

**I. Introduction:**

- A. Borrowing from a recent lesson by Bro. Fulton, I am going to say that Nehemiah was a unique individual.
1. Austin pointed out that David, during his exile from home, had a hard time living for God.
  2. He had no support structure; only one young inexperienced priest; no godly wife to encourage him.
  3. He had no access to the Tabernacle of God; his godly friend Jonathan was forbidden to him.
  4. He was captain over a pretty motley crew, so generally speaking his companions weren't much help.
  5. *I Samuel 22:2 – “And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him.”*
  6. It was through no fault of his own that he had no church, no pastor and no Christian brethren to uplift him.
  7. He had no access to Biblical preaching, the prayers of like-minded men, even a Christian handshake.
  8. **And yet**, despite moments, minutes and months of living in the flesh, he was an above average saint.
- B. Well, Nehemiah was in much the same situation.
1. Nehemiah – even while in Shushan – had limited access to the outward aspects of his religion.
  2. By the way, I need to correct a mistake I uttered last Sunday.
    - a. I said that when Nehemiah got to Jerusalem there were no strong priests there to support him.
    - b. I said that Ezra had passed away.
    - c. I discovered my mistake Monday when in my reading I fought Ezra once again in the spot light.
    - d. Ezra led the second emigration to Jerusalem which was only 10 years before Nehemiah's.
    - e. And the truth is, he was still in the land when Nehemiah arrived, and he **did support** him.
  3. But my point today is that we don't read that when still in Persia, Nehemiah had much spiritual help.
  4. Even though the Jewish synagogue began during the exile in that place, it was not for another century.
- C. Nehemiah's **knowledge** of God's word, his **devotion** to the Lord, his **love** for God's people were gifts of grace
1. And that remains true today.
  2. Even with churches, Christian parents and friends, good books, the internet and all the other help we might have – a godly Christian life is a miracle of God's grace – empowered by the Holy Spirit.
  3. It isn't thrust upon us unwillingly, but God gives us a willing heart for godliness, just as He did for salvation.
  4. A godly life comes about when a Christian surrenders to the leadership of the Lord.
  5. And that demands the question: *“Are YOU surrendered to God's will for you? Really?”*
- D. Throughout this chapter – and this book – we will see Nehemiah's Christian character – his godliness.
1. And as I said last Sunday, this is our purpose in making this study.
  2. Here is a man who amidst great adversity, like David, was a good servant of God.
  3. Lord willing, tonight, we'll catch a glimpse of the God Nehemiah served.
  4. But this morning, I want to look in a different direction, using a very contemporary kind of sermon title – *“The Godly Christian in a Post-Christian World.”*

**II. Hanani, one of Nehemiah's kinsmen, brought back a report from Judah and Jerusalem.**

- A. I would guess that Hanani & some others had been sent to Jerusalem on official business by King Artaxerxes.
1. Hanani is not listed in **Ezra** as being among the people who emigrated to Israel.
  2. He apparently was sent to the province sometime after Ezra and just before the beginning of this book.
  3. In those days, honest men didn't travel about the countryside without royal permission.
  4. So he had been on some sort of official journey, and he may have returned with some Judean residents.
  5. Nehemiah tells us, *“I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.”*
- B. At this point, for the sake of our lesson, I want to make an application and a comparison.
1. The people in Jerusalem were Jews; they were of the remnant whom the Lord spared from the exile.
  2. Nehemiah and Hanani used the words **“escape”** and **“remnant”** – they had **escaped the exile**.
  3. With the permission of Cyrus and Artaxerxes – they had left the captivity and returned to live in Judah.

- C. I suppose that we could use that to illustrate salvation from sin – a small remnant had been born again – they had new lives in the Promised Land.
1. And just as it was in the early chapters of **Acts**, in the first return there was a multitude – about 50,000.
    - a. That was under Zerubbabel when the worship of the Lord was restored and the temple was built.
    - b. Then later under Ezra there were another 2,000 saved – more escapees from spiritual slavery.
    - c. Eventually there would another unknown number saved through the prayers and ministry of Nehemiah.
  2. In the two books of **Ezra** and **Nehemiah** we have the names a number of Levites and Nethinims who were dedicated to God’s service, and servants of David and Solomon – singers and other musicians.
  3. **Ezra 1:7** says, *“Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put them in the house of his gods; Even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.”*
  4. So those redeemed saints – **“redeemed”** was a word used by Nehemiah in **verse 10** –
  5. Those **“redeemed”** saints had a church, they had pastors, they had the Word, they had all the accouterments necessary for the worship and service of the Lord.
  6. Some of the old rites were being carried out, and some of the ancient festivals were being kept.
  7. If I might so say, the returnees had more opportunity to serve God according to the law of Moses than did Nehemiah and the others who remained in Shushan.
- D. But Hanani’s report about Jerusalem was a sad one.
1. *“The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.”*
  2. The word translated **“affliction”** is ten times more often rendered **“wickedness”** – that is, about 60 times.
    - a. What if we switched and replaced those words in this verse? What would it say?
    - b. *“The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great **WICKEDNESS** & reproach.”*
    - c. In addition to that, that Hebrew word is translated **“affliction”** six times but **“evil”** – 442 times.
    - d. *“The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great **EVIL** and reproach.”*
    - e. And the people were not in common, every day, evil and wickedness, but **“great”** wickedness.
  3. Added to that, they were living in **“reproach”** which speaks of **“shame.”**
- E. In other words, God’s people, living at the center of His world, were being harassed by evil people.
1. And Nehemiah will see and testify to some of that later in this book.
  2. Wicked, heathen men like Sanballat & Tobiah will be seen making life difficult for the inhabitants of the land
  3. Isn’t that just as it is today? Isn’t evil thrust upon us? Aren’t we surrounded by unbelief and hatred of God?
  4. But something else we’ll see is that the **Jews** were living in considerable **sin themselves**.
    - a. There were **mixed marriages**, some Jews were being **sold into heathen slavery**, and there was **slavery of Jews to Jews**.
    - b. A few residents were full of **greed**, taking **advantage** of the weak and poor.
    - c. Some were **neglecting** their civic and religious responsibilities.
    - d. They were going to **church without contributing** anything or supporting the service.
    - e. Some of the secular leadership of Judah was **living in open disregard** for the laws of God.
    - f. And not all the priests were behaving as servants of God.
  5. While God’s enemies were making life miserable for Israel, Israel was making life miserable for Isreal.
- F. Here is where I would like to begin to make a radical application of this scripture.
1. What if we looked at **Nehemiah** as servant of God **WE all ought to be?**
  2. I’m not saying that we are him, or he is us. I am saying he teaches us things about who we ought to be.
  3. And on the other side of the question, what might we learn if we looked at the Judeans as religious people who were **NOT** as they should be.
  4. We might look at them as members of true churches of Christ, but only as nominal members – backslidden members, drones rather than workers.
  5. Or I suppose we could view them as professing Christians attending nominal Christian denominations – Protestants, evangelicals.

- G. From which ever camp they come, they attend their church almost every Sunday morning.
1. They sing the songs of Zion when they are told to sing and when the organ begins to play.
  2. They appear to listen to the weekly sermons – but do they really hear? Are their hearts engaged?
    - a. They are fine with eavesdropping on an internet church service, but they can't go to the trouble to get out of their pajamas and to assemble themselves with other believers.
    - b. Maybe they drop in a financial offering once in a while, but they don't tithe as God's Word commands.
    - c. They are spiritual leeches, sucking out whatever seems tasty to them, but they leave what doesn't tickle their fancies or tickles their ears.
    - d. And they contribute nothing.
  3. In verse 10 Nehemiah describes them as *"redeemed by (God's) great power, and by (His) strong arm,"* so let's view them as born again souls.
  4. But like David's original 400 men, they were *"in distress, in debt, and in discontentment,"*
    - a. And sadly, they can not really see the reason why. They are contributing to & enhancing their distress.
    - b. It takes the eye of an impartial visitor like Hanani to recognize their backslidden condition.
- H. But that is **not** my **primary lesson** from this chapter.

### III. How should WE respond to news about backslidden Christians and dilapidated, dying churches of Christ?

- A. Nehemiah, our representative of the good Christian, tells us, *"And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven."*
1. Aren't we looking at a man whose heart has been broken?
  2. This isn't for show, because the only audience in Hanani and God.
  3. This isn't merely a good religious act. This is the true Nehemiah.
- B. I wonder where that man was when Ezra took that throng of people to Jerusalem a decade earlier?
1. Was he a new believer, excited about the Lord, but unable to return with the others because of his age?
  2. In his innocent heart and youthful mind did he then picture the restoration and reestablishment of what he considered to be his home town – the city of his fathers?
  3. Didn't the church of Christ look perfect and pristine in the early days of our spiritual lives?
  4. Ten years later, when Nehemiah hears about what has happened in Jerusalem, the fairy tales he had created in his mind were dashed to pieces. And his heart fell to pieces with it.
  5. He will tell the king in the next chapter, *"The city, the place of my father's sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire."*
- C. While comparing Jerusalem to Christ's church, **Ephesians 3:21** comes to mind.
1. *"Unto (God) be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."*
  2. That is the sort of thing Nehemiah might have said about Jerusalem.
  3. The Lord expects to be glorified by the people of His assemblies; He assumes it; He commands it.
  4. But if that holy city lieth waste; if its walls are destroyed and there are no gates, where is the Lord to find His glory?
  5. Yes, He may be glorified in the destruction of that local ecclesia; or He may turn elsewhere.
  6. He can choose to be glorified in any of a great number of ways and places, but He has said, *"I will be glorified in my church."*
  7. In one sense that is equivalent to *"I prefer to be glorified in my church."*
- D. As we shall see, Nehemiah will be granted permission to move to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls.
1. You may picture the walls of an ancient community as only a necessity to protect against a variety of problems – from enemy armies or thieves to mad dogs and hungry lions.
    - a. But for most of those cities and most of its citizens the wall was much more than that.
    - b. It was often the most honorable part of the community – it was certainly the most public.
  2. Oh, how proud the people of Jericho were of her walls; other heathen cities boasted of their walls as well.

3. Inside might be all manner of poverty and ugliness, but if the wall was beautiful, the people had something in which to be proud.
  4. To be a major city, as Jerusalem had once been, and now to be without a wall was the epitome of shame.
  5. That wall, when there was one, was what the world saw when first looking toward that city.
  6. A city without a wall meant a city without good government – with a broken economy – without pride and certainly without protection.
- E. When Nehemiah heard that the city of David – the church of Christ – no longer had doctrines and gates to protect it, his heart instantly shattered.
1. When he heard that the inhabitants of Jerusalem cared more about their homes – whether hovels or mansions – than they did in honoring and protecting the house of God, he began to weep.
  2. When he learned that the wicked – the heathen – laughed at the saints and spit at hearing the name of Jehovah the God of Zion, a tsunami of emotions crashed across this man's soul.
  3. He will hear Tobiah say that a fox could bring Jerusalem's walls down.
  4. That is often the sort of thing what the world thinks of God's people and Christ's church.
  5. Such things crushed that saint's spirit – and it should do the same to us.
  6. Nehemiah must have immediately taken some sick leave, because when Hanani gave his report he mourned "*certain days*" outside the court of the king.
- F. Why aren't we more like Nehemiah? Shouldn't we be like Nehemiah?
1. As David said, "*Is there not a cause?*"
  2. I know for a fact that we are often far too defeatist, cynical, pessimistic. I know because I get that way.
    - a. *These are the last days. We shouldn't expect revival. We shouldn't expect to see the power of God.*
    - b. *Of course churches will fall to false doctrine or die of financial strangulation. These are the last days.*
  3. When we hear of another Baptist church becoming charismatic, turning protestant, or even cadaverous, we shouldn't be nodding our heads, it should bring our heads down to our chests in sorrow and shame.
  4. "*And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.*"

#### IV. And what was it Nehemiah prayed?

- A. He began where we always should – but where we rarely do – with the Lord Himself.
1. I am planning on considering the God of Nehemiah this evening, so we'll set our gun sights a little more horizontal at this point.
- B. This man of God began by **confessing sin**.
1. "*I confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee;*
    - a. *both I and my father's house have sinned.*
    - b. *We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments,*
    - c. *nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.*"
  2. As I read Nehemiah's words, I can picture some elderly Baptist deacon listening and nodding his ancient, hoary head.
  3. He might even say, "*Amen, preacher. Sin IS the problem in the church today.*"
  4. But often he is hearing those words or reading those words editorially rather than literally.
  5. He's not thinking about himself or his church.
    - a. He is picturing some church, for which he has no love, which is on the brink of destruction.
    - b. Or he is thinking of Bible Christianity generically.
- C. But that was not the confession of Nehemiah.
1. "*I confess the sins of the children of Israel – all of us – which we have all sinned against thee.*
  2. *Both I and my father's house have sinned.*
  3. *We, as a nation and people, have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.*"

- D. How could Nehemiah be responsible for the condition of the city of Jerusalem?
1. I don't think he had ever been to the city of David; he had never visited the Temple; he never celebrated the Passover or the Day of Atonement in Jerusalem.
  2. He had not personally committed any sins in Jerusalem.
- E. But he **was** a member of the nation whose capital was in Judea, and his great-grandfather was Abraham.
1. His grandparents were a part of that generation which forced God's hand into judgment and captivity.
  2. It may defy logic, but it doesn't contradict the Bible – we are linked – brother to brother; sister to sister; brother to sister.
  3. And Nehemiah was confessing that he, personally, was not the servant that Jehovah wanted him to be.
  4. He was not saying that his sins had brought reproach upon Jerusalem, but he acknowledged that he was a sinner nevertheless.
- F. There is not going to be revival in these the last days, until God's people – all of God's people admit to our general and specific unworthiness of God's gifts.
1. God's greatest blessings are not going to fall on Calvary Baptist Church until we crucify the idea that we are better than the next guy or the next church.
  2. Until we stop with being satisfied that our doctrinal ducks properly aligned, our Jerusalem is going to remain a laughing stock in the eyes of the heathen.
  3. As long as we think that hating abortion and a few other disgusting social sins are all that God wants of us, then we are going to be in danger of destruction.
  4. Dare I say that our pride, our laziness and our unconcern, because we are Christians, are more wicked in God's sight than the sins of Sanballat or some transvestite?
- G. Nehemiah was the sort of man whose Christian character was so impeccable that the great king of the Medes and the Persians trust him with his life and his wife.
1. That king may have had some pretty high standards.
  2. But Jehovah's standards are infinitely higher.
  3. Nehemiah wasn't trying to score artistic points with God when he included himself in this confession.
  4. But it was that inclusion which gave this confession its power with God.
- H. I won't say that Nehemiah actively thought that his prayers and his confession were a part of God's plan for the rebuilding of Jerusalem.
1. But you know what? They may have been.
  2. God's Nehemiah apparently thought that Jerusalem was not going to be blessed by God, until he confessed his own personal sins & once again brought himself into a position of surrender before the Lord.
  3. He prayed, *"Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations."*
  4. Yes, Lord that was your promise and your threat on several occasions.
  5. But you also said, *"But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there."*
  6. You said, *"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land"* – **II Chronicles 7:14.**
- I. How should Christians behave in a **post-Christian world**?
1. We should behave like some of the godly people the **pre-Christian world** – like people such as Nehemiah.
  2. This world needs hundreds and thousands of Christians who are living and serving God in humble repentance before the Lord.
  3. This worlds needs people like us who are more like Nehemiah.