“Passing on the Legacy” Memory Verse: Nehemiah 13:31b

Pastor Cassi Scripture Reading: Nehemiah 12:27-30

**SLIDE 1: TITLE**

I started this message series with Nehemiah 1:1-4, highlighting how Nehemiah's compassionate heart responds to the broken state of Jerusalem's walls. We drew parallels to our own lives, emphasizing the inevitability of encountering brokenness and the call to address it through both compassion and action. Week 2 Pastor Andrew focused on Nehemiah's prayerful response to his burden and the foundational role of seeking God's guidance in our lives. He emphasized how prayer and seeking divine direction are crucial steps in any rebuilding process, highlighting the importance of God's wisdom for successful restoration and transformation. The third message explored Nehemiah 3. Nehemiah's ability to rally the people together for a unified effort. The message underscores the significance of unity and collaboration in accomplishing God's work, emphasizing the value of each member's contribution and the greater impact achieved through a united effort. In the fourth message, we dug into Nehemiah 4-6, shedding light on the challenges and opposition faced by Nehemiah and the builders. This provides insights into the obstacles encountered when pursuing God's calling and offers strategies for persevering in the face of adversity while trusting in God's protection.

Last week, Pastor Andrew explored Nehemiah 8-10. This time the focus was on Nehemiah's importance of maintaining integrity and devotion to God during the pursuit of restoration. The sermon underscores that our work, like Nehemiah's, should ultimately bring glory to God and be rooted in a heart of obedience. Collectively, these sermons provide a comprehensive and practical guide for navigating the complexities of life, leadership, and spiritual restoration.

Today, our focus turns to the closing chapters of Nehemiah, chapters 12 and 13. This is the point where Nehemiah wraps up the walls' construction and brings a revival to Jerusalem. But I hope this series has not been just a history lesson; it's about drawing parallels to our lives and seeing how Nehemiah's story resonates with what Jesus taught us in the New Testament and what that means for us today.

**SLIDE 2: Nehemiah’s Jerusalem**

Now, we shift our focus to the last chapters of Nehemiah. As we heard in Chapter 12, the people have been residing and laboring in Jerusalem for a span of 12 years, Nehemiah has accomplished a remarkable transformation. Through his leadership, Israel has been restored to a state of obedience and spiritual strength not experienced since the time of Joshua. We witness Jerusalem buzzing with excitement and joy as they celebrate the completion of the walls. The once-ruined walls have been reconstructed, the city is bustling with activity, the temple is fully operational, and the people are diligently living in accordance with God's law under the Covenant. Or so we think… But it is Israel and they are human so we come to chapter 13.

In Nehemiah 13, Nehemiah left the city after 12 years, to return to king Artaxerxes. His heart was in Jerusalem. He longed to get back to the holy city, the place he'd spent twelve important years. Graciously, the king granted his request, and sent Nehemiah to Jerusalem once again. Last week Pastor Andrew talked about the covenant Nehemiah had signed with over eighty others, years earlier, they had all said they would not marry unbelieving people, would keep the Sabbath, and would tithe and give other support to the temple worship. One can imagine Nehemiah anticipating these practices and that holy society while he heads back to Jerusalem. While he was away, the people began to slide back into disobedient behaviors, especially as it related to the corrupting of leaders. The people have compromised the sanctity of worship by neglecting the temple and allowing Tobiah, an adversary of Israel, to have a room within its walls. Let’s read Nehemiah 13:4-9, Nehemiah is writing here about what he found in the temple upon his return *“Now before this, however, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed to be in charge of the storerooms of our God’s house and who was related to Tobiah, prepared a large room for Tobiah to use. This was the room where they had previously kept the grain offering, the incense, and the equipment, together with the tenth-part gifts of grain, wine, and oil. These items were for the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers as well as the portions for the priests. I wasn’t in Jerusalem while this was happening because I had gone to Babylon’s King Artaxerxes in the thirty-second year of the king. After some time, I asked the king’s permission and returned to Jerusalem. That was when I saw the wrong that Eliashib had done on behalf of Tobiah by preparing him a room in the courtyards of God’s house. I was very angry and threw all of Tobiah’s household furniture out of the room. Then I gave orders that the rooms be purified, and I put back the temple equipment, along with the grain offering and the incense.”*

**SLIDE 4: Nehemiah 13:4-9**

This act symbolized a compromise of the highest order, allowing an outsider with hostile intentions to infiltrate the very heart of their worship space. To get a better understanding of this passage we need to remember what Pastor Andrew said about Tobiah a few weeks ago. Tobiah was an Ammonite official who attempted to hinder Nehemiah's efforts to rebuild Jerusalem. The Ammonites were some of the original people that God had driven from the land for the Isrealites. This is why Tobiah's presence not only desecrated the physical space but also undermined the spiritual security of the community. The neglect of the temple was more than a physical oversight; it reflected a disregard for the sacredness of the place designated for communion with God. Nehemiah reacts with righteous indignation, driving out Tobiah and restoring the sanctity of God's house. Once again, Nehemiah is instrumental to gaining the people’s obedience to God’s word.

Now, fast forward to the New Testament, and we're seeing a similar theme in Jesus' teachings. Jesus often spoke about true worship and purity of heart. He wanted genuine connections with God, not just religious routines. Sound familiar? Nehemiah's actions echo the righteous anger displayed by Jesus in the temple when he drove out the money changers and those selling sacrificial animals. Read Matthew 21:12-13 *“Then Jesus went into the temple and threw out all those who were selling and buying there. He pushed over the tables used for currency exchange and the chairs of those who sold doves. He said to them, “It’s written, My house will be called a house of prayer. But you’ve made it a hideout for crooks.*”

**SLIDE 5: Matthew 21:12-13**

Both instances serve as a resounding call to action, urging believers to be vigilant guardians of the sacred spaces designated for worship. It goes beyond a passive preservation; it necessitates proactive measures when compromise looms. The imagery of Jesus overturning tables and Nehemiah purifying the temple rooms paints a vivid picture of the urgency required when the sanctity of worship spaces is at stake.

These stories aren't just ancient narratives; they're a direct challenge to all of us. Take a moment to peer into your own spiritual practices, to scrutinize the designated spaces and times we have for worship in our lives. Are there compromises we are making? They can be subtle or bold, affecting your time with God? What we read here in Nehemiah and Matthew is crystal clear: it's time for spiritual watchfulness and action. Only through being vigilant and taking proactive measures can we safeguard the sanctity of our worship spaces, preserving our time with God as holy.

**SLIDE 6: Parade**

A little boy lived out in the country around the turn of the twentieth century. He had never seen a traveling circus, and one was coming to his town on a particular Saturday. When he asked his father for permission to go, his dad said he could provided his chores were done early. Saturday morning came. Chores finished, the little boy asked his father for some money to go to the circus. His dad reached down in his overalls and pulled out a dollar bill, the most money the boy had ever seen at one time. Off the little wide-eyed fellow went. As he approached the town, he saw people lining the streets. Peering through the line at one point, he got his first glimpse of the parade. There were animals in cages and marching bands. Finally, a clown was seen bringing up the rear of the parade. The little boy was so excited that when the clown passed, he reached in his pocket and handed him the precious dollar bill. Thinking he had seen the circus when he had only seen the parade, the little boy turned around and went home.

Isn’t it sad that so many people come to church like this little boy who went to the circus? They may come with the intent to worship God, but all they see is the parade – the parade of readings, singing, prayers, and preaching. They peer through their pews at all the activity and then turn to go home at noon, thinking they have been to God’s house, but yet they missed the main event!

This is what we should be learning from Nehemiah and Jesus’s teachings. Do not miss the main event. Nehemiah, in this passage, we see the people missing the purpose of the restoration. We see it happens again in Jesus’s time. The people, you and I, we continually forget the importance of having a heart turned to God.

SLIDE 7: Nehemiah 12:27-30

Now, I wish I could have ended Nehemiah’s story on the high note of chapter 12. They praised God on top of the walls they'd built. People moved back to Jerusalem. And they had committed to a future with God. All was good.

Until it wasn't. But even though they broke their covenant with God, he didn't break his covenant with them. They were his people—a nation meant to bless all the nations—and he would work to fulfill that promise in their lives. So he sent Nehemiah at the tail end of his career and ministry to revive and renew the people one more time.

This is grace, church. It shows us God's long-suffering nature—he is slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness. And even though we might expect or hope for perpetual enthusiasm, God does not. One day our ultimate resurrection and renewal will come, but today we are beset with the peaks and valleys of life. God knows we are in a constant battle between flesh and Spirit. This means that when we feed our inner person with Spirit things—things like the Word, prayer, or fellowship—we are giving the Spirit the nutrients required to bear fruit from our lives.

**SLIDE 8: Pharisees**

Second, let's not coast on autopilot. Nehemiah's vigilance in upholding God's standards prompts us to examine our own commitment to spiritual principles. Don’t get too comfortable. Do you remember who Jesus was the hardest on? It wasn’t the occasional Christian. It wasn’t even the down right dirty sinner. It was the religious people. The Pharisees. We always think of them in such a negative light, but did you know that the Pharisees were some of the most devoted church attendees? They were people who wanted revival! That doesn’t sound so bad, does it? They wanted people to become more devoted to the Law that God had given them. And they strove to go above and beyond what the Law asked of them. They went the extra mile to make sure that not only were they obedient but that they were totally committed.

But that wasn’t enough, because somehow, they missed the main event, they missed the real thing. Are we actively preserving the sanctity of worship and honoring our covenant with God in our lives today? Here’s the problem. We miss the main event when our worship ends at 12:00. It’s like we’ve watched the parade and we leave and miss the circus all together. worship is a lifestyle. You must see worship as more than what you do here on Sunday mornings. Worship is about everything you do. You don’t need to come here to be in God’s presence. God is with you everyday and you must be worshiping God through your actions, through your words, through your service to others. What you do here is really just a culmination of what should be taking place in your life all week long. Worship is about your response to what God has done for you through the giving of his son Jesus Christ. It’s about responding to God’s love out of gratitude by surrendering your life to God’s control. This hour is supposed to be so much more than what we frequently make it. Rather than being the sole worship event of our week it should be the culmination of a lifestyle. This hour should only be a pit stop in the race, not the main event itself.

One specific aspect that becomes a litmus test for our commitment is our attitude during worship services. How we approach these sacred moments speaks volumes about our spiritual maturity. Actively evaluating our worship attitude entails considering whether we are genuinely engaged, open, and receptive to the message being conveyed.A growing spiritual maturity often reflects in an increased reverence and awe during times of worship.It goes beyond mere participation; it involves an intentional openness to transformation, a connection with the message, and an authentic expression of praise. This evaluation prompts us to be not only present in body but also fully engaged in spirit, allowing the transformative power of worship to shape our character and deepen our relationship with God.

Nehemiah didn't stop after the walls were up, nor should we. He continued, making sure the city's heart was aligned with God. We've got our own walls—relationships, communities, and personal struggles—that need restoration. Trusting him daily, day after day after week after month after year after year … it all adds up to a long walk that we might even call “living a legacy.”

**SLIDE 9: My Family**

It’s women’s Sunday today, so I’m going to share a story here of my own life and the legacy there. The picture here is of 5 generations of women in my family. It is of myself, my daughter Lily, my mother Sue, her mother my Grandmother Lillian, and her mother my great grandmother Dagmar. One of my final conversations I had with my grandma Lillian was about how her mom came to Christ. Lillian was about 12 at the time when her parents went to a tent revival. Before that Lillian remembers her older sister going to dances and dates and her whole family going to movies. But her parents came home with a life changed for God. No more dances, or movies and suddenly they were going to church every day. Now, my Grandma told this story with a bit of snark as what 12 year old wants to be told no dances after watching her sister do it. But, that was the start to our families life in Christ. My great Grandmother instilled a love for God in my Grandmother, She also instilled in my mom, who then instilled in me, who I am praying is instilling it in Lily too. It is through their faithfulness to God and making spiritual practices such as worship important in their lives that I am able to stand here today.

This legacy is the last part I want us to learn from Nehemaih. He didn’t rebuild the walls of Jerusalem for just himself. Nehemiah's legacy is a testament to the importance of passing on a heritage of faithfulness. Here is where I think we sometimes miss the mark - when you and I are casual about spiritual things, careless with the disciplines of the faith (things like prayer, Bible, study and church,) when we are callous about things that are holy, we could be leaving a legacy that may not be strong enough for our family in their time of need. We have to understand that when satan targets us and tries to weaken our faith, compromise our stand or induce us to sin, he is not simply targeting us as individuals but he is targeting our children and our family and our friends as well. Each action we take today, rooted in dedication to God and His teachings, shapes the legacy we leave for future generations. Our commitment to living out Christ's teachings lays the groundwork for a heritage of spiritual integrity.

**SLIDE 10: Our commitment to living out Christ's teachings lays the groundwork for a heritage of spiritual integrity.**

Nehemiah 13 is a sad chapter because the people fail to keep their covenant with God. But also an important one. Without this chapter, we would be entirely misled about God's work of renewal—how it works, how it is maintained, where it is found. At the end of the day, just as it is at the end of this book—we must look to someone outside ourselves. Over and over again, we must look to Christ for lasting renewal. God has given to us His greatest legacy, Jesus Christ. Jesus lived as a peasant, died as a criminal because he died for our sins and left us the legacy of His Holy Spirit. This is a legacy we can leave with our children, our friends, our world. The eternal legacy of Jesus is ours to share. May our actions today shape a legacy that influences generations to come, reflecting the eternal truths of God's love and grace. Amen.

**Benediction:** May we, like Nehemiah, remain steadfast in our commitment to God's will and diligent in our efforts to uphold His law. May His grace and favor be upon us as we strive to purify our hearts, homes, and communities, and may our worship be a testament to His glory. May we rejoice in His presence and find strength in His promises, now and forevermore. Amen.

**Memory Verse:** “Remember me, my God, for good.” Nehemiah 13:31b

**Scripture Reading:**

We come to the concluding chapters of Nehemiah today. Nehemiah 12:27-30, 40-43 describes the dedication of Jerusalem's wall. The jubilant sounds of celebration echoed far beyond the walls of Jerusalem.

“When it was time for the dedication of Jerusalem’s wall, they sought out the Levites in all the places where they lived in order to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with joy, with thanks and singing, and with cymbals, harps, and lyres. The singers also gathered together both from the region around Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites,also from Beth-hagilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth, because the singers had built themselves villages around Jerusalem. After the priests and the Levites purified themselves, they purified the people, the gates, and the wall.”

…

“Then both groups of those who gave thanks stood in God’s house. I was there too along with the half of the officials who were with me. Also there were the priests .... The singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader. They offered great sacrifices on that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy. The women and children also rejoiced, and the sound of the joy in Jerusalem could be heard from far away.”