

The Dying Saint – Nehemiah 13:31

I. Introduction:

- A. When we started this study last April, I said that Nehemiah could be used as an illustration of a New Testament Christian.
1. Despite not knowing anything of Jesus Christ, this man's trust was in Jehovah, and his service was for the glory of God.
 2. As we have seen over the last 8 months, he was not a typical Jew, worshiping God like some sort of robot.
 3. By the grace of God he was a child of the King of kings.
 4. From day #1 in human history, **Ephesians 2:8** has been true, *"by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."*
 5. God's gift of grace had been given to this man, and I have no doubt that he is with the Saviour today.
 6. Early on, I also said that Nehemiah was not a priest, a Levite, or a king, but an uncommonly common man.
 7. The Holy Spirit laid a need upon his heart, and he did what he could to meet that need, sacrificing a great deal in the process.
- B. Even though he knew nothing about the institution of the church of Christ, much of what Nehemiah did can be taught in the light of New Testament churches – their needs and their responsibilities.
1. He built a wall around the congregation at Jerusalem, helping to identify it as God's Holy City.
 2. And with that wall he protected its members from the unbelievers without, very much like publishing and teaching a church doctrinal statement.
 3. Then like a godly church deacon, he urged his fellow church members into a period of revival, highlighting their need of closer fellowship with the Lord.
 4. And he also pointed out some of the most glaring sins of the day – for which they as a congregation needed to repent.
- C. Let me be clear – Israel and Jerusalem were not God's pre-incarnate church, morphing into today's church after the first Pentecost of the Christian era.
1. That is a common opinion today, but it is one that I flatly deny.
 2. Israel and the Church are two completely different entities under the plan of the Lord.
 3. But we can make comparisons between them, and saints today can learn from the saints of yesterday.
 4. *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning..."*
- D. Again – it is not accurate to say that Nehemiah was a *"Christian"* in the New Testament sense, but he can be used to illustrate today's saint.
1. And neither is it accurate to say that the last words of this book were the last words of Nehemiah, but I want to look at them as if they were.
 2. He may have lived many years after the conclusion of this book, but we know nothing of that.
 3. Despite that likelihood, I'd like to pretend that these words were whispered by Nehemiah as he lay dying.
 4. When his housemaid brought him breakfast one morning, after he went to bed not feeling well the night before, she caught him in prayer.
 5. The only thing she could clearly hear were *"Remember me, O my God, for good."*
 6. And then in the next moment the spirit of Nehemiah was gone – gone to join his Saviour.
- E. I spent a few minutes this week looking for the last words of some of God's more recent saints.
1. There are dozens of collections of these both in books and on various websites.
 2. I can't vouch for their accuracy and authenticity, but some of them are sufficiently well-known to be correct.
 3. For example, the hymn-writer, **Augustus Toplady**, who died at age 38, is quoted to have said as he lay dying, *"I enjoy heaven already in my soul. My prayers are all converted into praises."*
 4. **Isaac Watts**, another hymn-writer, died speaking these words – *"It is a great mercy that I have no manner of fear or dread of death. I could, if God please, lay my head back and die without terror this afternoon."*

5. **David Brainerd**, an early missionary to the Indians said *"I am going into eternity, and it is sweet to me to think of eternity."*
6. **Michael Faraday**, the English scientist who died in 1867, was asked: *"What are your speculations now?"* He answered: *"I have no speculations. I rest upon Jesus Christ who died, and rose again from death."*
7. **Charles Spurgeon**, sat straight up in bed and said, *"I can hear them coming! Don't you hear them? This is my coronation day. I can see the chariots, I'm ready to board."*
8. **Dwight L. Moody** asked, *"Can this be death? Why it is better than living! Earth is receding, heaven is opening. This is my coronation day."*
9. I could go on, but I'll leave that to you for some research when you need a blessing.

- F. Now, I ask you, do Nehemiah's last words sound like those of these men I've just quoted?
1. While not sounding like the dying words of an atheist or heretic, they don't really come up to the level of these other saints. Is it due to some deficiency in his faith?
 2. It is said that **Jonathan Edwards** last words were *"Trust in God, and you shall have nothing to fear."*
 3. But don't Nehemiah's last words sound just a little fearful, or am I reading them incorrectly?
 4. Is he saying that he has doubts about his salvation?
 5. Is he trusting in the work he did in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem to earn him a place in heaven?
 6. I certainly don't think so.
 7. But then again, what does this statement mean?
- G. Looking at this in the light of the entire chapter and the rest of this book, I see three things:
1. I see **Nehemiah's insecurity** in himself in contrast to his **confidence** in God.
 2. But when it came down to it, he suggests that he lived in absolute **dependence** on the mercy of God.

II. Consider Nehemiah's **INSECURITY**, despite his many accomplishments.

- A. *"Remember me, O my God, for good."*
1. This is **not** the only time Nehemiah has spoken to the Lord like this – it is the fourth time.
 2. In **chapter 5** he prayed, *"Think upon me, my God, according to all that I have done for his people."*
 3. Then here in the last chapter he prayed –
 - a. *"Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof" – Nehemiah 13:14.*
 - b. And then in **verse 22** – *"Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy."*
- B. What does Nehemiah mean with *"Remember me, O my God"*?
1. He was **NOT saying** that the infinitely perfect God forgets things.
 2. The omniscience of Jehovah cannot fail; the Lord doesn't get old and forgetful – senile or degenerate.
 3. He cannot forget, but He doesn't remember in the same way as we do.
 4. On the other hand, the Lord Himself says, *"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."*
 5. In **Isaiah 43:25**, Jehovah says, *"I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."*
- C. One of the greatest blessings that any human being can receive stems from God's choice to forget – or to lay aside His knowledge of our sins.
1. **Saul of Tarsus** was a blasphemous murderer, but when the blood of Christ covered those sins, God chose to consider them annulled – atoned – forgiven and forgotten.
 2. **David** was an adulterer, but in grace and mercy, the Lord pardoned and absolved David of those sins.
 3. God does not act upon the sins He has forgiven.
 4. They are gone, because as the Christian knows, our Saviour bore their punishment, carrying them away.

- D. In contrast to that, when Nehemiah asked the Lord to “remember” his service for God; he was asking the Lord **to act upon them.**
1. Each of Nehemiah’s statements begin with the same Hebrew word, but in **5:19** it is translated “*think upon*” me.
 2. Nehemiah was asking the judge of heaven and earth to render a verdict on what he had been doing.
 3. Do any of us dare to pray like this?
 4. Have any of us served God well enough to bring it up before the Lord for judgment?
- E. Each of those four verses come at the completion of various acts of service.
1. In **chapter 5** Nehemiah had just said that he refused to receive the salary of the governor, and yet he still showed generous hospitality toward hundreds of people – both Jews and gentiles.
 - a. *“Moreover there were at my table an hundred and fifty of the Jews and rulers, beside those that came unto us from among the heathen that are about us....”*
 - b. *“Think upon me, my God, according to all that I have done for his people.”*
 2. In **chapter 13** he made sure that the priests and Levites were being properly paid.
 - a. *“Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof.”*
 3. Then he made sure that the Sabbath laws were being followed.
 4. *“Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.”*
 5. And finally *“cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business; And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.”*
- F. Nehemiah had given up a safe and lucrative job in the Persian palace of Shushan to come to Jerusalem.
1. He had overseen the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem at great risk to himself.
 2. He had encouraged the priests and Levites in their regular worship services, and helped to organize the dedication of the wall.
 3. He had been an integral part of the religious education of the people – which resulted in a revival of godly religion.
 4. To some extent he had driven the heathen out of the city – at least on his Lord’s Day.
 5. The list of Nehemiah’s good works could fill a small book – in fact it has.
 6. And now he is asking the Lord to remember and bless that service accordingly.
- G. But while doing that, don’t you detect some degree of insecurity?
1. Why does he ask God to remember him and what he has done?
 2. Could it be because he doesn’t consider his service worthy of the Lord’s notice?
- H. My point is this: no matter what you do for the glory of the Lord – in itself it is not worthy of reward – especially in the light of the holiness of God.
1. Is the fulfilment of duty, something worthy of honor or reward?
 2. There have been religious ministers who thought that their service was sufficient to buy them a lease on a Heavenly mansion. But it doesn’t work that way.
 3. Judas Iscariot was probably as capable a preacher as any of the twelve, but even if he preached a hundred gospel sermons, resulting in thousands of conversions, they didn’t redeem his soul.
 4. I have no doubt that some of the most famous evangelists of the last century are in Hell today because they gloried more in their evangelism than in the Saviour Himself.
 5. It is good to give your tithes and offerings, but you need to know that if you are a child of God *“ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold.”*
 6. Nothing any of us can do – there is no good thing which we have done – which impresses the Lord.

- I. In fact, **the more GODLY** a person truly becomes, **the more UNGODLY** he will realize himself to be.
 1. The more a man is lifted up in communion with the Lord, the deeper will be his personal abasement.
 2. The holiest are the most humble.
 3. **William Bradford**, published the first newspaper in Philadelphia and taught Benjamin Franklin the trade.
 - a. He was asked to be the official printer in Rhode Island, so I am going to assume he was a Christian.
 - b. In 1742, as he lay dying, his last words were, *"Oh Lord! Forgive the ERRATA!"*
 - c. I like that. *"Lord, I am not going to pat myself on my back for all the truth that I've published."*
 - d. *Rather, forgive me for all typos in the my life."*
 4. When good men stand before the Judgment Seat of Chrsit, other than divine grace, their first thoughts should be of their own *"errata"* – their own failures and meager service.
 5. I think that is a part of Nehemiah's meaning in *"Remember me, O my God, for good."*

III. But a second part hints at his **CONFIDENCE** in the Lord.

- A. Despite the similarities in Nehemiah's four statements, there are differences.
 1. They all begin the same way, *"Remember me"* or *"think upon me"* – the same Hebrew word.
 - a. Each of them are addressed to *"God" – "Elohim."*
 - b. And all four of them speak of, or refer to, *"good."*
 2. But at that point they fall into two camps.
 3. Two of them say *"remember me" FOR good* – as in **UNTO or TOWARD good**.
 - a. *"Remember me, O my God, for good."*
 4. But two of them look back, asking God to remember the **good that he had done**.
 - a. *"Think upon me, my God, according to all that I have done for his people."*
 - b. And *"Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof."*
- B. What has this got to do with Nehemiah's confidence in God?
 1. First, there is the theological truth to which I referred to earlier – God is omniscient and knows all about us.
 2. He knows our down-sitting and our uprising. He knows every thought and intent of your heart.
 3. He has scanned our fingerprints & has a record of everything we've touched since the day we were born.
 - a. He has numbered every hair of our heads, and He knows every mole and freckle on our backs.
 - b. What an illustration of the fact that the Lord knows us better than we know ourselves.
 4. The Lord knows what thoughts are going through your mind at this moment.
 - a. And He has an external hard-drive copy of every thought that has ever entered your computer-like brain
 5. To the lost man and the backslidden Christian that should be a sober, if not a frightening, thought.
 6. But to the child of God, who is in close fellowship with the Lord, it should be a blessing.
 7. *"Even though I may ask you Lord, I know that you will" – "remember me, O my God, for good."*
- C. In addition to God's omniscience, Nehemiah's prayer hints at confidence in something even more blessed.
 1. *Remember me, O my God, for GOOD."*
 2. Three times Nehemiah uses the very common word *"good."*
 3. It is scattered 650 times throughout the Bible, beginning in the very first chapter in **Genesis**.
 - a. *"And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness."*
 - b. *And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day."*
 4. This same Hebrew word is used to describe God Himself – **Psalms 73:1** – *"Truly God is good."*
 5. And then the Psalmist adds, *"even TO such as are of a clean heart."*
 6. This takes us back to Nehemiah – an Israelite with a clean heart, who was trying to serve and glorify his God.

D. In the covenant which the Lord made with Israel, there were provisions for reward.

1. **Deuteronomy 28:1-2** – *“It shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.”*
2. **Deuteronomy 15:5-6** – *“Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee.”*
3. **Exodus 15:26** – *“If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.”*
4. There are dozens of verses like these in God’s law and they are repeated elsewhere.
5. Since these are the promises of Jehovah, Nehemiah appeals to them, placing his confidence in the God of those promises.
6. *“Remember me, O my God, for good.”* I have served you according to the principles of your Word.

E. But please notice that the good blessings of these promises are primarily earthly.

1. *“I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.”*
2. *“The LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth.”*
3. When Nehemiah said, *“Remember me, O my God, for good,”* he was not thinking about eternity, Heaven, the redemption of his soul, or forgiveness of his sins.
4. As secular as it sounds he was talking about lesser rewards – not intrinsically spiritual rewards.
5. In other words, I don’t believe that Nehemiah was serving God in order to be saved from his sins.
6. But as he was serving the Lord, his heart remembered that there are rewards for obedience.

F. And that is true even for you, Christian.

1. *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” – II Corinthians 5:10.*
2. *“The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works” – Matthew 16:27.*
3. You know that *“whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free” – Ephesians 6:8.*
4. *“Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great” – Luke 6:35.*
5. *“The elders which are among you I exhort ... Feed the flock of God which is among you... And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.” – I Peter 5*
6. There are dozens of scriptures which tell us that the Lord remembers the good service we perform for Him.

G. Nehemiah had confidence in the Lord’s fidelity in keeping His promises.

IV. But his dependence for salvation was laid squarely upon something else – God’s mercy.

A. **Verse 22** – *“Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy.”*

1. Nehemiah’s expectation of earthly blessing and approval was based on God’s promise to reward.
2. But his hope for deliverance from sin – *“to be spared,”* as he put it – was based on God’s promise of **mercy**.
3. Again, I say, Nehemiah is a type of the saint, a picture of the New Testament child of God.

B. Centuries later, Paul was writing to the Christians in Ephesus, and looking a few months or years into their past, and he said,

1. *"You hath he (God) quickened (or made alive), who were dead in trespasses and sins;*
 - a. *Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:*
 - b. *Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*
2. *But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,*
 - a. *Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)*
 - b. *And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:*
 - c. *That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.*
 - d. *For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*
 - e. *Not of works, lest any man should boast."*

C. Nehemiah was delivered from his sins in the same way – through God's mercy and grace.

1. He might have plead his service before God, but not for salvation.
2. For that he said, *"spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy."*

D. No man has yet been saved *"by works of righteousness which we have done,"* and you will not be the first.

1. Salvation from sin is *"according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."*
2. David, for example, did many good things during his life, but they couldn't offset his sins.
3. David was saved by grace through faith.
4. Moses was a good servant of God, but it was because of God's mercy that he was delivered from the punishment of his sins.
5. We could say the same for Daniel, Joseph, Noah, Peter, James and John.
6. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" – 1 Peter 1:3.*
7. Nehemiah knew that for the salvation of his soul, *"it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" – Romans 9:16.*

E. If we can't work sufficiently to cleanse us from our sins, what must we do?

1. We must trust the Lord's grace for mercy and deliverance.
2. We must completely give up on ourselves, admitting that we are miserable sinners.
3. We must admit that no number or quality of good works can offset our sinfulness in God's sight.
4. We need mercy.
5. And therefore we must trust the Lord Jesus Christ who made that mercy possible by taking our punishment upon Himself.
6. *"If you from sin are longing to be free, look to the Lamb of God."*
7. *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."*