



Series: Nehemiah, Healthy Walls	Reference: Nehemiah 13 continued	Title: R & R	Date: 8.13.17
Website Writeup:			
Are you overwhelmed, too busy, never finding a break? Nehemiah teaches at the very end of this book the two R's of Sabbath. Not Rest & Relaxation, but rather Rest & Remembrance, in order to further bring spiritual health back to individuals and community life.			

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

UPG Prayer of the Day...

The Northern Hmu are a people group of over 2 million.. The Chinese have despised the Hmu people for centuries, and have called them "men-dogs." When a Hmu dies, a shaman "opens the road" by giving directions to enable the soul of the deceased to reach heaven after a long journey. In 1898 missionary W. S. Fleming & the first Hmu convert, Pan Xiushan, were murdered & 32 Christian inquirers were seized & beheaded.

Sermon...

Nehemiah's been like eating a good steak. We've eaten a lot of meat in the past 13 weeks. We're full, but long for more of God's Word, more nourishment. Always good to finish something, to follow through with it until the end, but there's still so much more to be enjoyed at the next meal. So, let's begin our last study of Nehemiah in Chapter 13 with Verse 15. We won't finish the whole chapter since the end of it deals more with the issue of intermarriage & I thought it better not to flog a dead horse. It says...

In those days I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath & bringing in grain & loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs & all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day. Men from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish & all kinds of merchandise & selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah. I rebuked the nobles of Judah & said to them, "What is this wicked thing you're doing-desecrating the Sabbath day? Didn't your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity upon us & upon this city? Now you're stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath." (Neh 13:15-18)

Until today orthodox Jews control Israel in this way, and for the visitor to the area, the Sabbath can be sort of an inconvenience; certain services are just not available. I remember growing up as a kid, nothing, and I mean nothing was open on a Sunday. It was inconvenient at some level, but on another it was really nice - sort of a forced time of quietness, rest & reflection. In Indonesian Muslim culture it's similar during the month of Ramadan, not horrible, but inconvenient none-the-less. They don't close stores & restaurants since they're not under Sharia Law, but eating out can be an issue - since you get stares. Restaurants put up visual barriers so no one on the outside can see people eating on the inside. You just felt sort of guilty eating in public.



There are ways around these religious inconveniences though. A missionary friend of mine says that in Saudi Arabia, during the month of fasting when restaurants & stores are supposed to close down during the day, they get around it by flipping the schedule. A Saudi student of mine from Riyadh confirmed it to be true. Instead of being open all day & sleeping at night, they just sleep all day & open all night. The difference is though that when 'breaking the fast' at night they really party - and as a result, Saudi Muslims gain weight instead of losing it during the fasting month. They aren't really fasting, just flip-flopping their schedule! Sneaky. Always a way round a requirement.

So, Nehemiah had gone away, come back & found the people had forgotten the word 'remember' just like we always do. To remember is important, to recall the past mistakes & triumphs, to learn from them is key to making better decisions in the future. They had forgotten again, they hadn't remembered the Sabbath & why they were to practice it. Nehemiah's shocked, like we should be at ourselves, at the propensity to quickly forget. We stop practicing the disciplines of our faith; prayer, reading & meditation & quickly we forget. Old patterns are revived & we find ourselves in the same troubles & stresses we did before! How easily we forget.

Using his authority, he reminds & implements change yet again. *When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut & not opened until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day. Once or twice the merchants & sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem. But I warned them & said, "Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will lay hands on you." From that time on they no longer came on the Sabbath. Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy. (Neh 13:19-22a)*

So, he shuts the gates to impede this trade & the guys sit outside all night hoping someone will open the gate in the morning so they can buy & sell. Couldn't you hear them outside? "What's the big deal? He can't be serious? Who's he anyway to say we can't do this?" And they'd be right, who is he? Besides his earthly authority of position, what gives him the right? God does, because these are God's wishes not Nehemiah's. And, he says, "Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will lay hands on you." In other words, I am gonna kick some butt! I am getting the impression Nehemiah was a strong man of principle & not one you'd want to make angry! Later in this chapter he actually beats some guys & pulls their hair out due to their intermarriage with others! He's passionate about these things because God's passionate about them. God's passionate about them because it's the best thing for everyone!

Just like last week when we saw how they placed personal desire before truth & faith, here they think the best thing is to work more. To become busier & busier! Sound familiar? To fill every waking minute of our time with more work & activity. We'll miss an opportunity if we don't get something done or started. That we'll be better workers if we keep going & producing. Rest is for the weak, not the American! Rest is for the lazy & unambitious. Rest isn't a value in our culture. People aren't a value. Work & ambition



are. A grinding, self-destructive pace, but not rest. Rest is for those who won't succeed according to American culture.

What's the result of all the stress? Cornell University has earned the unfortunate moniker of being the 'Suicide School'. Now, during exam weeks they have to install 10 foot high fences around the bridges on campus to keep students from jumping to their deaths. It's a shame our culture drives us so hard. But the question becomes, who should drive our lives? Culture or Christ?

What's this all mean for us? What we have to remember is, these regulations imposed upon Israel regarding the Sabbath, were what the New Testament calls "shadows," or pictures of something even more important God wants observed. So, the question is, What's Sabbath? And the proposition for you today is: *We observe the Sabbath when we fulfill what the Sabbath portrays.*

And, the Sabbath is two things; rest & remembrance, R&R. Not rest & relaxation, but rest & remembrance. The mind, emotions, spirit & body need rest to operate rightly; one day in seven to be exact. God provides that in the idea of the Sabbath.

Consider these questions:

1. *Do you feel you're never able to finish anything?*
2. *Do you feel life just gets heavier & busier?*
3. *Do you feel you never get a moment to yourself?*
4. *Do you yell at people on the road from inside your car?*
5. *Are you fatigued & overworked?*
6. *Do you not sleep well at night?*
7. *Do you get angered or frustrated easily?*
8. *Are you short with those around you, or complain constantly?*
9. *Does everything seem not to go your way?*
10. *Do you say, "If I don't do it, it won't get done!"*
11. *Do you feel, "If I don't get this done now, everything will fall apart. I will never have the time, there will just be more & more on my plate!"*

Exodus 20:8-11 in the list of the 10 commandments (and Genesis 2) is the familiar passage on Sabbath. God rests on 7th day after laboring six. Why did God rest? He doesn't get weary. Simply, he was through - he finished his steak, unbuckled his belt, leaned back in his chair & smiled! He'd done what he intended to do. Accomplished his objective. For most if we were God, we would've woken up on the 7th day & said, "I'm not satisfied with how dry that desert is...I don't like that I made water so wet, winter so cold, or the crow so black...I better work more & change it all!"

There are two great pieces of advice I'd give to younger artists & painters when I have taught art. The first is - "STOP! You're done! Don't touch it or you'll ruin it!" But they always say, "Nope, gotta do more, it's not finished!" And it becomes a muddy mess, they've ruined something beautiful by overworking it.



The second is, come back to it later. When a student of the arts gets stuck on a piece of work, the last thing to do is to keep working at it. The answer is stop, put the painting to the side, go have coffee with a friend, give it a day or two, then come back & look at the painting fresh. The stress is gone. The frantic nature has been stayed. And, new insights come about. All great artists do this; much of their work is done in reflection.

The point is there's a limit to our work, and that's what God's teaching. There's a time to just stop & rest. Because if you keep working you're going to burn out! You'll do too much, over work things & ruin what progress you've made. Not everything has to be perfect or finished, as you think they do. It's better to go away & come back fresh to an unfinished task. But we usually overwork things, then we end up going back cleaning up the mess we made by overworking it. Whereas, if we'd stopped, rested & come back to our work, we'd be more level headed to do it rightly in the first place - see how practical & wonderful the thinking is? There's a need in our human spirit & body to rest, to let go of control & be content with what's done to that point.

I make to-do lists. The funny thing about them is, when I write things down I think they're so important at the time. Yet, I often find myself scratching those things off the list 2 weeks later & they were never done because they really didn't need to be - what seemed so urgent in my mind, wasn't so urgent! Or, I find someone else has done it. But in my arrogance, I was the only one who could do it right!

There's another reason the Sabbath was given but we're not as familiar with it. Deuteronomy 5:15. God said to Israel, *"Remember you were slaves in Egypt. The Lord brought you out with a mighty hand & an outstretched arm. Therefore, the Lord your God commands you to observe the Sabbath day,"* (Deut 5:15).

That's a different reason from the former. They were to rest in order to remember - Israel didn't deliver itself from Egypt. It couldn't. When they came to the Red Sea they panicked. They didn't know how they were going to get through the waters. The Egyptian army was coming on them & they were afraid. But God delivered them. He did for them what they couldn't do for themselves. Therefore, they were to think of that when they observed the Sabbath. There are so many things in our lives that we think, "I gotta fix this now!" But we can't & if we'd just stop, pray & wait, God works it out.

So there are two aspects of the Sabbath - to rest & to remember God works for us, doing what we can't do for ourselves. To remember he's in control of life, not me. It's not up to me to save myself, to get everything done. I can't save myself, or make everything work out the way I want it - but God's there & by my rest I can remember & allow him to work. So I cease work & rest because I need it & need to sit back & notice the hand of God in my life.

Jesus said it in Matthew 11. *"Come to me all you who are weary & burdened, and I will give you rest,"* (Matt 11:28). Just come, he says, that's all. "Come to me. Trust me. Rest upon what I've already done & I'll give you rest." The rest of regeneration, where we become a new creation & enter the process of change. Then he said, *"Take my yoke*



upon you & learn from me,” (Matt 11:29a) “... and you will find rest for your souls,” (Matt 11:29c). A rest which is given & a rest which is found, as we journey with the Lord. A rest extended...isn't it nice that Jesus recognizes our need for rest? That he understands life is somewhat exhausting & even traumatizing, especially if you're at all trying to live it well. That we have a great High Priest, as Hebrews refers to him, who is able to empathize with our weaknesses; one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet he did not sin (see Hebrews 4:14-16). Jesus knows the tension life brings - he sweat blood in the Garden of Gethsemane in an effort to stay true to his word in it.

Rest & Remembrance is what the Sabbath pictures for us. If we're doing these, we're fulfilling the Sabbath as God intended it to be fulfilled. At appropriate times you need to stop your work. Stop trying to save yourself. Trust his work for you. Obey, follow & learn from him. And then, you'll discover God working through you, doing for you what you can't do yourself. We run around with such stress forgetting these gifts God calls us to. We look to others, work, relationships, drugs, the internet, etc. to find solace in our craziness. We forget we have a Great High Priest - we can *“come boldly to the throne of grace... to find grace in our time of need,” (Heb 4:16).* Very few people seem to rely upon that provision of strength & grace from on high to carry them through the pressures & the burdens of life.

I've learned over the years to recognize when I'm under too much stress. It comes out in how I speak to my wife & kids. It comes out in my physical body in certain ways. I start to forget things. I get overly emotional about small things. I've actually believed the lie sometimes that my ministry's better when I'm really busy. I've had to crucify the self-centered thought I'm all that important to everything - not that I'm not important, it's just that I'm not God. I've learned to manage my schedule & to not feel guilty in saying no. This week someone sent us an invitation to something I could have gone to. The first thought was, they're going to think I'm rude for saying no. The actual temptation was to lie & say I had something else on those evenings, but instead I just said, no. I was honest, it would've taken my attention away from more important things & would've overwhelmed me to do it.

Here's what I do when I get too busy.

- Assess what's really important & leave the rest
- Make a to do list in order of priority & schedule in rest at the top
- Get out of town to a quiet place
- Have a quiet time & pray
- Cancel some things even when they feel really important
- Ask myself, “What's driving me, faith, or the desire to be recognized?”
- Sleep & don't feel guilty about it
- Refrain from making large decisions
- Tell others they'll have to wait on something
- Read

Let's conclude with a warning. Some of us are driven people & need to hear this message. And we'll say, “I don't see how I can rest!” and you're going to have to wrestle



with God in that. But there are others in this room that may have to propensity to rest too much - and you'll say, "See I'm justified." Don't let my silence on that issue be your justification for not working hard. Remember there were six days of work before the seventh day of rest! Don't use what I have said today as an excuse to say no to the responsibilities & obligations you have before you, or to help others when they need it. There are plenty of times within in the 6 days before in which we are to stretch ourselves.

I intentionally didn't get into the age old argument of when the Sabbath day is, because we usually use that as a red herring to get away from the issue of what the Sabbath shadows or portrays to us - which is simply, are you taking the time for rest & remembrance? Remember, what's the Sabbath? It's taking the time for rest & remembrance. Rest because you need it, and remembrance, because God will work on your behalf in what you can't do yourself.

So, the more important question is how are you resting & remembering? Do you take time daily for a quiet time with the Lord. To listen, to remember him through his word? To schedule in time when you're not necessarily not doing anything, but are resting...how does that happen for you? Do you read? Do you go to a coffeehouse? Do you take a drive? Hang out with a good friend? Is rest & remembrance in your schedule?