

Diligence in God's Work - More Lessons From Nehemiah

by Erlo Stegen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of zeal and diligence in serving God, using Nehemiah's story as an example, and warns against the consequences of spiritual leanness.

Duration: 1:17:21

Scripture: Numbers 33:55, Deuteronomy 32:3, Joshua 1:14, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "God's Work"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of not being able to escape from God, no matter where one may try to hide. The preacher shares a personal experience as a teenager contemplating suicide and how a cousin reminded them of the value of being human and the potential to become like angels. The sermon also highlights the need for believers to be true to their faith and to constantly have the word of God living in them. The preacher encourages listeners to mark the places where the Lord speaks to them and to let the word of God accompany them throughout their day.

Transcript

And we remember God coming among the children of men as the Son of God. Now today my text is not about Christmas, but nevertheless it contains the Christmas story. For Jesus came to remove sin.

Now during this youth conference we've been looking at the theme about the building of the walls of Jerusalem, built by Nehemiah. Nehemiah had been far off in the kingdom of Persia. But still was very concerned about the situation there, one day calling his brother and saying, tell me how's it really going there in Jerusalem? Despite the fact that he had a very comfortable and high position in Persia, one can say that he had reached the ultimate position to be reached.

He was the one who was entrusted with the very meal and catering for the king. The life of the king was entrusted into his hands. Also he was the counsellor of the king, an advisor.

So even though he lived in comfort and with a wonderful position away in the province of Sushan, far away from Jerusalem, nevertheless his heart of concern was for back at home in Jerusalem. One is reminded of Paul who felt extreme concern for those who had been converted through him, though they were far away, for those who had been saved through him and those who hadn't, who had found the Lord about their

spiritual condition. And so Nehemiah was in such deep distress about the condition of Jerusalem.

When he heard about what was really going on, and that the walls of Jerusalem had been broken down and burned. And now anybody and everybody could come in as they wished. Jews, Gentiles, it didn't matter what type of person would come in and do what they wanted.

They would come in and do business there. And the little remnant of Jews who were still there had intermarried with the Gentiles. And their offspring only spoke a slang.

They couldn't speak the Hebrew language anymore. They could no longer speak the language of their forefathers who had walked with God and known God. Now their language had degenerated into that which was just a mixture of the Gentiles.

That caused him great distress, Nehemiah. He said, I could not eat. He wept profusely, day and night.

Then when he got to the king, the king even noticed and said, Nehemiah, are you not feeling well? Nehemiah prayed in his heart to the Lord as to how he should respond to the king and asked the Lord for wisdom. Then he said, O king, my home country, Jerusalem, lies in waste and ruins today. Now God was busy at work and then the king said, Nehemiah, how may I help you? He said, I'd like to be given permission to go back and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

He asked Nehemiah, how long will you need to be gone? They came to an agreement. And so the king provided everything that Nehemiah needed, including protection, security, horses, soldiers, diplomatic letters, so that as they crossed and traversed various countries, they wouldn't get into trouble as to their intentions. The king then asked Nehemiah, how long will you need to be gone? Nehemiah said, I'd like to be given permission to go back and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

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As he travelled and got closer and closer As he travelled and got closer and closer and he discovered what had been happening that the Jewish people had been intermarrying and that their children couldn't speak the Jewish language anymore he was so angered that he plucked out at the beards of these men and their hair and he said, out with these Gentiles, you've got to separate yourselves, you and your

children. He said, out with these near-witched, he said, out with you and your children You and your children He strongly resisted those who had gotten into positions of leadership Who were not real Levites And he and he strongly resisted And the son of the high priest had married the daughter of Tobias, who was the arch enemy of the Lord's people. And Nehemiah expelled him, and he said, I'm going to put security at the gates that will be responsible, and will check on each one that only those who are allowed to be there will be allowed to come in and out the gates.

Because some had been coming, some would come and sit outside the city gates and not go right in. Because some of the Gentiles by then were doing business just outside the city, and they would sit outside the gates selling fish and their other products without going inside the walls. So Nehemiah then threatened, he said, look, this is my last warning.

If these people are allowed to come and continue with this trading and their business among God's people, I will lay hands upon them. I will do violence. On the Jews that stayed outside.

On the Jews that stayed outside. So some of the Jews that said, well, we won't eat properly and get the right thing if we stay inside. So they just went out to the edge.

And Nehemiah said, well, if I find anybody doing that again, I will take very strict steps against them. Would you like a leader like that who puts his foot down and says, look, this is the way it is. This is how things will be.

This is who your children can marry. But I'm going to show you in what direction we're going. Nehemiah built the walls in 52 days.

Some of the Jewish folk complained and said and criticized and said, this can never be accomplished. It's just impossible. And Nehemiah said, look to the Lord, seek him and he will enable us.

But I was not good. Don't go to the kitchen. You should go.

Don't go. In the beginning, there was lots of mockery from people like Sam Bellet and Tobias. They say, oh, what type of wall is this? Even foxes will be running on it.

These walls will never stand. But Nehemiah said to the workers, listen, obey, keep your focus right. He will be with us.

He just insisted he persevered and look at this astonishing achievement that in just 52 days, these walls encompassing a huge area were built around Jerusalem. In the beginning, there was lots of mockery from people like Sam Bellet and Tobias. They said, look to the Lord, seek him and he will enable us.

Humanly, you just can't achieve something like that. But what is impossible with man is possible with God. And he did it with great enthusiasm, with zeal.

And diligence. They didn't waste a moment's time as they went up and down completely focused on building the walls. This shows us as Christians what zeal we should go about doing the Lord's business, what diligence, what care we should have.

How amazing it was. And so it saddens me to see those people who call themselves children of God, who don't have this zeal and enthusiasm. You find a person maybe smoking, spending weeks and weeks fighting against kicking the habit, or trying to stop and he just fails.

A day is enough, or for drugs, or whatever it is, you don't need to spend years working on something to kick a habit. Maybe you need to ask yourself if you really are saved. Some people come in and they complain and say, but two weeks for me to kick the habit is just far too little.

I can't stop drugs in such a short time. I say, no, then just go, because you're not really zealous about the things of the Lord. Maybe you spoke, so you speak so tenderly and carefully to your children as if though they are Christians.

Meantime, they're not saved. They belong to the devil. They're on the way to hell.

And you say, I don't know about my child. I'm concerned about the fact that they seem to be drawn by the world. No, they're not even saved.

They are not Christians yet. They're not born again. Otherwise they'd be zealous and on fire for the Lord.

They are Christianized, churchianized, but they are not genuine. They're children of the devil. The sooner you agree and understand that, the sooner God can work.

There are some children who got saved recently. They went home. One child phoned here and said, please send one of the missionaries to come here, because there are people that I have witnessed to that are ready to turn to the Lord and I need somebody to come and help them.

This is a child of a preacher. I'm a well-known Lutheran preacher in a good position, high position. When they got there, they found that this house was full of people.

There were young people, some prayer ladies. The preacher was there, the minister. And here were these children who had surrendered their lives to the Lord.

And this particular child of the minister. The child stood up and said, you all know me. I want to tell you that I've got converted.

I've been at Kwa Sisa Bantu. I've turned to the Lord. I've confessed my sins.

I've repented. And now I'm asking you all to do the same. I know that you all go to church.

And that you already are in the prayer organization. But you haven't yet repented. And then he mentioned sins by name.

And he said, Father and Mother, I've got to let you know that I'm not going along with you in the church anymore. I have got converted at Sisa Bantu and I'm going to be there. And he said, don't be surprised if you don't see me coming to our church because I'm going there where I found help.

Now, I didn't instruct him to say anything of the kind. And I wouldn't tell a person to say that. But see and behold the zeal of a person who gets truly converted.

After that, the Father stood up and said, Son or Child, I want you to go there where you have been helped spiritually. And do it properly and be strong. After all that, they said, if there are any that would like to turn their lives over to the Lord and get right with God, they can come.

And there was a large group. A long string of people, queue of people. Even prayer.

Pray, ladies and gentlemen. He said, we need to get right with God. We can't just carry on.

It doesn't help to carry on just in our religiousness. We need to get truly converted today. And many of the older people and youngsters got their lives right with the Lord.

Maybe you say, well, I'm not so sure about the spiritual condition of my child. It seems perhaps that maybe they like to be Christians. No, that is nonsense.

You don't know what you're talking about. You might have been Christian yourself at one time. But now you just become rubbish yourself.

You won't be confused about whether a child is converted or not. You will see it, it will be visible, obvious. Even the child will be correcting you and saying, parents, this is right, this is not.

That is why things are as they are and you've become stagnant. Nothing happens around you. You can't even witness to your own children.

You don't even know how to lead them to Christ. You might say you're a nice cake, but you're really a cake of dung. I'm going to read something of a word that somebody gave me.

I didn't get the chance during the youth conference, but I'll read it for you today. One of the young people, Zechariah chapter 12, 14. He said, Zechariah 14 verse 12.

And this shall be the plague with which the Lord will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem. Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet. Their eyes shall decay in their sockets and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths.

We'll read this far. Here one sees living death. You see the body, the flesh, rotting, dissolving while they are standing on their feet.

So that there is corruption and rottenness. What a picture of living death. Living death.

Corruption clinging to him. As a festering putrid body. What a heartbreaking thing it is.

I'm sure nobody would like to even see an artist's depiction of such a thing. These days when the children were shown some of the slides on AIDS, they were shocked and horrified at some of the things and called out in amazement. But what would they say if they were to see this depiction? It says the flesh dissolving while the person is standing on their feet.

Their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, it says. Just be holes. The eyes decayed.

It says and their tongue shall dissolve in their mouth. It says that Japan was the place where the hydrogen bomb was made. Not the atom bomb, the atom bomb.

Something similar happened in Japan when the Americans exploded those atom bombs to the Japanese. They say the flesh dissolved right there. Eyes dissolving in their sockets.

The tongue dissolving in the mouth. It's an ugly, horrible depiction. You can't think of anything more awful.

So if that happened literally to a people, what a terrible experience the Japanese had to undergo. That's living death. However, there is something that surpasses that in evil.

If this happens to your spiritual body, in your spiritual life, that your spiritual flesh is dissolved, your eyes decay, and with your tongue you can no longer speak for God, you are silenced, much preferable would be a bodily dissolution like this, where your body would rot and be eaten by maggots and you turn to dust. It's 10,000 times worse. If this happens to you spiritually, we may ask the question of God, why would he ever cause such a dreadful thing to happen to a person? It says this is the punishment and the judgment of God.

But why? What is the reason that God should strike them with such punishment? God says because they fought against Jerusalem. Those who had ever fought against Jerusalem, against that which is of God, that which belongs to Jesus. Those who had ever fought against Jerusalem, against that which is of God, now we children of God are his Jerusalem.

We are his children. We are his people. We are his temple.

We are his church. God says in Psalm 106 verse 15, I gave them what they desired, but I sent leanness to their souls. Leanness means becoming thin.

A spiritual starvation. A person with that disease may not notice that they have it. Maybe they are even praying and say, God, thank you for hearing my prayers.

And God has answered them. God may give them what they want, but look at their spiritual condition. How there is now leanness of soul.

They have become thin and skinny. Bamboos, they have become thin and skinny. The leanness has become emptiness.

There was one occasion where a person was asked, can't you just lead a Bible study, present something from the word just as a devotion. And this person searched around and tried to find something and there was nothing that they could bring of spiritual nourishment. They were lean.

Or a person says, but I'm not a preacher. That's not for me. I'm not cut out for that nonsense.

If you're born again. If you can't talk. Why do you talk so much at the rugby? Or tennis? Or worldly things? Then you talk.

Then you've got the gift of gab. But when you've got to say something spiritually, you haven't got anything. I had some friends.

I had the privilege yesterday of having some friends with me. Jan and Iris from Holland. With our brother and sister from Canada.

Originally from Holland as well. That's correct. And our brother from Norway.

Now he said, so many Christians have got their three D's. Decent, dignified and dead. Nothing more.

You can't even win your own children. You can't even win your own neighbours. Well if they are so spellbound by the devil.

Then go a step further. The whole world is crying and longing. For people to bring the cure to them.

And you've got it in Christ. And if you can't preach. Then at least you should be able to give your testimony.

And tell them how you got converted. Tell them the day when Christ met with you. Oh no, I haven't got such.

Well, there you are. You are dead. Maybe you'll die here and we'll say what a wonderful person.

While you burn in hell. The tongue has wasted away. They can't pray.

They can't give the testimony. They can't speak and talk for Jesus. But touch on something else.

Then they can talk. Or let them be in the company of a girl. Or a boy.

Then they can talk. And that shows you. What kind of spirits.

Or spirit children they are. No wonder that Jesus said. Don't cry for me.

Daughters of Jerusalem. Cry for yourself. And for your children.

Maybe you think well they are well educated. That's the best thing you could do for them. To make clever devils out of them.

That's their inheritance from you. When they punished Christ. There was a terrible picture.

The women cried. I told you what he told them. Is this why they do this to a green tree? Look at that Christmas tree.

Green. What will happen to the dry tree? And you are the dry tree. He doesn't have to show anything.

That's green. It's always green. It doesn't wither.

Those branches. And there are some lights. And your beauty should be more attractive than that tree.

You should be so beautified. In a far greater way excelling this tree. I don't mean by that.

That you have to go and have a special hair do. And make your hair to be what it's not. But that you would be ornamented within.

Beautified within. As Peter says not with the outward ornaments. But with the inward ornament of good works.

Now this very wasting flesh. This dissolving flesh. Seeks its own.

Symbolic of selfishness. Selfishness. You think about your own self.

You want your best. You want a place. You want a position.

You are thinking of yourself. In the letter to the Galatians it says do not sow to the flesh. That's selfishness.

Thinking about self. Satisfying yourself. If you sow to your flesh.

Satisfying your flesh. And the lusts of the flesh. Like immorality.

And you feed the flesh. The lusts of the flesh. You're sowing to the flesh.

Even if your body. Physical body doesn't rot. But spiritually you are rotting.

You're a rotten potato. To the detriment of the church. And the fellowship where you are.

And you are a weakling. Gazing at pornographic images. Well, you're simply feeding the flesh.

Internet. Looking at porn on the internet. You can't but be dead, corrupt, and rotten.

That's what you are, and that's the cause of your leanness spiritually, and what a burden you are to the saints of God. Where does it come from? It says, those who once resisted Jerusalem. Please go through your past.

When you meet with God, you don't meet with the present, you meet with the past, and you meet with the future. Three in one. He's the God who was, who is, and is going to be.

Go through your past. What did you say? Did you ever say something against Jerusalem? That thing will make your meat rot, your flesh. It will rot.

It will waste away your eyes and your tongue. You can pray till doomsday. You'll never get right until you've made right what you are supposed to do right.

And you'll feel unhappy. You'll feel alone. Why? Sin in your past.

You haven't dealt with it. You can't experience the fullness of God, never, because you are living in living death. And here the heresy comes in of some so-called pious people.

I serve God because I love Him. I don't fear Him. Not of fear.

It seems to be very pious. But they don't know. They are rotten.

They are living in sin. And that's the license. If they'd know God, they'd know His punishment.

If they knew God, then they'd use a man who says, if your right hand offends you, cut it off. Out with your right eye or your right foot. Rather enter heaven with one eye, one hand and one leg, than to be cast into hell.

Is that love? That's the beginning of wisdom, the fear of God. People who just emphasize love and not justice and not the fear of God have got no wisdom. They are the biggest fools in this world.

That is the beginning of wisdom. And are you living in such a fool's paradise? That's why you can get angry, you can get annoyed, you can go to your wife and gossip about another man and another person. Instead of going to Him, you talk about Him.

May God in heaven grant that today you realize what you are up to and what you've been up to. And you know what the future will bring. Not blessing.

A curse. That is the beginning of wisdom. And that is the beginning of wisdom.

Maybe you say, but I don't speak, I don't resist Jerusalem. But have you ever? We've never done it in the past. One sentence suffices.

Because of the holiness of God. If that person is here, as the Holy Spirit works, He will ensure that such a person, if he resists the Spirit, will never be able to remain in the congregation of God's people. As long as He is there.

And we see that in the church in Jerusalem when Ananias and Sapphira died. In the letter to the Corinthians, chapter 5, that such a person, there is no room in the church. Don't eat and eat with them.

If God is real in that church, that person is going to leave that church. But if he doesn't leave it, God will kill him in the church, he'll die. Agave.

And then God says, well, if that person refuses to hear, refuses to make right, then that person must die. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear. This book is not a book of tales and fairy tales, but the truth, and it will happen as God says.

You don't like it, run away. Hide in the highest mountain of this world. Go somewhere where you can get away from God.

To the highest places in this world or to the lowest depths in the sea. But as a young teenager I knew, Eno, you can't escape from God. Even in the lowest depths of the earth, He'll be there.

Or if you hide in the cosmos, in the skies, He'll find you there as well. Nobody did have to tell me that. I knew it as a 13-year-old boy when I was contemplating sometimes to commit suicide.

When a little cousin girl, a cousin of mine, told me, Oh, Eno, how can you say such a thing? How could you wish that you'd be a dog or a tree? I say, kill the dog, fell the tree, it's finished. But with us, it's not like that. And she says, Oh, I'm so happy that I'm a human being, because one day I'll be like an angel.

I said, That's the little talk, that's the talk of little girls. What have I got to do with being like an angel one day? I knew I didn't have the right thing. And I was on the way to seek the right thing.

Because I didn't want to live the way I lived. And that's why I said when I left home to become a preacher, I don't want to be a preacher like other preachers. I want to be different.

Not because I wanted to be special, but I wanted the real thing. I wasn't satisfied just to baptize, just to bury people. I wanted to have that what Jesus had.

I was a verkrampter of the verkrampters. But when Jesus came in, the first thing I did, I went from one Zulu hut to the other, with my Bible, not knowing Zulu, but reading in German what the verse said, and then trying to read it in Zulu. I went from one hut, full of smoke, from one hut to the other, and I came out smelling like Schwarzwälder Schinken.

And that was the greatest joy to me, that these people, whom I was dead to, I wished that they could taste what I have tasted. I got to know Christ. Do you know Christ? Do you? Or is it just show? Churchianized.

You're like a bird. You go to my house, you'll find a bird that can laugh, like other people. A bird that can talk.

It's just a bird. When one girl passed there, the bird said, Saubona. She turned around, looked at it, and said, Saubona.

Now just as a parrot can be taught to imitate, so too you can get your children into that mode where they know the Christian language, it's flowery, Christianized language, but inside there's death. Christ is not there. Let me end with Numbers 33, verse 55.

Numbers 33, verse 55. It's a help to mark those places where the Lord speaks to you. Use it as a time of encouragement later on when you may be tempted, where you can recall what the Lord has spoken to you, so that it won't be grudges that fill you, but the Word.

That the Word should live in you, live in you. You go to work, you think of it. Live in you.

That's why Graf von Zinzenbeck made a little brochure, daily reading, because he wanted the people, when they went to work, that these words would accompany the whole day. And when they spoke together, that they'll speak about these words. Just check yourself, how many minutes or hours of the day does the Word live in you? How long are you busy with the Word? Do you read it? You walk out of the room, you've forgotten it.

Well, that's why you're such a barren person. That's why you can't bring children into this world. Those words have got to live in you all the time.

You must be busy with those words all the time. Numbers 33-55 But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell. If you do not drive them out from before you, those who compromise, those who have a fellowship with others, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell.

You may be some of your family members, sons-in-law or daughters-in-law. They before your eyes. You can't make a decision, you can't do a thing, because they are they, and they don't like it.

But if you do not drive them out from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell. If you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you let remain shall be irritants in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall harass you in the land where you dwell. And thorns in your sides.

What will you be able to achieve with thorns in your side and things in your eyes? With thorns in your side and things in your eyes. Samson persevered with the lusts of the flesh, even when he was young. Samson persevered with the lusts of the flesh, even when being warned by his parents, but he persisted while he ended up with his eyes gouged out, finding himself in prison.

He dabbled with sin. He compromised. He loved the shape of that girl.

He could put his head on her lap. What a foolish man. Solomon, a man whom God loved, and women led him astray.

They lost his glory. We speak of the King of David, but Jesus was never called the King of Solomon. Leanness came into his heart because of the opposite sex, being a lady's man.

What a disgraceful and shameful thing. You become immobilized. You cannot move.

You cannot do a thing. You become blinded because you allow these things in your life. May God help us. May He reveal Himself. We call for God to pour out His Spirit, but He can never pour out His Spirit upon such people. You'll never experience this.

God doesn't pour out His Spirit upon such a kind of people. Never. It will be a spirit from below.

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