

Needing a New Heart

Nehemiah 12-13 - NCBC, September 4, 2016

Main: **Lasting restoration requires Divine Intervention.**

- **God's law reveals the sinfulness of our hearts (Nehemiah 13:4-31)**
 - o Divided Heart (7-14)
 - o Greedy Heart (15-22)
 - o Lustful Heart (23-29)
 - o Prideful Heart (30-31)
- **Christ alone is able to restore our sinful hearts (Galatians 3:2-4:7)**
 - o Giving us His Spirit (3:2-5)
 - o Providing us with His Righteousness (3:6-13)
 - o Blessing us with His Promises (3:14-29)
 - o Adopting us as His Children (4:4-7)

App: **Rejoice & Believe in Christ's restoring work!**

Opening Announcements: Women's Bible Study,
Children's Ministry Startup

<<In Christ Alone>>



And as He stands in victory – sin's curse has lost its grip on me...for I am His, and He is mine – bought with the precious blood of Christ! Thank you church for singing such profound truths together.

I now invite you to open your Bible to **Nehemiah chapter 13** as we conclude our study of Ezra-Nehemiah today.



If you do not have a Bible with you today, our ushers are coming now to give you a Bible. Please catch their attention as they pass by and it would be our joy to give you a Bible. You are welcome to take this Bible home as

our gift to you, or just simply return it after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room.



Last week we were reawakened to the reality of our disciple-making mission from Nehemiah chapter 11. God's people sacrificially move towards God's glory with their lives. So have you taken time yet to start your own disciple-making plan?

Last week 250 of us took one of these plans home. But now comes the challenge – will you read it and complete it by God's grace? Can you imagine what God's Spirit intends to do in us, and through us, for His greater glory in our communities – as we together get intentional this fall about the mission He has entrusted to us?

Well today we come to the conclusion of Ezra-Nehemiah – and we encounter a rather depressing end to this book.

Ezra + Nehemiah
GOD RESTORES

Ez. 1-6	Ez. 7-10	Neh. 1-7	Neh. 8-13
Restoring the Temple	Restoring the People	Restoring the Wall	Restoring Worship
Zerubbabel	Ezra	Nehemiah & Ezra	
Haggai & Zechariah	-	Malachi	
First Return 538 BC	Second Return 457 BC	Third Return 444 BC	

56 Year Gap: *Ezra* 13 Year Gap

In **chapter 12** the people dedicate the new walls around Jerusalem and enjoy praise and worship with offerings around the temple in the middle of the city! It seems as if their worship has been fully restored, and all is well with God's people.

But then we read chapter 13...and it's like we lose all the ground that we gained in the last 70+ years. Something more is needed. God's people keep backsliding into ruin.

So the conclusion of Ezra-Nehemiah actually highlights the truth that God's people need a new heart.



The law is unable to bring about lasting restoration.

So please stand with me in honor of God's Word as I read from **Nehemiah chapter 13 verse 6**. Our text is found on page **409** of the Bibles we've handed out.

Starting in **verse 6 of Nehemiah 13**, reading from the English Standard translation:

While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king. And after some time I asked leave of the king ⁷ and came to Jerusalem, and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. ⁸ And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber.

Now please skip down to verse 29:

Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

³⁰ Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work; ³¹ and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the firstfruits.

Remember me, O my God, for good.

Thus ends the book of Ezra-Nehemiah. You may be seated. Let's Pray.

We've learned so much about spiritual leadership, prayer, and depending on God throughout our study of Ezra-Nehemiah this summer. But you have to admit, this ending is a bit of a downer!

Here in the final chapter, verse 6 tells us that Nehemiah had returned back to his post serving King Artaxerxes in Persia. He had been in Jerusalem for 12 years – from 445 – 433 BC. Under his leadership, the wall had been completed, the city repopulated, and the teaching of God's law had been revived with Ezra's help. So considering his work in God's city to be done – he returned back to his service as the cupbearer or prime minister for King Artaxerxes.

But the people started to spiritually drift in the absence of strong leadership and accountability. Such is always the case when God's people try hard to just follow God's law. The law alone cannot produce lasting restoration. The law can only expose and restrain sin... but true lasting restoration requires more than God's law.



Lasting restoration requires Divine Intervention.

We don't know how long Nehemiah was gone from Jerusalem. Maybe it was a year? It could have been up to 10 years. But all we know is that for some reason Nehemiah decided to return to Jerusalem and see how God's people were doing in his absence.

And what he finds brings intense disappointment and anger. **Chapter 13** recounts how God's people actually had broken all the promises they had made to God back in **chapter 10** as part of their spiritual revival. And we see Nehemiah running around – yelling at people – even beating up some of the backsliders – and then asking God to remember Him. It's as if Nehemiah is saying... "God I tried as hard as I could...but it didn't last. Remember me God – I tried so hard..." and then the curtain falls, and the testimony of Ezra-Nehemiah concludes as the Jewish people enter into 400 years of Divine silence – without a prophet, without Biblical record of God's working among His people.

So let's not miss the grand point of this disturbing finale – restoration that lasts is only possible by an internal supernatural work of God Himself. As wonderful as God's law is – simply trying to obey God's commands will never bring about lasting change. God's law is unable to produce lasting change in our hearts.

In fact, God never gave the law to try to save us or make us holy. He redeemed Israel *before* He gave Moses the law. Rather,



God's law reveals the sinfulness of our hearts (Nehemiah 13:4-31)

Biblical commandments show us the holiness of God and just how sinful we are in comparison.

Romans 7 teaches us that God's law is good – teaching us what sin is.¹ Romans 3:19-20 says it clearly,

"The law...speaks...so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

Have you ever tried to clean up your life – or make yourself better spiritually by just trying harder to follow God's rules?

Dear friend – You can't improve your spiritual condition one bit by spiritual rule-keeping. Legalism is a dud.² Just

¹ Romans 7:7-25

² C.f. "Legalism is a Dud" 9/13/15 sermon on Colossians 2:16-23

like Nehemiah discovered, you must resign your pride to the reality that law-driven change just doesn't last.

Look at verses 7-14:

and came to Jerusalem, and I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. ⁸ And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. ⁹ Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense. ¹⁰ I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field. ¹¹ So I confronted the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. ¹² Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses. ¹³ And I appointed [4 men] as treasurers over the storehouses ..., for they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers. ¹⁴ 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 his service.

Picture this! In Nehemiah's absence, God's people had broken their revival promise of **Nehemiah 10:39** by forsaking the temple! Eliashib had allowed Tobiah – one of Nehemiah's enemies – to actually take up residency within God's temple – in the very room which was supposed to serve as the storehouse for the Levites' provisions! And once Tobiah moved into...the provisions

moved out... and (verse 10) the Levites were eventually forced to return to their own farms to try to provide for their own needs.

How could this happen?

Well this was nothing more than a heart problem... the problem of a,



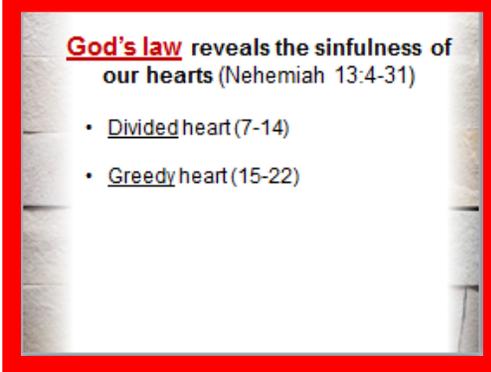
Divided Heart (7-14)

The law has no power to change our hearts – it only reveals how divided and compromised we truly are on the inside. Tobiah was God's enemy – but he was one of the social elite. He was a very successive businessman in their community. There were political and social favors to be gained when you were on Tobiah's team... and so the divided hearts of the people wandered...and were exposed as pragmatic compromisers when measured against God's law.

Loved ones – if you are trying to earn God's acceptance through your obedience ... please learn from the Jewish

exiles – trying hard to follow God’s rules will always fail in the end for you – because your heart is double-minded and divided – and eventually you will justify sin for pragmatic reasons.

But every person’s heart is corrupted by more than compromised double-mindedness...in verses **15-22** we observe that God’s law the problem of a,



Greedy Heart (15-22)

Look at **verse 15**,

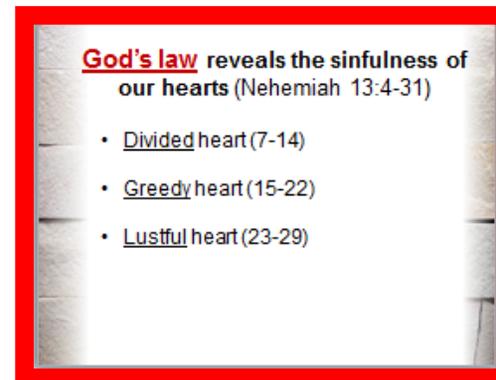
In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food. ¹⁶ Tyrians also, who lived in the city, brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah, [and note this next phrase] in Jerusalem itself! ¹⁷ Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, “What is this evil thing that you are doing, profaning the Sabbath day? ¹⁸ Did not your fathers act in this way, and did not our

God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.” ... [verse 22] Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates, to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love.

Not only did the people forsake the law by neglecting God’s house – but they also neglected the Sabbath. They broke the promise they made in **Nehemiah 10:31**.

The law was clear – do not buy or sell on the Sabbath day. Keep it separate and holy. But greedy hearts will eventually justify law-breaking – for legalism is not strong enough to free you from materialism or the lust of the eye.

In fact, trying to follow God’s law will only show you how divided your heart truly is – in your greed, and then also, in your lust. **Verses 23-29** illustrate well mankind’s universal problem with a,



Lustful Heart (23-29)

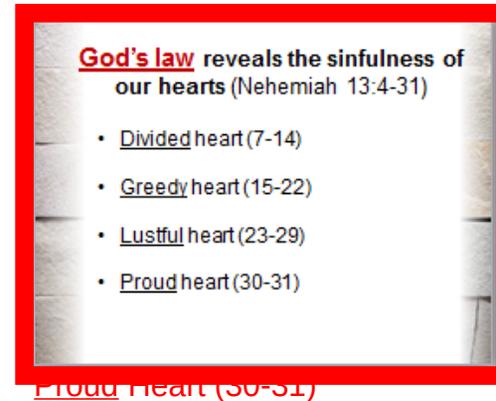
Verse 23,

In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. ²⁴ And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. ²⁵ And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. ²⁶ Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. ²⁷ Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?" ²⁸ And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. Therefore I chased him from me. ²⁹ Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

Here the people violated their well-intended promise of **Nehemiah 10:30**. They knew marrying unbelievers was contrary to God's law. But their hearts lusted after these women – and the law of God is not powerful enough to save us from our inner cravings and impurities.

Are you getting a clear picture of the true condition of every one of us here this morning? Our hearts have been so corrupted by sin – that mere rule-keeping only

dresses our lives with external fronts – hiding the sinful reality of a divided, greedy, and lustful heart. In fact, Nehemiah's final complaint in verses **30-31** of chapter 13 highlights the core problem for all of us – the problem of a,



In verse 29 Nehemiah complains that the people had desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood. In verse 30 he records how he worked to cleanse them from everything foreign. In other words, the people had forsaken their promise of **Nehemiah 10:29** to observe and do all the law of the Lord.

Their hearts were proud – for what else do you call the sin of self-reliance and independence that causes us to believe that we can be spiritual if we just keep enough of our own self-made traditions? Truly the law of God teaches us today that sin is more than just breaking God's rules – Sin is rebellion or treason against God Himself. Every time we sin we are engaged in some practice of self-salvation or self-worship.

So why do you and I slip into the ditch of believing that if we just follow our own moralistic code – no matter how religious or irreligious our standards are – that somehow this obedience is what makes us truly spiritual?

God's law was never given to save or sanctify His people. God's law only reveals the holiness of God so that we can better comprehend our own utter sinfulness.

And loved ones – this morning we are being reminded through the failure of the Jewish exiles that we are all this sinful on the inside – in our hearts. Our hearts are so sinful that they even proudly corrupt any attempts at obeying God's law on our own. We need to be saved utterly by grace and by grace alone!

And so Ezra-Nehemiah ends. And the progressive revelation of God Himself goes silent for 400 years. And then, in the fullness of time, God sends forth His Son – Jesus Christ – born of a woman, born under the law, so that His people might finally be fully restored – from the inside out!

So joyfully turn your Bibles with me to the book of **Galatians**, where we will glory together in the reality that,



Christ alone is able to restore our sinful hearts (Galatians 3:2-4:7)

God restores church! But His restoration is more than just exterior renovation. God doesn't remodel. God makes all things new from the inside out! Only Christ is able to accomplish such a complete restoration of our sinful hearts!

So quickly now... let's just skim over the gold-mine of **chapters 3 and 4** in Galatians as we remind ourselves how Christ Himself intervenes and accomplishes lasting restoration within us.

First, the beginning of Galatians 3 tells us that Christ restores sinful hearts by,



Giving us His Spirit (3:2-5)

Verse 2 – *did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?* The answer is clear in the context – **verse 5** – Christ supplies the Spirit to all who believe on Him by faith.

So child of God – lasting restoration begins when you are born again by God's Spirit! *That which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of Spirit is spirit.*³

In other words – all the efforts of your own flesh at trying to become righteous – will only make you more fleshy. The only way to become spiritually pleasing to our holy God is by faith in Jesus Christ – for the Holy Spirit lives inside every person who believes on Christ – and it is only the Spirit of God which can make us truly spiritual.

But read on in Galatians 3 – **verse 10**,

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

³ John 3:6

Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."

So how does Christ restore sinful hearts? By,



Giving us His Righteousness (3:6-13)

Like verse 13 says,

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law...

He gave us what the law never could – full justification before a holy God. Perfect righteousness by faith in Christ alone. It's a gift. All by His amazing grace.

Do you believe this good news this morning?

Sinners like you and me could never deserve such grace. Our hearts are too sinful. But faith exchanges our sin for Christ's righteousness.

And then, Galatians goes on to teach how Christ restores our sinful hearts by,



Giving us His Promises (3:14-29)

Look at verse **18**,

For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise?

Verses **21-22**,

Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

In verse 29 Paul drives his point home – we are internally changed and transformed – fully restored back into the family of God as His forever children – only by participating in the new covenant promise of God – by believing in Jesus Christ through faith.

Christ alone restores our sinful hearts – for Christ is the only One who is able to redeem sinful people like you and me, actually



Adopting us as His Children (4:4-7)

Verse 5 of chapter 4,

Christ redeemed those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave [to worthless elementary rule-keeping], but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Church – God's saving grace restores sinful hearts so that we are made into God's children – from the inside out. God becomes our Father, and we become His children. *He puts His Spirit within us, and writes His law upon our hearts.*⁴

⁴ Ezekiel 36:26-27; Jeremiah 31:31-34

This is the new covenant of God that we celebrate today as we participate in the Lord's Supper. Because grace has taught us to,



Rejoice & Believe in Christ's restoring work!

So as our servers to come forward and prepare to serve us with the communion elements, I'd invite you to quietly take a moment to humbly ask God to pour out more of His grace upon you. Turn from the worthless lies of sin – humbly repent — and find your joyful rest in faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone.

If you do not believe in Jesus Christ for the salvation of your sins, we would invite you to just simply observe us as we participate in this symbolic ceremony of our common-union with Christ. For there's nothing spiritual about this juice or these crackers. They just represent and remind us of Christ's blood and body.

So there's no advantage of participating together in the symbol if you aren't first participating together with us in God's amazing grace that saves, sanctifies, and helps us look forward to the coming glory of our God and Savior.

As you receive the bread, and then the juice in a moment... please wait until we can all partake together after everyone is served. And as the bread is served, confess any legalistic moralism that has crept into your life. See through the deceptive danger of spiritual rule-keeping as a means of earning God's acceptance. Confess your faith in Christ and Christ alone – and rejoice in His full restoration that lasts.

Jesus first took bread and gave thanks for it. I'm going to ask _____ to give thanks at this time.

<< Instrumental Hymn >>

This cracker represents the body of Jesus Christ – broken on the cross to redeem sinners from their inability to keep His holy law. As we partake together – let's rejoice in Christ's provision for us.

the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

<<eat>>

The men are now coming forward to serve us the cup, as we remember the blood that was spilled to cover our sins.

As we prepare to remember Christ's blood which covers our sins... I'm going to ask _____ to pray for us as we take the cup together.

Feel free to sing with us as the juice is served, as we celebrate the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord!

<<The Wonderful Cross>>

In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

<<drink>>

Amen.

Church – Christ has intervened and secured lasting restoration for all who believe on Him. Truly every one of us here today



Needs a new heart. So repent of your proud attempts to make yourself good enough...and believe on Jesus Christ alone.

Christ alone is able to restore your sinful heart.

Next week we begin a new series from the upper room discourse – **John 13-17**. So take some time this week, and read through these amazing chapters.

Let's pray our Benediction now as we are dismissed,

*²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹ equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.
Hebrews 13:20-21*