

Taboo Power

Taboo

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

Bible Text: Nehemiah 9:4-8

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Almost half a century ago famed radio columnist Paul Harvey wrote a piece entitled, “If I Were the Devil.” It was somewhat of a warning to our culture, to our community and particularly our churches, but it has become an incredibly prophetic as the years have gone by. That actual audio recording was in 1993, though it was penned in 1964. But you might agree with me. It sounds like he read the headlines of this morning’s paper, because what he understood and what we are going to learn from the Word of God today is simply this, that when you continue on a path that you are on, you are going to get to the destination that is predicted at the end of that road.

Today I want to encourage you to open your Bibles in the Old Testament to the book of Nehemiah chapter nine.

If you are a first time guest or visitor with us, we are continuing in a message series that has at best a very odd title, “Taboo.” By strict definition the word taboo means that which is to be prohibited, that which is to be kept at arm’s length, that which is not to be participated in or that which is not to be encouraged. And what we are doing as we go through Nehemiah chapter nine over this course of weeks is looking at the subject matters in the areas of life that years ago the people of God said we should have nothing to do with that. We should have no participation in that, but yet today it has just become a part of our culture and our society.

There are two other supplementary passages of Scripture that we are going to find ourselves in today, not only in Nehemiah chapter nine. They are both in the New Testament. Maybe you are one of those who likes just to write it down in advance or maybe you actually want to locate it. We will put it on the screens for those of you who are not as familiar with the exact order of the biblical books. But those two passages are in Romans chapter 13 and in 1 Timothy chapter two.

Romans chapter 13 we are going to deal with at the beginning and in 1 Timothy chapter two we are going to deal with in the end of the message. Speaking of the message, today is going to probably feel more like a Bible study than it is a sermon. As we turn to Nehemiah chapter nine, we are just going to systematically walk through these verses of Scripture and let the Spirit of God teach us in a very relevant and very realistic manner today.

We have come to the subject matter in this series of taboo that has the potential to be one of two things, either the most impactful or the most controversial. And it is determined on how you receive the words of God.

In our first week we dealt with the subject matter of conformity, that the world says that we are to conform and look just like it. But the Word of God says in Romans 12 that we are not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Then we went to the word desire, that we as depraved, fallen humanity desire to draw our own parameters or set our own rules and we looked at Nehemiah nine that when we obey the laws of God, the precedences of God and fall within his confines, we are protected and provided for. And we put ourselves at risk and at danger when we are outside.

Today as we continue in Nehemiah chapter nine which, by the way, is the longest prayer recorded in the Bible, the people of God coming out of captivity, the people of God wanting to reestablish the laws of God in their life, the people of God wanting to reestablish life as God designed them to live, they are going to pray beginning in verse nine of Nehemiah chapter nine. They are going to end their prayer, allude back to when pharaoh was in power and when Moses led them out of the wilderness. And the word that we have chosen to address today is the concept or the idea of power or authority or who, for lack of better terms, is in charge of the decisions and the areas of your life.

And when we speak of the term authority, the Bible addresses authority and power within the home on issues related to husbands and wives and parents and to children at the work place in relationship to employers and employees. But today specifically because of what is addressed in Nehemiah chapter nine, we just have to deal with the subject matter. Because pharaoh is listed, because Moses is listed, because these things are listed, we have to deal with the idea of power or authority in what we know as the civil realm. In fact, the word that we could have used for today, that I chose not to because I did not want to stir up controversy in advance, is this hot button of a word that called politics, this idea of who is in charge, who sets the rules and how are we not the world, how are we, the people of God to respond to the civil governmental environment that we find ourselves in today.

Our guidance today will not be led by directives of a political party. You will not hear from me any pandering as a Democrat or as a Republican, as a Tea party or Green party or anything in between. Today's message is not about politics. It is about how the people of God are to respond to the environment in which they find themselves in any given moment in life.

In Nehemiah chapter nine beginning in verse nine we continue in this prayer of the people of God confessing the sins of themselves and, particularly here their forefathers. It says:

And didst see the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heardest their cry by the Red sea; And shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, and on all his servants, and on all the people of his land: for thou knewest that they dealt proudly against them. So didst thou get thee a name, as it is this day. And thou didst divide the sea before them, so that they went through the

midst of the sea on the dry land; and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters. Moreover thou leddest them in the day by a cloudy pillar; and in the night by a pillar of fire, to give them light in the way wherein they should go. Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant: And gavest them bread from heaven for their hunger, and broughtest forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and promisedst them that they should go in to possess the land which thou hadst sworn to give them. But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage: but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not. Yea, when they had made them a molten calf, and said, This is thy God that brought thee up out of Egypt, and had wrought great provocations; Yet thou in thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to shew them light, and the way wherein they should go. Thou gavest also thy good spirit to instruct them, and withheldest not thy manna from their mouth, and gavest them water for their thirst.¹

In this passage of Scripture the people of God are praying about how their forefathers responded both properly and improperly in days gone past to situations of power and authority that they found themselves in. And what we are going to do today, as we have done the last couple of weeks, is draw a parallel between the people of God then and the people of God today. How are we, men and women, boys and girls who claim that we are sinners and needing of a Savior by the name of Jesus Christ, how are we as the saved, how are we as the redeemed, how are we as the reconciled to live in this fallen sinful world, particularly today in light of the fact that often times we find ourselves under the direction of leadership, authority and power which could not in any way whatsoever be considered godly.

Now there is a series of questions that I want to ask today as we go through Nehemiah chapter nine. And the first question is a very simple question. Who decides who is in power? Who gets to make that decision?

Now one of the problems that we have in our culture, in our community and in our country is this. We say, "Well, of course, we do." We the people, we vote and whoever gets the majority of the electoral votes in the national election or whoever gets the majority of them here in a local election, those are the people who get the power. Those are the people who are in authority.

¹ Nehemiah 9:9-20.

Do you realize that democracy and a republican government are a far cry, a minority in the world? Do you realize that our world is filled with governments that are not democratic by nature? They are communistic by nature. They are fascist by nature. They are dictatorial by nature. We live in a world with all forms of government, not just ours. So the question we have to ask is: Who decides who is in power?

I want you to turn to Romans chapter 13, the first passage that we will allude to here this morning. And I want to show you a passage of Scripture in verses one through four of Romans chapter 13 about the authorities and the powers that we find ourselves under, whether we are in a free country such as the one we are blessed to live in today or whether it is a totalitarian state on the other side of the planet. It says:

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.²

Now, I have mentioned world wide the different types of governments, different types of leaders, but let's narrow our focus because the overwhelming majority of us will wake up tomorrow in the western civilized world and particularly what we know as the United States of America. And it says that all powers are ordained by God. And we think that there are different types of leaders. We think there are different types of powers. We think there are different types of authorities. We think in terms of there are Democrats and there is Republicans and a few others scattered among the mix.

Let me share with you how God sees the powers that be. There is only two types of leaders in God's eyes. There is godly and there is ungodly. There can be individuals who disagree with you on an issue that is important to you and they can be a godly man or woman. And there can be an individual who disagrees with you and is godly and agrees and is ungodly.

In other words one of our big problems in society is we see everything according to that which directly affects us and not that which either promises or demonstrates the promises of God or goes against. There are two types. Now let me show you how we get confused here. We end up getting confused when we substitute the issues for the identity of the individual. Let me say that one more time. We get in a real mess when we substitute issues for identity.

² Romans 13:1-4.

Some years ago when I had the privilege of being in vocational evangelism and traveling from country to country and state to state, I found myself in another state just on the heels or just in the beginning stages or right at the end, should I say, of the gubernatorial election, a governor election. About two weeks from that moment a new governor was going to be elected to the state that I was serving in that week. And, by the way, let me say this from the very beginning. I do believe God has given us the freedom to be active participants in our political process and we need to take advantage of the freedom that we do have. I do believe we need to be active. I do believe that we need to be a part of the process. Why? Because God has ordained it and we get the privilege of being a part of it. That means this. This group of people. We were preparing for a revival service. We were preparing to have a worship service and the conversation in between kind of a break time kind of migrated to this issue of this gubernatorial election that was about to take place in this other state.

And the issues were there, as they always are. But one of the things that was at the forefront was one candidate that you would consider a very godly, God fearing, Bible believing Christian and there was one candidate who was carnal at best. And they were discussing the fact of what a struggle it was for the Christians to agree with and to pray for and to vote for that which was godly, but maybe not the issue that they preferred. Until the pianist spoke up. The little lady had been playing piano the whole revival long. She interjected her voice and she interjected her opinion. And here is what she said. She said, "I know that that individual is a godly man. I understand that and I understand that this other person is not, but I am telling you. I am voting for the ungodly man."

This was the church pianist, by the way. And we kind of looked at her and she said, "Well, let me tell you why. I am a school teacher. We haven't had a raise in five years. He has promised me a raise. I need a raise."

We can laugh at that illustration, but God sees it as ungodly or godly. From sinful humanity we see it as this issue versus that issue. And so the first question we have to address is this: Who decides who is in power? According to Romans 13 God decides who is in power. Now he may give you the option and the choice to cast the votes, but ultimately God ordains whoever that leader or that power figure or that authority figure is which leads to the next very natural question.

So why would God allow an ungodly leader? It is a great question to ask, right? In this passage of Scripture, verse 10, Pharaoh. Could we have picked a more ungodly person? This was an individual who enslaved a group of people for hundreds of years. You cannot tag the word godly on top of that individual. This was a man who ordered forced labor. This was a man who refused children to be born under certain circumstances. This was an ungodly man. It doesn't matter how you cut it, slice it or dice it, he was ungodly.

So the question is, so why did God allow this ungodly man to enslave his own people? Why would God do that? I think there are two reasons that God allows, ordains ungodly leadership in the world, whether that is local, national or international. The first reason is this. Ungodly leadership is allowed to be put into power by the hand of God so that he

can demonstrate his power. Now I want you to walk with me in this passage of Scripture. I want you to look at verse 10. They confessed that God showed signs and wonders.

Verse 11. He divided the sea.

Verse 12. Cloudy pillar in the night, pillar of fire.

Verse 15. Bread from heaven. Verse 15. Water out of a rock.

If that is not the power of God being demonstrated, I don't know what is. You have got water coming out of rocks. You have got bread Krispy Kreme supernaturally coming out of heaven. You have got the Red Sea being divided and all of that happened under one of the most unscrupulous, meanest dictators the world has ever known. So when this individual was allowed to be in power, it allowed God to demonstrate his power as being superior and supernatural.

We could fast forward a few years to the New Testament. And we find out that God so loved us that while we were yet sinners Christ Jesus was sent for us.

You know, the book of Romans says that it was in the fullness of time. In other words, it says in the Word of God that Jesus Christ came in just the right time. That is right. God was in heaven waiting on the people of the Middle East to elect a Bible believing leader. No. Jesus Christ was born under the leadership of Caesar Augustus. And one of his governors was a man by the name of Herod who was so ungodly that when he found out there was a challenger to the throne, Jesus Christ, he had every male child under two killed. What we know as the early church, the disciples that Jesus sent out, they were under the leadership of the Caesars. They were under the leadership of men such as Nero. The Roman government of you New Testament, the Roman government that Jesus Christ came and lived and died and rose from the dead, but here is the thing. There was ungodly leadership in Egypt and God said, "Fine. If you won't change, I will deliver them anyway." There was ungodly leadership in Rome when Jesus came. Let me tell you something about ungodly leadership. Ungodly leadership did not make Jesus sin. Ungodly leadership did not prevent him from going to the cross. And, listen. It doesn't matter who the power is. They could not, would not and were not going to keep him from raising from the dead.

God said, "Guess what? You may be ungodly and you may not be righteous, but I am still God." And so when ungodly power internationally, nationally or even locally is allowed to be in power and authority, the Lord said the reason I have done this is I want to demonstrate my power.

There is a second thing. Not just to demonstrate his power, but he wants to demonstrate his plan. And this is really where kind of the rubber is going to meet the road for those of us who call ourselves believers in Jesus Christ. His plan. Look in verse 14.

“And madest known unto them thy holy Sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws.”³

Do you realize if it had not been for the captivity if it has not been for the ungodly leadership of Pharaoh, they would have never received the ten commandments. The purpose of having that which we would call ungodly leadership with its local, national, international, whatever that is in history or in today, if God has a plan. Do you know what that plan is? That plan is for us to forsake the laws of the world and to obey the laws of God. The world says it is okay to do this. The world says it is okay to that. God says, “Thou shalt not...” And so he was guiding them back to his Word. Every time there is ungodliness in leadership it is God’s way of getting his children’s attention that they are headed down the wrong road and they need to be following his road and his law. It is the part of his play to get us recentered on his Word.

But there is a second part of this plan. And this is the part that I get the most excited about. Look in verse 14, the last statement.

“...by the hand of Moses.”⁴

Do you know what one of the plans of God is? God desires even more than you to raise up godly leaders. More than your giving to organizations, more than your participating in electoral processes, God desires more for godly men and women to lead than even you do. But I want to show you how God raised up Moses. He raised him up supernaturally. Listen, 400 years of slavery under pharaoh, 400 years of a system that was tyrannical at best. Moses was not raised up among them. Moses was not raised up among a part of the system. God supernaturally brought him and one day he shows up and says, “Guess what, folks? It is time to get out of here.”

If God created the world in six days, he doesn’t need an election year cycle process to raise up a godly man or woman. He can deliver godliness in the midst of ungodliness. It was Moses who was brought forth in the midst of pharaoh’s camp. And he goes in and pharaoh’s boys could not keep up with the power of God. The water turned to blood, the frogs, the lice, the darkness and the first born being slain. He demonstrated his power. He got him on his plan.

So here is the next question. And this may sound odd. In the context of this story, Moses is now the leader. Ungodly has been replaced with godly. Slavery has been replaced with freedom. It looks good, right? What can go wrong when there is godly power? And I think one of the mistakes the Christian community makes is we think if we get the right man or the right woman in the right position we can sit down and drink sweet tea the rest of our lives. This is good.

What we see here is that the people of God get delivered out of the Red Sea and 11 days

³ Nehemiah 9:14.

⁴ Ibid.

after they were on the other side, they say, “Moses, how dare you do this? Give us back to Egypt.”

Just because godly men and godly women find themselves in power, does not mean that the people of God will necessarily respond appropriately. I want you to see what happens in this passage of Scripture in verse 16. There is that word again. If you are a first time guest or visitor, forgive me. This is my favorite word in the Bible. It is the word but.

“But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks.”⁵

What can go wrong when you have a godly leader? Let me tell you what can go wrong. The people of God can begin to reject the Word of God. What got them their freedom? What got them godliness is when they began to succumb themselves, they began to submit themselves to the way and to the will of God and say, “Okay, God, we will do it your way.” When they did it God’s way he delivered them. When they decided to do it their own way, they found themselves with a molten calf, idolatry and a big old mess. We have a tendency that when things are in a good position to get comfortable.

One of my best illustrations, and forgive me, it comes from the sports world. It is called prevent defense. Do you know what prevent defense does? It prevents you from winning the game. When you decide the lead is safe, when you decide we have got this wrapped up, what they do is they tend to get lazy. They tend to come back and say, “It is no big deal. Surely the lead is so big they can’t beat us.”

One of the things we need to learn from history is this. When the Israelites got lazy, Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians came in. And all these people came in. Why? Because they rejected the Word of God and they migrated back to the way of the world.

But there is a second thing that can go wrong when there is a godly leader. Not just the rejection of the words of the God. It is the rebellion against the man of God. Moses was raised up supernaturally by God. I want you to see what happens in verse 17.

“And refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them; but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage.”⁶

See one of the problems here is God gave them what they needed, but it wasn’t what they wanted. God said, “I am going to deliver you from pharaoh. I am going to deliver you from ungodliness. I am going to give you Moses as your leader.” And eleven days later they said, “We don’t want him. Give us somebody else.”

That is why this message necessarily comes on the back side of the message about the parameters of God.

⁵ Nehemiah 9:16.

⁶ Nehemiah 9:17.

Let me tell you what the problems with the Israelites were 11 days after they got delivered. Instead of looking at the identity of how God delivered them, they started looking at the issues. How are we going to eat? How are we going to have water? And rather than looking at the one who put his staff in the Red Sea and God parted it, they started looking to another captive and said, "Give us what we want, not what God has promised to give us."

So just because there is godly leadership does not necessarily mean that everything goes right. In fact, let me share with you a fascinating phenomenon. If you come from a non Baptist background, that is okay. We will forgive you. Just kidding. If you come from a non Baptist background, what I am going to share with you are statistics that are amazing to me. If you go back the last 20 or 30 years in history the United States of America where there has just been this turmoil. There has just been this antagonism in the authority and power process of our country and you start looking at the individuals whom God has allowed to participate and be ordained in a leadership role, particularly on the national level, i.e., the president. Do you know it is amazing that when an individual is elected to office in this country, that whether right, wrong or indifferent is perceived by the Christian community as being antagonistic to Christians, did you know that salvations and baptisms actually increase? And when someone is elected into office that we would say, "That is a friend of the church," they actually decrease.

You say, "How did that happen?"

Because in our perception when there is ungodliness in power, do you know what happens? We naturally get on our knees. We naturally get serious about the things of God. But when it is what we want to see, we get apathetic and we say, "Everything is just going to work out."

All power is ordained by God. Whether it is ungodly or godly, God desires to work in both realms to get us to where we need to be, doing what he desires for us to do, which leads to the very last question and the most important.

So how do we respond? Because you know as well as I do that in the world of power and authority and, in particular, this concept of politics when, you get two people together and you are getting at least three opinions and probably a good fight going.

So how do you respond? How do you leave this campus today? How do you go into the work place? How do you go into the school house? How do you go you into your neighborhood? How do you, as a person who claims that you are bought by the blood of the Jesus Christ, you are saved and you are forgiven, how do you respond?

Two things that I would encourage you to do. The first one is this. I want to encourage you to decide to pray for whoever is in power, not just your guy or your gal. Decide to pray for whoever God has allowed to be in power.

For this I want you to turn to 1 Timothy chapter two. I am going to show you a passage

of Scripture here that will probably make us a little uncomfortable, but that is okay. 1 Timothy chapter two? It begins by saying:

“ I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men.”⁷

In other words, he says, “Above all other things you need to hit your knees. You need to pray.”

Listen to verse two.

“For kings, and for all that are in authority.”⁸

That means you are supposed to pray for the guy you didn't vote for.

Can I just be honest with you for a minute? Our world, our culture, our country would be incredibly more righteous and godly if all of the energy we spent in griping about someone who is in power we spent in praying for God to get their attention. Just a thought.

“For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.”⁹

Do you know what that says? That whoever is in power, whether it is pharaoh or Moses, we are to pray that whatever they do will allow us as Christians, to practice our faith in peace and in quietness. Huh. You know, the interesting thing is I have watched a lot of debates over the last couple of years and those issues never come up. It is always about this and that and this scenario and that. It is always about the issues. Have you noticed that?

Verse three.

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.¹⁰

Do you know why it says that in verse four and not verse one? Because when you and I decide that we are going to pray for whoever God has allowed to be in leadership in our lives, locally, nationally, internationally, whoever that is, when we pray that that man and that woman will fall down and allow us to live in godliness and peace, what naturally happens? We may not get the issues we want. We may not get the perks we want, but people come to know Jesus and that is why we are here, folks. We are here not... this leads to my last thing. This is... I guess I would be about six foot tall if I had a soap box.

⁷ 1 Timothy 2:1.

⁸ 1 Timothy 2:2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 2:3-4.

Here is my soap box. It is a question I have asked in the past and it is a question I want to ask in the present. Are you more interested in revival or replacing somebody you don't like? I didn't put names to anything. We all live in different counties. We have different leaders. There are some of you from different states. There are people here from different countries. This isn't just an American...

Here is the question I have got. Are we more interested in having power or are we more interested in having revival? Because the way I read Nehemiah chapter nine, when the people of God get on their faces before God and revival comes, God takes care of the power problem. He takes pharaoh away and says, "Here is Moses." And he raises that individual up unbeknownst to the processes of man and all the things that we do. So, number one, decide to pray for all leaders, whoever those leaders are. And the second thing is: Decide that revival and repentance is more important than replacement.

I am going to close you with one final frightening illustration. Before I say this illustration, you do understand I am active in the political process. I do vote. I want to encourage you. We live in the United States of America. We should be active. When God gives you the opportunity, take advantage of the opportunity. I advocate activism. You got that? But listen to this final thought.

This year in the United States of America over two billion dollars will be spent in deciding who sits behind the resolute desk of the oval office, two billion dollars. At that type of money and that type of resources, we could empower over 4000 missionaries for a four year term on the streets of this great country. Let me ask you a question. This is the difference between power and revival. What would change our country for godliness more? One man in one office or 4000 missionaries knocking on the doors? It is a hard question to ask ourselves. Yes, I believe we should be active. Yes, I believe we should be our part in the process. But I want you to hear something, that in Nehemiah chapter nine when the people of God came together and they prayed to God, do you know what they said? They said, "God, we are going to get prostrate on our face and we are going to pray and we are going to ask you to move. And when God moved and when God shows up, his power goes beyond process. His power goes beyond politics. And what I want to advocate us what has become taboo is no longer do we pray for revival. No longer do we pray seek revival. I have a feeling that we are seeking power.