

Consecration – Something to be faithful to.

Nehemiah 11:1-12:47

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



We are almost to the end of the book. And as we examine the last three chapters of Nehemiah, we will find the chronicler re-recording the re-populating effort of Jerusalem and its outlying areas. We first encountered this back in chapter 7. With that, we again find ourselves with long lists of names and titles, and for our modern sensibilities, it feels like a fly-over passage. Yet, we should be struck with the size and scope of the people who have come back to Jerusalem to worship God. God has done a mighty thing, and Nehemiah gathers them to rejoice and give thanks to God for what he has done. I'm sure that some were filled with national pride. This great city of their ancestors and of David has been repaired, its people are back, and its enemies are held at bay. And while that is a monumental thing, it misses the whole point of what has happened and will cloud the future with confusion that will lead to fracture. Nehemiah gathers the people, and they give praise to God for what he has done, and that includes the wall, but it is so much bigger than the wall. Again, we are confronted with the purposes of God to be in relationship with his people. The wall, the city, and the structures were forms to accomplish that purpose. They are to be faithful to God, who has been faithful to them, and this wall serves as a reminder, not an object of pride or, worse yet, worship. After all, they are still under the Persians, they are exiles in their own homeland. They will never rule themselves again. But, it was never about being a nation. It was about being in faithful covenant relationship with God. The reality that stands out to us is that, **faithfulness isn't a part-time job.**

1. Faithful with what?

- a. Faithfulness drives gratitude (thanks). → Why?
 - i. Let's consider the definition we've been working with for faithfulness.
 - 1. **Faithfulness is a forward-looking trust, that is rooted in God's past provision.**
 - ii. When we consistently consider what God has already done, it does three things in us:
 - 1. **Builds trust** – God will come through, because he has come through.
 - 2. **Inspires confidence** – “The Lord is your strength” → A refrain we have heard in this text over and over again.
 - 3. **Grows gratitude** – We become increasingly thankful because we become increasingly aware of our inability and God's ability.
 - a. As this happens we stop taking things for granted... especially the little things.
 - b. **What is something that you had taken for granted, but now, are routinely grateful for?**

- c. Example: I (Kyle) had really good coaches on my high school travel baseball team. One of the things that they did well, was be clear with you. I grew to take that for granted. But, when I got to college, that was definitely not my experience and grew my gratitude for what I had.
 - d. As we grow into adulthood, how many of us had grown in gratitude for the things we took for granted in our youth?
 - iii. The very recording of the larger passage and those that settled in Jerusalem reflects the gratitude of the people.
 - 1. **It was with a sure instinct that “the people blessed all those who volunteered to settle in Jerusalem” (v 2), and recorded their names with gratitude.¹**
 - 2.
- b. **When we see how much God has given we are moved to respond in right worship.**
 - i. This has been the larger story of chapters 8-10.
 - ii. This is also why we are coming back in the story to the dedication of the wall.
 - 1. The work was done in chapter 6.
 - 2. The people moved back in chapter 7.
 - 3. Chapters 11 & 12 are a recapturing of that moment and of the worship that ensued.
 - 4. **They are ordering themselves as a community of worshipers. This is not just a celebration of a mile-marker in their personal lives. God has moved the community forward as a whole.²**
 - iii. Note on the casting of lots and where people were settling:
 - 1. Casting of lots was not seen as a “random” thing. It was seen as a way to figure out the will of the Lord on discretionary matters.
 - 2. We learn from 1 Chronicles 9:3 (in a chapter which fills out the present list with further names and with glimpses of the Temple servants at their work) that Israelites of other tribes than the three mentioned here took up residence in Jerusalem. But these three, Judah, Benjamin and Levi, were the nucleus. **These had stayed with David’s heirs, to form the kingdom of Judah when the rest had broken away;** now the future of Israel lay with them and with those who had rallied to them from the other tribes.³
- c. **My greatest purpose is to bring honor and glory to God.**
 - i. When I seek God’s glory, I will find my greatest good.
 - ii. **First, as in the case of Nehemiah (cf. chap. 7), so the people too recognized that buildings in themselves are lifeless. Once divorced from their purpose of providing a framework within which a community (be it town, Church, or family) may develop, they become nothing more than a liability.⁴**
 - 1. The city had a larger purpose in God’s plan and it needed to be fulfilled.
 - 2. That larger purpose was the declaration of God’s glory through the right worship and restored community of God’s people.

¹ H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, vol. 16, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1985), 354.

² Mason, Eric. *Nehemiah For You: Strength to Build for God (God's Word For You)* (p. 174). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

³ Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 12, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 128.

⁴ H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, vol. 16, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1985), 354.

3. **This is no rabble of refugees, settling down anywhere: they have the dignity of order and of known relationships; above all, of their calling to be ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Exod. 19:6).⁵**
- d. Again, we know that faithfulness is not a part-time job, so what are we to be faithful with?
 - i. Three things:
 1. Our time, talents, and treasure.
 2. **This is really asking: How will we live intentionally with the resources that God has blessed us with?**

2. Our Time

- a. How were they using their time to glorify God?
 - i. The work that has been completed.
 1. Think of the amount of time that was devoted to the restoration work.
 - ii. The actions of remembering and praising. → Worship
 1. We’ve seen the notes on how many hours were devoted in worship in chapters 8-10.
- b. The resource of time: We all have a finite amount.
 - i. 24 hours a day → 7 days a week → 4 weeks a month → 12 months a year.
 - ii. **Do we think about our time in terms of a resource to bring God glory?**
 1. What would change about our days or our schedules if we did?
 2. First, we need to examine how we are spending our time.
 - a. Time audit – I have made a habit of conducting a time audit periodically.
 - i. This is when you chart your day in 30 minute increments.
 - ii. Just like a budget, we need to account for every hour in the audit. Specificity helps and brings clarity.

3. Urgent vs Important

- a. How many of us bounce from urgent thing to urgent thing in life?
 - i. Then we look back at our days and wonder what we got done.
 - ii. **“Your greatest danger is letting the urgent things crowd out the important.”⁶**
— Charles E. Hummel, Tyranny of the Urgent
- b. We need to make time for the important things in life. Otherwise, they don’t get our time. Think of it this way:
 - i. Big rocks – Most important items (essential)
 - ii. Small rocks – Important items
 - iii. Sand – Urgent things
- c. If you fill the jar of your life with sand first, you won’t have room for the important and most important things.
 - i. You have to put the big rocks in first, then small rocks, and lastly, the sand.
- d. When we look at our time in this way, it allows us to say no to the things that take away from the most important things.

⁵ Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 12, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 128.

⁶ Charles E. Hummel, *Tyranny of the Urgent* (1984)

- i. There is a holy and God honoring reality to saying “no” to certain things.

3. Our Talents

- a. The lists reflect the purposes that the people played in the life of this transformed community.
 - i. Priests, Levites, Gatekeepers, Singers / Choir, Musicians, Officials, Valliant men / Then those who are living outside that make life happen (farmers, tradesmen, etc).
 - ii. They literally used their talents to rebuild the city to a habitable state.
- b. **Do I consider my talents a resource to be used for God’s glory?**
 - i. If I did, what would change about myself or my day to day life?
 - ii. **This isn’t just a question about what you are doing, but it is also about why you are doing it.**
 - 1. Action and motive are important.
- c. Are my talents for me or for a higher purpose?
 - i. **“If you think your talents are simply for you to make a lot of money, retire, and die, you’ve missed the point of your life.”** – Rick Warren
 - ii. Whether you’re a musician or an accountant, a teacher or a cook, God gave you those abilities to serve others. The Bible tells us, *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms”* (1 Peter 4:10 NIV).
- d. This is a key question in our strategy of serving.
 - i. As a church we think following Jesus in a life-defining way happens through the three strategies.
 - 1. Gather in worship.
 - 2. Connect in community.
 - 3. Serve those around us. (Church, Community, World)
 - ii. God has given us talents to honor him by serving others.
 - 1. A disciple is someone who is focused on eternity and freely gives of their resources.
 - iii. Do I know what my talents are?
 - 1. What am I good at?
 - 2. What do others say I’m good at?
 - a. Affirmation of others is an important part of discernment.
 - 3. What excites me?

4. Our Treasure

- a. What is the tithe?
 - i. Regulations regarding first-fruits are found in Exod 23:19 and 34:26. Deut 26:1–11, which is often adduced here, is, strictly speaking, **reshith רֵאשִׁית**, or “prime-fruit” offering. Although these passages speak only of bringing them to the sanctuary, Num 18:12–13 makes clear that they were for the benefit of the priests, and that is explicitly reaffirmed here.

1. **The quantity involved is not stated, but it was a token amount of that harvested first each year to acknowledge that the whole was from God and properly belonged to him.**⁷
 - a. **Giving is an act of worship. → We praise the one who has supplied our every need.**
- ii. Tithing was the OT action of giving a 10% portion of grain or earnings to the Lord annually.
 1. There is no mandate in the NT for the tithe, instead, we are told to give generously, joyfully, and sacrificially.
 2. **Matthew 6:21 – “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**
 3. **2 Cor. 9:7 - Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.**
 4. **2 Cor. 8:12 - For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what one does not have.**
 5. **1 Tim 6:17-19 - As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.**
 6. **Heb 13:6 - Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.**
- b. **Why does God need our money?**
 - i. Again, He doesn't... our action of giving is a profound statement on what we think about God.
 1. **Character** – Good and trustworthy
 2. **Nature** – Kind and faithful
 3. **Disposition** – Merciful and generous
 - ii. The writer to the Hebrews, 11:13–16, speaks of earlier heroes of the faith who similarly looked for promises whose physical realization lay still in the future. **To all who are thus conscious of a discrepancy between a vision of God's future vouchsafed by revelation and a present frustration at the shortfall in realization, there comes the writer's assurance that “God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”**⁸
 1. Again, giving is an action that reminds us of who God is.
- c. How does the tithe transform us?
 - i. Identity saturation – We've talked about this over and over through this series, but it is key.
 - ii. **Key conviction - He (Nehemiah) belong to God** – I.e., His identity is wrapped up in belonging to God's family.
 1. More than anything, this is the ultimate lens that influences Nehemiah's worldview.
 - a. **I belong to God, and I am to honor God. Therefore, everything that I do must be filtered through that lens.**
- d. **Who are we in Christ?**

⁷ H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, vol. 16, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1985), 337.

⁸ H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, vol. 16, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1985), 354.

- i. 1 Pet 2:9 - ⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
- ii. Gal. 3:25 - ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.
- iii. 2 Cor 5:17 - ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.
- iv. Rom. 6:11 - ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.
- v. Col 1:12-14 - ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.
- vi. Rev. 21:1-4 - Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."
- 1. What we experience in a foretaste now, we will experience in full in the age to come.
- 2. **This is the story of Nehemiah and the people. Their formation wasn't just about who they are in the present, but it is also about who they are becoming. The vision for the future only gets better and better.**
- e. **If one of the strongest prevailing cultural mantras that we experience, is, "I am what I do," then we need the action of giving to reorient that mantra and reset our identity.**
 - i. How do we experience this?
 - 1. When you meet a new person... "What do you do?"
 - 2. High school students... "Where are you going to college?"
 - 3. Elementary students.... "What do you want to be when you grow up?"
 - ii. These questions are not bad. → They are part of a deeply emmeshed American cultural experience.
 - iii. **Giving is a physical action / spiritual discipline that states:**
 - 1. I am not what I produce, earn, do, etc.
 - 2. I am dependent on the Lord.
 - a. God deserves my very best, because of who He is.
 - 3. I value contentment over greed.
 - 4. My ultimate allegiance and sense of identity is found in Christ and nothing else.
- f. If we want to be a people who are found faithful, we need to remember two things:
 - i. We need to be faithful with our time, talents, and treasure.
 - ii. Faithfulness is not a part-time job. It only happens as we increase our intentionality.
 - iii. Lord, find us faithful!