

Nehemiah 13  
Caversham Baptist  
6.2.16

### Call to Worship

Romans 10:11-13

11 As Scripture says, 'Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.' [a] 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile - the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' [b]

Footnotes:

Romans 10:11 Isaiah 28:16 (see Septuagint)

Romans 10:13 Joel 2:32

### Highlights of Nehemiah #4

#### **Righting the Wrongs**

Over the last four weeks we've had a glimpse, or three glimpses of the book of Nehemiah. David Anderson lead us off in chapter one, reminding us that every great move of God can be traced back to a kneeling figure (DL Moody). It was a great reminder at the start of the year that all we hope for and plan for and are burdened for must be based on prayer. Nehemiah we read certainly took this seriously.

God's prompting followed by prayer sees Nehemiah act and in our glimpse in chapter two we see Nehemiah journeying in the dark. His heart, his desire to follow the King with a capital K has him travelling 1500 kilometres to Jerusalem. After a three day rest we see him inspecting the city at night. His determination to live for God gives him courage as he motivates the people.

And he sure does motivate as he builds community, confronting the selfish behaviour in chapter five. It's as if he's saying, we're all in this together! Like we are here as part of God's church.

Our final glimpse today is chapter 13. When we examine the behaviours going on in this chapter, we might simply shrug our shoulders and not care. The wrongs are so common today. However, the chapter's relevance to us is found 400 years later in the birth of Jesus. Some people overlook the significance of Jesus' birth and continue to live under Nehemiah's teaching. We must though look to Jesus, and live in the freedom and grace that He offers. Christianity is not all about rules and law.

### Read

Nehemiah 13

As I've looked at these five foreign 'crimes' or sins or wrongs that so upset Nehemiah I've

- a) marvelled at the freedom with which we live today
- b) been equally appalled with Nehemiah at how far we have fallen
- c) realised that another chapter would have been a better idea!

I've been drawn back to the four chairs, Good, Bad, New, Perfect. In these chairs it is helpful to sit, and ponder. The 'good' chair reminds me of the first two chapters of the Bible. Here God and humans lived in harmony. Humans trusted God. It was a time before selfishness and before all forms of sin entered the world. In this time Tobiah would never have considered having a place of his own in the temple, there was equality, respect for each other, the love for and trust in God was real. No curses were necessary, people lived in harmony together. It must have been quite something. As you look out from this chair, it

helps to consider all God intended, how it was meant to be, how good god's intention was. None of the bad things that we read of in this chapter would have happened in the 'Good' era. It was sin free.

But then come the fall, selfishness, sickness and sin in all it's many faces entered the world as Adam and Eve sin. And this 'fall' wasn't just in the world outside Israel, it was in the world within as well. All of humanity was stained. In these five wrongs we see in chapter 13 we see so clearly how humanity turned from what God had wanted. We see it more obviously in the book of Judges, it's a surprise to see it here in Nehemiah.

From this chair, this 'Bad' chair we see loss, hopelessness, evil upon evil, irreparable relationships. It's a mess. The wrongs here fit so well. And it was never fixable by humans. The fix came 400 years later, when Jesus arrives. God provided the fix. Everything changed with Jesus.

### **v1-3 Foreigners Excluded**

As we look at these five wrongs in the time before Jesus, we have to consider how different they are in the time since Jesus. Firstly when you look from the 'New' chair, in the era we are now, how would the Ammonites and Moabites who are excluded in verses 1-3 be treated?

Firstly they'd be offered forgiveness. No one is excluded from the forgiveness that is offered by Jesus.

If you're an Ammonite or Moabite or feel like one remember Romans 10:11-13 'Anyone who believes in [Jesus] will never be put to shame.' 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile - the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Jesus reminds us about forgiveness, that we are to forgive in an extraordinary way, an extraordinary number of times, 70 times 7. And we are not to create Ammonites and Moabites. We are a forgiven people who are to forgive. This wrong in these first three verses is so different when viewed from the lens of the 'New' chair.

### **v4-9 Tobiah**

What about the next wrong in verses 4 to 9. Tobiah creates his own space in the temple. Who does he think he is?! Could this happen today? Was he trying to get closer to God, or be like God? Today, in this 'New' era God is no longer restricted to one place. And no one today has exclusive access to God. No one can prevent access to God. In fact everyone has the opportunity to be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Everyone can be gifted by the Holy Spirit.

Through Jesus God has opened up the temple access to Himself. No longer is He contained in a temple. What Tobiah did cannot happen today. God is open to all. There are no exclusive people or places for God! Jesus has made a great difference!

### **v10-14 Grudging Giving**

In the third wrong in verses 10 to 14 that of not honouring the Levites with gifts they deserve we see grudging giving. There is no lavishing of gifts. But who are the Levites today? Today we don't have a set tribe or nation of people who lead worship, or who bring the message, or who teach our children. You can look at it either way, we're all special, or we're all ordinary.

Let's go for ordinary because we're Kiwi's. We're ordinary people going about our tasks of serving God, in the kitchen, on the stage here, all sorts of ways during the week. Through the lens of this 'new' chair, we give in all sorts of ways, but especially by sharing in the gifts that God has given us. And this is how we grow, this is how we're community, this is how we belong, connecting with each other and God.

What a massive shift since Jesus. Imagine what it was like back then. How could you serve? Here we are as ordinary people, gifted with skills, being willing to serve God. No more Levites, just the priesthood of all believers.

### **v15-22 Sabbath Abuse**

Which leads so well into the fourth wrong. Sunday is no longer the only day of worship. Everyday we are to give thanks to God as we recognise His goodness to us, as we experience His blessing and presence. No more temple to gravitate to. Now every day is important, all we do is important. God is to be honoured everyday in all we do.

Do we scrap Sunday? Certainly not! God created a day for rest for a good reason. We ALSO use it as a great opportunity to worship together. For those who like to worship alone be it in the outdoors or wherever, this is a challenge. But there is something special about worshipping together, that grows our faith, that contributes to the faith growth in others. We are not called to be Christians alone.

### **v23-31 Marriage of Foreigners**

And finally, the fifth wrong, cross cultural marriage. As we sit in this chair that has given us the new era, what has changed? We are free to marry whoever. Like the Sabbath though, we can choose to ignore advice. If we as single Christians choose to marry those who aren't interested in following Jesus, our children will be as confused as those in these last verses who don't know who God is. 2 Corinthians 6 talks about not being unequally yoked. And we know how hard it is when one of us becomes a Christian after marriage. There is freedom, but warning here in the 'New' chair.

Finally, let's not forget the fourth chair. It's called 'Perfect' for it represents the time to come when sin, selfishness, wrongs, curses, evil, sickness, death, is no more. It will be a wonderful time and place. I look forward to this time when God prepares for us the renewed heavens and renewed earth.

This chapter is sad. Nehemiah lives before the time of Jesus, in a time of fear, of not being sure if you've done enough to keep God happy. 'Remember me' Nehemiah says three times in this final chapter. Nehemiah is in second chair time. We're in third chair time. God's grace means we don't have to earn God's favour. God has given this to us already. That's what Jesus is about. Jesus is a very real symbol of God's mercy and grace. He rises from the dead to smash the power of death. He offers us the chance of new life too. All of us.

When we understand this we cannot help but respond, in love for others, in service, in worship. We should be so thankful for being third chair people, for living in third chair times. Yes, we have fallen far, but oh what freedom we've been given by a God who loves us so much. Let's be thankful for His mercy and grace.

Let's pray

Father God, we get so frustrated with sin, with others who don't do things right, who make dumb decisions, who don't live for you. Help us to be equally frustrated with our own sin. May we be overcome with the love you have for us, with the amazing grace you have given us, for the mercy we don't deserve. Thank you Father for sending Jesus. Thank you Jesus for dying for us. Thank you Holy Spirit for the gifts you give us.

Thank you that this good news is not exclusive, that your love is here for all.

Amen

**Benediction**

You are the people of God, gifted with dreams and visions.  
Upon you rests the grace of God like flames of fire.  
Love and serve the Lord in the strength of the Spirit.

May the deep peace of Christ be with you,  
The strong arms of God sustain you,  
And the power of the Holy Spirit strengthen you in every way. Amen.