

No Compromise Nehemiah 13

By Dave Urbanski

As we concluded our study of the book of Nehemiah this past Sunday, Pastor Scott shared with us what he often contemplates when he sees the aftermath of car accidents: "That could be me; I've got to be careful on the road."

It's not an uncommon thought for folks possessing wisdom, and for Christians driving down the highways of life, we should be giving ourselves similar splashes of cold water in the face, as all of us have the tendency to "drift" across the lane markers God has created for us in order that we may keep heading in the right direction.

Centuries before Jesus came to earth, the prophet Isaiah reminded us about our collective tendency to drift from God — to forget him — as well as the price the Son would pay on the cross for that drifting and forgetting: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)

In the final chapter of the book of Nehemiah, we see he's returned to Jerusalem after spending some significant time away, and he doesn't like what discovers in the city. Indeed, his people have drifted and crossed over lines in the road in three significant ways: They've participated in the activities of the world instead of staying separate, they've stopped their own spiritual feeding, and they've indulged in sin.

Right away in verses 1 through 3, we see that once folks get their eyes of the word of God, trouble that was upon them could have been avoided: "On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people. And in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, for they did not meet the people of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them — yet our God turned the curse into a blessing. As soon as the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent."

Further we find that Tobiah — an enemy of the building of the wall — apparently was back in the fold through marriage and actually was given a chamber that had been used to store offerings to the Lord. Nehemiah was understandably "very angry" — and he

became what Pastor Scott described as "vicious" in dealing with sin as he "threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber."

We must do the same. Have we allowed questionable relationships influence our beliefs? Have we let worldliness creep into our lives? Have we let it push God from the place he once occupied in our hearts? If so, we must toss those things out and invite the Lord back in.

Further in verse 15 Nehemiah finds that his people indulged in compromise number two – stopping their own spiritual feeding by "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." Nehemiah was vicious with this sin as well, confronting the nobles and commanding that the Sabbath be observed and make sure his people would "guard the gates" of the wall against those who would transgress against the Sabbath. Pastor Scott offered a compelling idea here as well: Even when we push sin out of our lives, it still lurks just outside of the gates we put up. It's right there, tempting us all the time – and therefore we must be constantly vigilant.

In the same way, we constantly must fill up on God's word. Our "daily" bread. Just as we feed our bellies with food every day, we must feed our souls each day with God's spiritual food – or else we starve spiritually! Indeed, we need the Lord EVERY DAY ... not just on Sundays or once or twice a year on Easter or Christmas. We must keep our faith fresh and strong and growing.

Finally we find Nehemiah confronting the third compromise – rampant marrying of his people to those outside the house of God. Just as Nehemiah discovered that Tobiah was given a sacred chamber, he found that Sanballat the Horonite – another who stood against the building of the wall – was related in marriage to a high priest! Again, Nehemiah is vicious with this sin, literally chasing the transgressor from him.

Pastor Scott also pointed out Nehemiah's prayer to the Lord when confronting each of these compromises, as he asked God to "remember me." Interestingly, Pastor Scott added that the book of Nehemiah was the last Old Testament book to be written before 400 silent years and then the coming of Jesus, who literally is the answer to Nehemiah's prayer to "remember me."

That is such Good News! Pastor Scott emphasized that just as Nehemiah labored to rid sin from his people, it is up to us to rid sin from our lives. Yet while sin always lurks,

while it always remains powerful, and while we must always be vigilant about it, Jesus forever freed us from the penalty of sin through his death and resurrection – and he invites us to accept his free gift of salvation on this side of eternity.

So let us stop letting worldliness creep into our lives, let us daily fill our souls with the Lord's spiritual food, and let us continually rid sin from our camps. Indeed, Jesus has paid the penalty of our sin, but our spiritual growth and health here and now depends greatly on how willing we are to avoid and stamp out sin. Let's all be willing!