

Taboo - Desire

Taboo

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

Bible Text: Nehemiah 9:4-8

Preached on: Sunday, April 22, 2012

We are in week two in a new message series entitled, “Taboo.”

Now can I just confess to you as the pastor, that is an odd, strange and kind of weird name to title a sermon series, because that is a word that we get kind of nervous even saying. The word taboo by strict definition, the word means to prohibit something or to keep away from something or to make a strict demarcation between that which is acceptable and that which is not. So why is it that over the course of the next couple of weeks, why would we name a message series, as we go through the book of Bible in Nehemiah chapter nine, why would we name a message series “Taboo?”

The reason is this. I believe wholeheartedly with every fiber of my being that we in the 21st century, what we know as the Church of Jesus Christ, those who claim that they are sinners in need of a Savior and have called on the blood of Jesus Christ to save them, it is time that we start calling some things taboo again. In days gone by there were behaviors that the people of Jesus Christ would not even think twice about participating in. There were words we never dreamed of saying and thoughts we never dreamed of thinking and yet today the culture, over the period of years and decades, has seeped into what we know as the church of Jesus Christ. And the problem is that we have gotten to be a community of faith that unfortunately looks more like the world than the world looks like us.

And what has happened as we talked about last week is the seed that is planted in the dirt has begun being engulfed by the dirt and the purpose of the seed is to grow and to change the dirt.

Last week we addressed a word, a concept that used to be taboo, but today is just a part of our culture. It is the word conformity. We looked at Romans chapter 12 verse two that says:

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.¹

The Lord has called us not to look just like the world, but to be distinct and different from the world. Today we come to a word that you may find odd. The word is desire.

Now by strict definition the word desire, there is no problem with that word because on a regular basis I desire Krispy Kreme donuts. I desire to watch Monday Night Football. There is a lot of things in life that we desire, but today what we are going to address is this word desire, that which used to be taboo, but today has unfortunately become a part

¹ Romans 12:2.

of the, “Christian culture.” We have become a people as a whole that no longer desire to live according to the parameters of God, but we desire to make our own rules. We desire to live according to our own standards. And years ago we would never think that we were smarter than God. We would never dream that we knew how to live life better than God did. But today we have absorbed that cultural phenomena.

In the book of Nehemiah chapter nine today we are going to be challenged by a prayer that the people of God prayed that we are not to desire our parameters. We are not to desire our rules. But realize that we are to be in conformity to the parameters of God.

As you turn to Nehemiah chapter nine, for those of you that weren't with us last week, allow me to give just a brief synopsis. The people of God, the Israelites 70 years before this prayer were living life fine and they came under captivity. A man by the name of Nebuchadnezzar in a land known as the Babylonians came in and they ransacked them. They tore the walls down. They tore the temple down. They slaughtered by the thousands those that were residing in that area. And they go back to Babylon and listen to what Babylon desires to do. Take the best and the greatest of their society and culture and turn them into Babylonians. In other words, take the seed and make it like the dirt.

It is in this period of time that we run into Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, those men who refused to be conformed to the world. But at the end of that 70 year time period, a man by the name of Nehemiah, hence, the name of the book of the Bible that we are studying, he rises up now under the Persian rule who has taken over the Babylonians and he comes to Cyrus the King and he says, “I ache for my homeland. I ache for the temple and I ache for the walls of Jerusalem to be rebuilt.” And he is given an edict. He is given permission to go back with a remnant and to rebuild that which had been lost to Babylon.

It is time that the Church of Jesus Christ realized it is time to collectively come together and rebuild the faith that we have lost to Babylon known as the world. And in Nehemiah chapter nine they did not establish a program. They did not start a new ministry. They came together and we have recorded in Nehemiah nine the longest prayer in the Bible. They prostrated themselves before God. They bowed themselves before God and said, “Lord, only you can do this.”

Now before we begin reading I am going to pick up in verse six of Nehemiah chapter nine. This is actually the prayer of the people of God. They begin their prayer not with a confession. They begin their prayer not with how they have gone wrong. We will get to that next week. They begin their prayer by confessing where they have come from. What are the roots of their faith? What is the origin of their belief system? And we are going to hear of in their prayer a man by the name of Abraham and how his life not only impacted theirs, but the parallel to us today, how it should impact us.

Beginning in verse six of Nehemiah chapter nine, the people of God have stood and they are praying. It says:

Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee. Thou art the LORD the God, who didst choose Abram, and broughtest him forth out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gavest him the name of Abraham; And foundest his heart faithful before thee, and madest a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Jebusites, and the Girgashites, to give it, I say, to his seed, and hast performed thy words; for thou art righteous.²

Now as you see in the beginning of this prayer there may not seem like there is a whole lot there, but trust me. We are going to unpack this, because this group of people when they realize where they have strayed in life, the first thing you need to do and this is kind of the cart before the horse, is you have got to go back to where you started to realize how far you have gone. They go all the way back to the book of the Bible known as Genesis chapter 12 where the Lord called out a man by the name of Abram, has him look at the stars in the sky and says, “Can you number them?”

He says, “I cannot do it.”

He says, “I want you to take your wife, your nephew and a bunch of cattle and I want you to go to a land you know not of and I will produce within you a seed that will be a particular, specific group of people who will, listen to this, I want to change the world.”

The question I have today is: Why do we not desire to go to a land we know not of? Why do we not desire to do things as God would have us to do? And so I just want to look at three simple concepts from the life of Abraham in Genesis 12 through particular 18 through Nehemiah chapter nine. What can we learn from this prayer? What can we learn about what we are to desire in life? And the first thing is this. When we look at verse seven it says he chose Abraham. I want you to understand that there are specific parameters that God has set up for living life.

Now I am tempted to use the word rules. But the thing that I am fearful of is when we hear the word rules that we become Legalists. And it becomes about checking off a box or saying yes to this and no to that and maybe to whatever. But when I use the word parameters we understand that, right? A parameter is a boundary by which we are blessed if we are within and we are cursed if we are without. It is for, as we will see in a moment, it is for our provision and it is for our protection. And so why is it that humanity does not like the parameters of God? How did we get into this trap that we think we know how to live life better than God does? I think there are two things that come up in life. There are two problems that arise themselves that we see in the life of Abraham and I see every day of my life.

² Nehemiah 9:6-8.

Two things that I want to mention together and then we are going to kind of leave them. It is the issue of fairness and the issue of feelings. We like to draw our own rules or parameters for life when we think that whatever those parameters are that God has designed, somehow, some way they are not fair to the way that we want to live life. And I don't feel like they apply to me. It sounds like the theory of all of our culture, does it not? And yet you find here in verse seven that God chose Abram. He brought him forth out of the Ur of the Chaldees and he gave him a new name named Abraham. And I want to share with you in the life of Abraham that what we see in his life is this problem of the struggle with the idea of fairness and feelings.

Now let me give you a little history here. In Genesis chapter 11 we know the tower of Babel was erected. The people of the world came together and said, "God, we don't like the way that you have set up the parameters. We know how to do it better." What did God do? He came down. He spread them throughout like he had told them originally and he confounded their language, hence, the word Babel. Abram ends up in ancient northern Babylon, what we know as northern Iraq, the Ur of the Chaldees. God comes to him and calls him out of Babylon. Do you notice the parallel to Nehemiah nine? He calls him out of Babylon to go to a land that he knows not of.

Now let me share with you the journey that Abraham would have taken. He would have gone from a city that was fortified to the desert. He would have gone from a place that had an intricate system for food and for water to a place that he just hoped he would find an oasis. He was to leave with his wife named Sarah who had yet to have a child and she was already in our terminology collecting social security. Time had passed her. And he was to take his nephew Lot who was a spoiled brat.

Later on in the story the cattle between Abraham and Lot gets too big and Abraham comes to him and he says, "Oh, nephew, we need to split up. Where do you want to go?" And he says, just like a spoiled brat, "I am going to the best land. I am giving you the junk, uncle. I am sorry."

Let me ask you a question. What part of the calling of God there was fair? Go to a place that is not comfortable with a woman who hasn't had a child yet and probably not going to and a spoiled brat as a nephew. I don't see any fairness there, do you? Abraham could have called out and said, "God, hello. Have you not seen what they have got in the Ur of the Chaldees? Have you not seen what they have got over here? I don't like the way you have set this up."

And what happens as we follow the story of Abraham in Genesis chapter 12 through 18 is that God begins to get a little more intimate in the life of Abraham and Sarah and even though she is barren, he comes to him and says, "Abraham, okay, here is the deal. You are going to have a child with that woman."

Now, you all do get the humor in this service, right? You all get that, right? That here is a man who is approaching 80 years of age and his wife who is not much younger, they have never had a child, but they are going to have one. Now I have never been in that

position because I am not at that age of maturity yet. Can I just say to you that I would have some weird feelings about that. I would just feel that somehow, some way God doesn't know what he is doing. Obviously he doesn't understand how things work. Even though he set up these parameters, look, I know more about biology than you do. So here is what we are going to do. Since she is of the age she is, she has a handmaid by the name of Hagar and we are just going to make this thing happen with her, okay?

Let me ask you a question. How did that one work out? She has a child by the name of Ishmael who, if you do not know in modern day, is the father of the Arab race. Eventually Sarah and Abraham believed God. They have a child by the name of Isaac which, by the way, means laughter because they both laughed at this idea by God, who is the father of what we know as the Jewish people. And today you can go look up any newspaper you want and I promise you, you will find that these two cousins are still fighting one another.

So how did it work out? See, when we start involving fairness and we start involving what feels right, if we don't do it the way God instructed, we are going to have a problem.

I know many of you are familiar with the fact that some years ago in a, "former days," I played this game called baseball. Now one of the things that you need to know about me in my baseball career is I played on some really good teams and I was at the bottom of the barrel of those teams. When I got to be high school level we had such good pitching on our baseball team that every one of our starting pitchers either went in the amateur draft for major league baseball or they went and played college ball. I was a pitcher up until that point. But my junior year in high school my coach came to me and told me he was going to give me the most important pitching position on the team, batting practice. That was my job. Every day it was my job to throw balls about 60, 65 miles an hour so that my teammates could just absolutely crush it and knock the cover off it. I had elevated myself to... I mean, not everybody can be a batting practice pitcher, okay, but that is where I was.

Well, growing up in those days we had a team that was kind of our rival team. This team was so good they won back to back state championships both my junior and my senior years, just a phenomenal team. Just, I mean, top to bottom with some of the best players, at least in those days, that I ever have seen, guys that would get drafted and guys that would go and play big time college ball. They whipped us every time we played them, bar none.

But one day we were playing them and the game was a little bit closer than we were used to. My coach came in with a set of parameters that wasn't fair and it didn't feel very good. See, our baseball field, even though it was a high school field was almost the size of Turner Field here in Atlanta. The power alleys to left center and right center Turner Field are 385 feet. At my high school stadium they were 375 feet. That is pretty long for high school kids. But centerfield was 400 feet to deep center. It is 401 to Turner Field.

So just imagine you are at a Braves game and you can get an idea of what our field looks like. But here is the difference. In the Dallas Fort Worth area we are in tornado alley. We are in that area where the wind blows and, boy, does it blow. It faced to due south. So on any given day when you are batting in our baseball stadium, you not only were facing a 400 foot center field wall, you were typically facing about 25 miles per hour of wind and a lot of dust that came with it.

One day we are playing this team that was so good and had all these players. And it was somewhat closer than we were used to and the coach called time out. And I was on second base like I normally was and, you know, they called the infield in to talk about some things. And he takes the ball from one of our star pitchers, the one with scouts there to watch him, and he puts it in my glove. The best hitter on the team is coming up to bat. He says, "Meyers, I want you to throw batting practice to this guy."

I am like, "Coach, have you lost it? I mean, this guy... I mean, he is going to actually... he is going to hurt me."

He says, "Just trust me. Act like it is batting practice, 60 miles an hour right across the plate. Just watch what happens."

I said, "I will show you what is going to happen. I am about to be embarrassed is what is about to happen."

This doesn't feel right. Hey, why do I have to do this. Can't somebody else pitch batting practice today? And so I got on the mound that day and I threw the first pitch to this guy. He looked at me like I lost my head. I mean, this was a guy who was already talking to pro scouts. This was a guy who was a phenomenal player. This was a guy who made it to a major league baseball card, okay? He wasn't an all star, but he made it. And I am pitching to him.

He looks at me strangely and I throw the second pitch. Strike two, 60 miles an hour to the catcher who had a great sense of humor. I looked at him and said, "Guess what, friend? Third one is going to be just like it."

I threw that pitch 60 miles an hour right down the middle of the plate. I literally thought he was going to take my head off when he hit it. He hit that ball so hard it was kind of like a fast airplane. I didn't see it, but I heard it when it went by. It went straight over my head. The center fielder on the warning track, about 395 feet away, takes his glove and catches it.

I go back to the dugout and the coach puts his hands on my shoulders and he said, "Did you think I was crazy?"

I said, "Yes, sir."

He said, "Did you think I had lost my mind?"

"Yes, sir."

He said, "Let me tell you what. On a field this big and a wind that strong not even he can hit it out."

Let me ask you a question. When you look at what God says about how we are to live this thing called marriage, are there times you think he is nuts? Come on, guys. You can laugh. It is okay. They won't hurt you. You are in church. Are there times where you look at how we are supposed to handle our finances and say, "Does he know... you mean he wants me to give it away? That doesn't make sense. The world says take it all. It doesn't feel right. Why do they get to be married and I am single? How does that? God this isn't fair. This doesn't feel right"?

And what happens is we start drawing our own lines and we get ourselves in a mess, which comes to the second book. What are the purpose for God's parameters? Why has God set up things the way he has set them up? Why has he done it for homes? Why has he done it for marriages? Why has he done it for all kinds of issues?

There are two things you need to understand. He has done it to protect you and he has done it to provide for you. You may not realize it, but in verse seven when it says Abraham came out of the Ur of Chaldees, God was protecting him.

You say, "How did he protect him?"

Did you know that the Ur of the Chaldees, Babylon, just like the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar that they are talking about specifically in Nehemiah nine was a world of false idol worshippers, multiple gods? And maybe Abraham couldn't see it from being outside the parameters, but God was saying, "I am here to protect you. I am here to take care of you, because if you continue worshipping false gods, you are going to be in a mess."

And then what he does is he provides for him. What did he provide? He provided a brand new start. He provided a new place, a fresh start, a new, as we say in the New Testament, a new creation and he gives him a new name that we are going to talk about in just a moment.

When we see the parameters of God, when God says, "I know it is not fair and it doesn't feel right, but there are certain things that you are not to partake in until you are married," God knows what he is talking about.

You know, a study came out just this week that what we call cohabitation that is living with someone of the opposite gender before you get married to them, just in my

generation has increased 1500 percent. Over seven and a half million, “couples cohabitating.” The number one reason they do it, they want to kick the tires before they buy the car, guys, just to make sure they are compatible.

Do you know what the study found out? People who cohabit before they are married are more likely to divorce than those who wait. Do you know what? When God set it up the way he did it, do you know what he was doing for us? He was protecting us. He knew he was providing the blessings of God as we will see in just a moment in Abraham. But I do want to address one specific area that is so prominent in our culture, because we live in a world that is pluralistic. What that means is our world believes in multiple ways, multiple paths, multiple beliefs. And I have heard it so many times that this idea that Jesus Christ is the only way to be forgiven of our sins, this idea that every other road in the world leads to hell but Jesus, that is just not fair. It is not fair that those on the other side of the world. It is not fair to those who want to worship so that it is just not fair. In fact, it doesn't feel right that somebody who is Buddhist, they are faithful in their beliefs and they meditate all the time and they are so sincere, it is so... it is not fair that a loving God would send that person to hell.

Listen to me. A loving God has never sent anybody to hell. You sent yourself. And people send themselves. And so understand that when he says, “I am the way, the truth and the life, nobody comes to the Father but by me.” Do you realize? Listen to what God is doing. He is protecting you from an eternity in hell. He is protecting you from utter damnation for all of eternity. You say, “Well, what is he going to provide for me?”

Read the last two chapters of the Bible. Streets of gold, no pain, no sorrow, no misery. That is good stuff. So what he was doing here is they are confessing that when he called Abram out it was to protect him and to provide. What did they do? Abraham comes from Babylon to the wilderness. They had gone from the holy land back to Babylon. And they were confessing, Lord, may this not happen again.

And I want to conclude today my final point by looking at a picture of Abraham, verse seven again. It says he called him out of the Ur of the Chaldees and the Lord gives him a name, Abraham.

You may not have thought much about this, but up until the time in which Isaac was born, his name was Abram. After Isaac was born his name became Abraham. In other words, when he did what God asked him to originally do he received a new name. Now this is a familiar concept in Scripture. There was a man by the name of Saul who wasn't doing what God asked him to do. He was blinded on the road to Damascus. He confessed Jesus as his Savior. He became Paul. And there was a man by the name of Simon. He was shifting sand. He was all over the map. He put his foot in his mouth any time he opened it. He confessed that Jesus is the Messiah and he said, “Your name is now Peter.”

Did you know the Bible says in the book of Revelation chapter two that when we confess Jesus Christ as our Savior we recognize that we are sinners in need of saving. He gives us a new name that only the Lord knows. One day when we get to the new heavens, folks,

do not pull me aside and say, “Jeff, how are you doing?” I am going to have a new name. You are going to have a new name. I don’t know how that is all going to work out, but guess what? God set up the parameters. I think he has got this thing covered, okay?

So the question is: what is the picture that Abraham gives us? He gives us a picture of two things. He gives us a picture of true biblical repentance; not I am sorry or oops. Repentance means to go from going one direction to a different direction, to make a 180 degree turn, from going to where your back was turned to where now your faith is headed.

Because it wasn’t fair and because it didn’t feel right, Abraham and Sarah together said, “Let’s go outside the parameters of God. Let’s do it our way and see what happens.” And they got royal mess.

The picture of repentance is when you realize that you are on the wrong path. You go back to where you got off and get on the right path. And that is exactly what Abraham and Sarah did.

We don’t have all the discussion in the book of Genesis, but I have been married long enough to know how this discussion went. She said, “Abram, that was a bad idea.” And he didn’t even consider blaming her for it because it was hers. I know how that went.

Maybe you are in a situation in life where you know that however you are living is not what God would bless. Get out of it and get on the right path. Maybe you are in a situation where you are not handling your finances as God would have you. Quit doing what you are doing wrong and start doing what the Lord says to do right. Whatever it is, it is getting off the wrong path and getting on the right path.

Maybe you are that person today who the thought of Jesus Christ, this idea of forgiveness and salvation, were for somebody else and you said, “Uh, oh, I am in a mess. If I don’t get on the right path this can be the day,” as the Bible says, the day of salvation. It is a picture of what repentance is.

But here is the last thing. It is a picture of what it means to be restored. Now, I had the privilege when I was a young child, I say a young child, I was a teenager. My dad assisted me in helping me restore a 1965 Mustang. That is taking that which comes out of the junk yard, that which is a bucket of bolts and rust, that which will hardly run, that which from all appearances is an absolute wreck, like a lot of peoples’ lives, and making it and fashioning it the way that it was designed to look and to run.”

When God called Abraham out of the Ur of the Chaldees into the land that he knew not of, Hagar wasn’t how he designed him to live. Fighting with Lot wasn’t how he designed him to live. He designed him to live by faith, being with Sarah, having a child by the name of Isaac, who would then have Jacob and the 12 tribes and who what we know as the people of God.

Let me share with you something you need to hear, when it says that God changed his name to Abraham, whether you like it or not, whether you think so or not, whether it feels right or not, the God of this Bible, the Lord Jesus Christ knows better how to live life than you do. He knows what your life should look like even if you don't like the picture. He knows how your life should be lived even if it doesn't feel the way you would like it to feel.

Let me tell you what he wants to do. He wants to restore everything the world promises you, but it never can deliver. The world tells you if you draw outside the lines you will have real peace. What do you have? You have got a royal mess. They world says, if you draw outside the lines that is how you will have success. That is how you end up getting loneliness. The world promises a lot of stuff that it never can deliver on, yet the Bible says he who began a good work in you, Jesus Christ, will begin it from this day until he returns saying, "I will never leave you. I will never forsake you."

Jesus says the thief, that is the devil, comes to steal, kill and destroy, not a pretty picture. But Jesus came to give his life that we may have it more abundantly. Folks, he knows how to best live this thing called life. As we talked last week, he has given us an instruction manual and I realize that it is out of date. I realize it is somewhat bigoted. I realize it is politically incorrect. However, understand that according to the Word of God it may not seem fair and it may not feel right, but it is to protect you and to provide for you. Jesus Christ is the answer for the mess of your life. Jesus Christ is the only means to be saved. Jesus Christ is the only way that a life that is headed down the wrong path ever can get back on the right path. Everything else is just smoke and mirrors.

The question is this. Which path are you on? Do you desire to live life according to rules and keep getting what you have been getting?

By the way, you know, the definition of insanity, right? Doing the same thing over and over and over again expecting different results. Or this morning going back to the point where you got off. The Bible calls it sin. And confessing Jesus Christ as your Savior.