
Sermon Notes

April 22, 2018

First Congregational Church of Pomfret

Starting Fresh
Nehemiah 9:38-10:39

Because of This...

- ❖ *Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing...*
 - because of what? because of all we confess about God's name and character
 - we want to tell the truth about God and ourselves
 - we want to establish, write down, and stick to the following priorities
- ❖ 84 of Israel's leaders (priests, Levites, and other officials) sign this covenant
- ❖ Primarily they are pledging to
 - submit to the authority of God's Word
 - maintain and support Temple worship
 - maintain purity and holiness among themselves

The Authority of God's Word

- ❖ Everything the people write down and commit themselves to is rooted in their understanding and response to God's Word
 - nothing deserves a higher level of commitment and obedience from you than God and the way God reveals Himself and expresses His will for you in His Word
 - God's Word is supreme we must be bound by it
- ❖ The people of Nehemiah 10 are a model for us of what a living faith in a living God looks like when it is put into action

The Importance of Temple Worship

- ❖ A commitment to respond to a wide spectrum of laws and commands about the Temple and Temple worship
 - the Temple tax, the offering of the firstfruits of people's crops and trees, the regular offerings and the tithe
 - though it takes a long time to complete the task, rebuilding the Temple is the first priority of the returning exiles
- ❖ Nehemiah underscores the need to keep the worship and sacrifice that goes on at the Temple pure, orderly, and done the way God proscribes

- ❖ Nehemiah also knows that the Temple and Temple worship will bind the people together and give them a strong sense of national unity

Maintain Purity and Holiness

- ❖ The people commit themselves to not getting "sucked into" the world's way of thinking and acting
- ❖ Maintaining purity and holiness is a corporate activity
 - the people know they must make themselves accountable to one another about these matters
 - everyone has a part to play in holding themselves to these standards
- ❖ In our pluralistic, individual culture of independence, autonomy and rights, **WE** tend to forget the importance of **WE**
 - the church of Jesus Christ needs to stand apart from the dominant values of the culture
 - the call to follow Jesus is a call to live a counter-cultural lifestyle

Get it in Writing

- ❖ The participants write out a very specific, detailed list of **HOW** they are going to accomplish their goals

- good intentions rarely bear results unless they are translated into specific, reforming activity
- neither the OT or NT have any place for confessions of faith that leave your lifestyle and practice unaffected

- ❖ Two key elements of this covenant

- a promise to God and to each other to keep their families strong (strong families make a strong society)
- a promise to put first things first in their business activities and their worship (the promise to abstain from doing business on the Sabbath and other holy days)

- ❖ Why is there so little change among people in our day?

- no change ever takes place unless you **want** to change
- if we are going to make progress in our lives, we must commit ourselves to something different, something bigger, something grander than ourselves

Personal Reflection

1. What principles from Israel's covenant with God are applicable to us today?
2. A "fresh start" does not always insure "lasting change". What steps can we take in life to help insure that our own commitments, re-commitments, and promises to God and others will stand the test of time?
3. Have you ever taken the initiative to write out your spiritual commitments and intentions? If so, did you find it helpful? Why? Why not?
4. Is there someone who can help hold you accountable in your quest for a deeper, richer, more consistent walk?