, it must have a regular rest in order to recover Short-term gain at the cost of long-term desolation is not acceptable to the land's owner!

Because God cares for His creation, we must above all people, care as well!

Recycling, preservation of resources, pollution concerns, water contamination are all important issues and must flow out of our stewardship responsibilities without elevating creation over the Creator

PP Third, letting the land rest on the seventh year expressed their love for others

PP *“For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard.” Exodus 23:10-11*

Nothing in scripture suggests that all the lands in Israel reached the seventh year the same time Nor that farmers would rest all their fields the same year, rather they likely rotated them But during the dormant years, a certain amount of produce would re-seed, and it was to provide the poor, and notice, the animals

God cares for all of His creation, expressing His love through the Sabbath land rest

PP Fourth, in obeying this command, Israel was expressing their faith in God

It is difficult for us to truly appreciate this recommitment, but they were an agrarian society How would they live when they let their fields rest, and would they have enough food?

Obeying God means to trust Him, and God is always faithful, without exception!!

PP *“Therefore you shall do my statutes and keep my rules and perform them, and then you will dwell in the land securely. The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and dwell in it securely. And if you say, ‘What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?’ I will command my blessing on you in the sixth year, so that it will produce a crop sufficient for three years.” Leviticus 25:18-21*

Our witness to the world is powerful when we, the people of God, live as managers of the possessions we have, rather than as owners

PP d) *Our relationships will be set apart for God!*

The fourth part of their recommitment to be the peculiar people of God is in verse 31, *“And we will forego...the exaction of every debt.” Nehemiah 10:31*

People always matter more than things to God, and every Christian must have that same attitude Debt in Israel was not often due to mismanaging money and frivolous spending

It was usually due to a death or illness of the primary wage earner, collapse of a family business or a condition such as drought, hail or others

In this case, deprived people had to borrow money, and then repay it

A Jew was forbidden to loan money to a Jew at interest, but in times of unfaithfulness, they did it

When the money could not be repaid, then they would be compelled to sell themselves as slaves to the to meet their financial obligations

So God created a distinct law that was only among Israel: *“At the end of every seven years you*

PP *shall grant a release. And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the Lord’s release has been proclaimed.” Deuteronomy 15:1-2*

PP *“When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing.” Exodus 21:2*

Again, as usual, we see that these commitments to obey God required faith!
Monies were lost and servants were lost!

We can bring this into our day as well in several ways, and I will share with you two of them
Debt is a crippling burden and is a perfect metaphor for enslavement to sin, which cannot ever be earned out from under it

God moved in the hearts of a couple not in our church, to pay off the debt that we were in
God’s desire for our freedom extends to all levels of it!

But there is another kind of debt that we regularly put people in, and we must deal with it!
Unforgiveness

Is there a face that comes to mind when I ask if you are holding back forgiveness from someone?
Anyone?

You may answer yes, and say that you are waiting for that person to ask for forgiveness

But the principle of letting go of debt, is that you must and can, by the grace of God, let go of all
debt by cancelling it, forgiving, dropping the charges, even when it is still owed you

And you’ll discover that by forgiving according to God’s principles, frees both yourself as well
as the one who wronged you

PP The people of Nehemiah were recommitting to pursue, by God’s grace, holiness
That would be different from the people of the land, and have a powerful witness of God’s
salvation

When we are not different from the world, we have nothing to say!

They would honor God in the way they marry; the way they fill out their week; the way they
manage their possessions; and the way they handle relationships

They would, by God’s grace, pursue holiness in every area of their lives!

Pray