

Standing for Truth # 31

Nehemiah 13: 15-22

As we continue our study in the closing chapter of Nehemiah, we continue to deal with the tragedy of decline that occurred in Nehemiah's absence. He had returned to Persia, fulfilling his obligation to the king, and was dismayed at what he found upon his return to Jerusalem. The sense of spiritual renewal the people experienced had been replaced with apathy and rebellion. The people had made a covenant with the Lord to continue in His Word and seek His ways, but their commitment began to fade with time. It is likely they did well for a while, but eventually they reverted back to the old way of living.

In our previous study we discovered their **Disobedience to the Scriptures**, their **Defilement of the Sanctuary**, and their **Disregard for the Servants of the Lord**. In our text verses Nehemiah addressed their lack of reverence and commitment for the Sabbath. This is to be expected. When a people lose their hunger and desire for the Word of God, His house, and His servants, it isn't long before they lose their reverence for the Lord's day as well.

It saddens me to admit it, but we too have traveled the same path as the people of Jerusalem. I can see a tremendous change in our society concerning the things of God in the years that I have lived. Long before my generation, a great spiritual decline began in America. There have always been those who neglected the Lord, with no desire for His Word or the church, but we used to be a people known for obedience to the Word and a commitment to serving the Lord and honoring Him. Those days have long since passed.

We are clearly in the midst of a spiritual crisis in America, but it doesn't have to continue. It is possible for us to once again return to the Lord and serve Him. I want to consider the [decisions](#) that are revealed in the text as we think on: [Standing for Truth](#).

I. The Corruption of Sin (15-16) – Nehemiah records the corruption that was prevalent within the city upon his return. Notice what we see:

A. The Publicity – [In those days saw I in Judah some treading winepresses on the sabbath, and bringing in sheaves, and lading asses; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. \[16\] There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the sabbath unto the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem.](#) There was absolutely no effort to hide their transgression. They were openly working in the winepress, bringing in sheaves from the field, and loading the animals with all manner of goods to be sold in the market places in Jerusalem.

- This was all being done publicly on the Sabbath day with no shame or remorse. The Sabbath had been reduced to any other day. It was no longer being honored as a day set aside unto the Lord. You will have to admit that the same is true in our society as well. Most have no problem doing any and all activities on Sunday. It is no longer viewed as the Lord's day, but typically as the close of the weekend, the last day to do whatever needs done. (Flea markets and yard sales are prominent on Sunday in our modern society.)

B. The Participation (15-16) – Nehemiah reveals that he saw some in Judah treading the winepresses, bringing in the sheaves, and preparing to go to the markets in Jerusalem. The men of Tyre brought fish and all manner of ware into the city to be sold in the markets. He found the children of Judah as well as the people of Jerusalem participating in this market atmosphere. This was not something that was reserved for a select few. The Jews surrounding Jerusalem, throughout Judah were participating. The men of Tyre had gotten in on the bounty, and it appears that the people of Jerusalem not only tolerated it, but actually encouraged it.

- I know that we don't like to think about it due to the many activities that are planned and engaged in on Sunday, but this was an abomination to the Lord. He was not pleased with the Sabbath being desecrated in this way. The Sabbath was to be a day of rest and worship unto the Lord, not another day for commerce and financial gain.
- I mentioned this a few weeks ago, and it bears mentioning again. We can seek to lay the blame on the world if we want, but the average Christian participates in much more than they would like to admit on Sunday. We cannot expect the world to honor the Lord's day if we are right there with them, engaging in all of the worldly activities as well.

I. The Corruption of Sin (15-16)

II. The Confrontation for Sin (17-18) – Here we find that Nehemiah refused to look the other way. He was convicted by what he saw and he was determined to confront those who had profaned the Sabbath. Notice:

A. The Accusation (17a) – *Then I contended with the nobles of Judah.* This reveals a strong confrontation. Contend means “*to make a complaint, to strive with, to debate.*” It has the idea of bringing evidence against one in a court of law. Nehemiah confronted the nobles of Judah; he went to those who were in charge, and expressed his displeasure in their activity. He knew that God was displeased with their activity; he had truth on his side and was determined to stop it.

- Much that we face today can be attributed to silence. The church has been silent too long. We know what the Bible says; we know what the Lord desires of us. We know that much today is being done contrary to the Word of God, and yet we sit by and let it happen without so much as a voice of opposition. I am not advocating that we be obnoxious or degrading to those around us, but we do need to take a stand for truth and make our voices heard!

B. The Assertion (17a) – *Then I contended with the nobles of Judah.* Clearly Nehemiah was a man of courage. These were men of influence and power. They were supporting and promoting activities that brought much gain to many people. Nehemiah must've known that his confrontation would not be popular with most of the people, but he was determined to stand for truth and please the Lord, rather than bowing to the pressures and dictates of society. He didn't go into the markets creating a fuss; he went to the source of the problem, the leadership.

- Standing for truth will not be popular and it will not be well received. The world engages in its activities because they please the flesh and are often lucrative financially. When you begin to confront pleasure or financial gain, you can look for a fight. Being all that we should be for Christ is not always easy, but we must stand for truth and confront sin. I am sure that it wasn't easy for Nathan, but he boldly stood before King David and declared, "*Thou art the man.*"

C. The Admonition (17-18) – The admonition of Nehemiah was twofold. Consider:

1. The Charge (17) – *Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the sabbath day?* Nehemiah didn't seek to "sugarcoat" the situation. He did not come to them with his head down in fear. He confronted them openly, charging them with committing evil and profaning the sabbath. This was far too important to ignore. Nehemiah could not neglect his duty. He had to confront this sin and rebellion.

- We must choose our battles wisely. Every mountain is not worth dying on. Many of the problems the modern church faces are matters of preference more than doctrinal issues. However, when we have a clear mandate in Scripture, we must be willing to stand. There are matters of preference that I refuse to debate, but I can assure you that I am determined to stand upon the Word of God. There are doctrinal issues that we cannot afford to compromise.
- Many in Nehemiah's day were participating in this evil, but that didn't make it right in the eyes of God. We cannot allow popular opinion or social pressures to cause us to compromise our stand. The world isn't going to agree with us or embrace our doctrine, but we must stand.

2. The Consequences (18) – [Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city? yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the sabbath.](#) Nehemiah knew that sin was never without consequence. In fact, Israel had been down this same path before, suffering the wrath of God because of this transgression. Nehemiah wanted them to be aware of the consequences of their sin. God would judge this sin if it continued.

- We hear very little about the consequences of sin in our day. It seems as if we have been surrounded by sin for so long that we have grown accustomed to it and even numbed by it. Society may embrace it, but we can rest assured that God will eventually judge unrepentant sin. [Gal.6:7 – Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.](#) Someone needs the courage to proclaim the holiness of God and confront sin.

I. The Corruption of Sin (15-16)

II. The Confrontation for Sin (17-18)

III. The Contention against Sin (19-22) – Nehemiah was determined to deal with this matter and see to it that these profane activities ceased. There is much wisdom revealed in how Nehemiah handled this difficult situation. We find:

A. The Identification (19a) – [And it came to pass, that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the sabbath.](#) Nehemiah identified the source of the problem and he addressed it at the source. He had cast his voice against such activity, but he was determined to ensure that it ceased. If they were not allowed access to the city on the sabbath, they would not be able to sell their goods on the sabbath. This was the logical solution: he shut the gates of the city just prior to the beginning of the sabbath and they weren't opened again until the sabbath was over.

- Are we willing to identify the problems in our day and address the source of the problem? We are good at laying blame, but I am convinced that we need to shut some gates in our lives as well. We must ensure that everything we allow into our lives, our homes, and our churches are consistent with the Word of God. If we would shut the gate on the world, we would keep a lot of hindrances out of our lives. By the way, it does no good to shut the gate after something has gained entrance. Let's do as Nehemiah and shut the gate beforehand.

B. The Instruction (19b, 22a) – and some of my servants set I at the gates, that there should no burden be brought in on the sabbath day. [22a] And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Nehemiah didn't just complain about the problem and demand that things change. He instructed his servants and the Levites concerning the issue. He equipped them to stand and bring about change.

- Many today know how to complain about the current situation we are in. It seems as if everyone has an opinion concerning what needs to be done to reach a solution. We hear a lot of negativity, but simply complaining about our situation will not bring about a resolution. The church needs to equip her people to respond to the difficulties we face. We need to be grounded in the Word and committed to living according to it. If all our children hear is complaining, they will never learn how to stand for truth and confront sin. Let's ensure that we equip them spiritually.

C. The Intervention (20-21) – So the merchants and sellers of all kind of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. [21] Then I testified against them, and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? if ye do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time forth came they no more on the sabbath. Some sought to ignore the command of Nehemiah, but he was committed to ending this iniquity. For those who would not hear, Nehemiah confronted them. They were warned that if they came again intending to sell on the sabbath, they would be arrested.

- We need the boldness and courage to take action and intervene when necessary. I know that we don't have the authority to arrest people, and we can't make them change their ways, but we can remain steadfast in our commitment. We may have to take a stand more than once on a particular issue. There will be times when it is necessary to get involved.

D. The Intercession (22b) – Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy. Nehemiah faced a difficult challenge. This was far more than he could overcome within himself. If he was to be successful, he would need the Lord's touch and His provision in his life. Nehemiah called on God to help him in his adversity.

- We have seen this many times throughout our study, but it bears repeating. We need the help of the Lord to overcome in our day. We cannot endure in and of ourselves. If we are to possess the courage and strength we need to stand and bring about profitable change, it will require the help of the Lord. We need to seek Him continually for His help.

There is much that we face in our day that is contrary to the Word of God. We live in a society that is increasingly more wicked and sinful. We have two options: look the other way and ignore it, or stand for truth and confront the iniquities we face. Someone needs to stand for truth in our day. If we don't who will? If we refuse to stand, what will be left for our children and future generations? I pray that we will seek the Lord and His strength to stand for truth and righteousness!