

# Finishing Well

Lesson #39

Fish Gate: Be My Witness

October 20, 2021

The people in Jerusalem:

- Neh. 8: Had experienced a major revival at the Water Gate with Nehemiah and Ezra
- Neh. 10: Submitted themselves, vowed to be a separate people unto the Lord, vowed to keep the Sabbath, promised to support the house of God and renewed their vows.
- Neh. 11-12: Celebration and dedication of the rebuilt walls and gates to the LORD.
- Neh. 13: Corruption set in; Broken vows and broken promises

During Nehemiah's absence, spiritual permissiveness and decline set in.

Spiritual compromise snuck in through the spiritual leadership.

Israel breaks 4 of the covenant pledges they had made in the Water Gate Revival [Neh. 8-10].

- Neh. 13:1-15 They are neglecting the house of God
- Neh. 13:5, 10-14 Mismanaging the tithes
- Neh. 13:15-22 Profaning the Sabbath
- Neh. 13:23-29 Marrying foreigners - again!

The Support Promise Neh. 13:10-14

Neh. 10:39 We will not forsake the house of our God was the final statement the Jews made in their covenant with the Lord. This includes:

- Pay the temple tax, provide wood for the altar
- Bring the required tithes and offerings to support the priests and Levites

Recall: Neh. 12:43-44 And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away. At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, first-fruits and tithes. From the fields around the towns, they were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites,

- for Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites.

Broken Promise: Neh. 13:10 Because the priests and Levites were without support, they deserted their work and scattered to the fields where they could work the land and survive.

Ignored Moses' Warning in Deut. 12:19

"Take heed to yourself that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live in your land."

Mal. 3:8 God said through the prophet, Malachi, that the people had robbed God through their tithes and offerings. They had stopped giving to God. [Malachi, prophet during this time]

Neh. 13:11 Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken?

- Contend: can refer to arguing or even physical combat
- Also carries the judicial meaning of "to plead a case."

Nehemiah defended God's case from the Law. The offenders had to admit that he was right. The temple officers in charge of the gifts had forsaken their posts because there was nothing coming in or going out, so Nehemiah "stationed them at their posts." [Neh. 13:11] He then saw to it that the people brought to God the offerings that rightfully belonged to Him [Mal. 3:7-12]. He appointed four men to supervise the treasury and distribute the tithes and offerings. These men represented the priests, Levites, scribes, and laymen, but they all had one thing in common: They were faithful to the Lord.

I Cor. 4:2 "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."

Matt. 6:21 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Consider: What a person spends his money on is often an indicator of his spiritual health.

Luke 3:8, 10-14 John the Baptist called Israel to bear fruits worthy of repentance.

<sup>10</sup>"What should we [the crowd] do then?" John answered, "The man with two tunics should share with him who has none, and the one who has food should do the same."

Tax collectors also came to be baptized. "Teacher, what should we do?"

➤ "Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.

Some soldiers asked, "And what should we do?"

➤ "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."

Note: Every fruit that had to do with true repentance was shown in their finances.

How people handle their money is an indicator of their relationship with God.

The Sabbath Promise Neh. 13:15-22

Recall: Neh. 10:31 And if the people of the land bring ware or any victuals on the sabbath day to sell, that we would not buy it of them on the sabbath, or on the holy day:

Neh. 13:15-18 In those days I saw in Judah people who were treading wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing in sacks of grain and loading them on donkeys, as well as wine, grapes, figs, and every kind of load, and they were bringing them into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day.

So I admonished them on the day they sold food. Also, people of Tyre were dwelling there who imported fish and all kinds of merchandise and sold them to the sons of Judah on the Sabbath, even in Jerusalem. Then I contended with the nobles of Judah and said to them, "What is this evil thing that you are doing, by profaning the Sabbath day? Did your fathers not do the same, so that our God brought on us and on this city all this trouble?

Yet you are adding to the wrath against Israel by profaning the Sabbath."

No doubt the Jews had excuses for violating the Sabbath. "If I don't tread my grapes that day, they will rot!" "Everyone else is doing business then. I can't compete if I close up shop!"

"All those imported fish will just rot and go to waste if we don't buy them!

It wouldn't be right, to waste all that good food."

Neh. 13:19-22 And it came about that just as it became dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered that the doors be shut, and that they were not to open them until after the Sabbath. Then I stationed some of my servants at the gates so that no load would enter on the Sabbath day. Once or twice the traders and merchants of every kind of merchandise spent

the night outside Jerusalem. Then I warned them and said to them, "Why do you spend the night in front of the wall? If you do so again, I will use force against you." From that time on they did not come on the Sabbath. And I ordered the Levites that they were to purify themselves and come as gatekeepers to sanctify the Sabbath day.

Separation Promise      Neh. 13:23-31      Marrying Foreigners AGAIN  
Recall Neh. 10:30 and that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.

Neh. 13:23-25 In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them knew how to speak the language of Judah, but only the language of his own people. So I contended with them and cursed them, and struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, "You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take any of their daughters for your sons or for yourselves."

Consider: If a generation was lost to the faith, what is the future of the nation? Nehemiah reminded them that Solomon, one of Israel's greatest kings, was ruined by marrying foreign women. [Neh. 13:26; I Kings 11:4-8]  
His mixed marriages were a threat to the throne and the kingdom.

In this text, Nehemiah is a type of Christ. As Christ went into the temple, He pulled out a whip, turned over tables, and harshly rebuked the leaders of Israel.

What was said of Jesus when He cleansed the Temple expresses the heart of Nehemiah.

John 2:17 zeal for the house of God consumed Him.

He threw a man out of the temple who was defiling it, rebuked the leaders for their lack of faithfulness in giving, locked people out of the city who were abusing the Sabbath, and pulled out the hairs of those who married foreign women in order to turn them back to God.

➤ Nehemiah was a man consumed with seeing God's glory in Israel.

In the same way, God is calling for people in this generation to be zealous for personal holiness and holiness in the church.

Message from the Fish Gate: You Are My Witnesses! My Ambassadors!

Transform the Marketplace! Protect the Marketplace!

Mixed marriages in Nehemiah's time threatened the priesthood. Nehemiah purified the priests and made certain that only the qualified served. We know this problem remained an issue because Malachi also dealt with disobedient priests. [Mal. 1-2]

Malachi, "My messenger," was the prophet to the Jews during and/or shortly after Nehemiah. He preached against many of the same sins as Nehemiah.

- Corruption of the priesthood      Mal. 1:6-2:9      Neh. 13:7-9
- Marriage to heathen wives      Mal. 2:10-12      Neh. 13:23-28
- Social wrongs      Mal. 3:5      Neh. 5:1-13
- Neglect of paying tithes      Mal. 3:8-10      Neh. 13:10-14

Malachi's overall theme: The indifference of God's people to His great love for them. God confronts His people with their apathy toward His great love.

➤ 47 of 55 verses are spoken directly by God - highest % of any prophetic book  
 People's response to God: astonishment or cynicism. Malachi reveals their blindness to their apathy and indifference with a series of questions which they ask in response to his indictment.

	God Speaks	But You Say...
1:2	I Have Loved You, says the LORD	How Have You Loved Us
1:6	O Priests Who Despise My Name	How Have We Despised Your Name
1:7	You are presenting defiled food on My altar	How Have We Defiled You
2:13-14	He no longer regards your offering	For What Reason
2:17	You have wearied the LORD with your words...	How Have We Wearied Him
3:7	Return to Me & I will return to you	How Shall We Return
3:8	Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me	How Have We Robbed You
3:13	Your words have been arrogant against Me	What Have We Spoken Against You

If you had asked Israel about her relationship with the Lord, she would have answered, "Everything's good!" But if you had asked her mate, the Lord, He would have said, "It's lousy! My wife is oblivious to My love. I could drop out of sight and Israel wouldn't miss Me!" God's evaluation of the marriage was the correct one.

Mal. 1:1-5 The Lord indicts His people for their indifference to His love for them.

Consider: Some have said the opposite of love is apathy or indifference.

- Going through all the motions of being "a good Christian." In a spiritual rut
- Yet...attitude is: If God really loves me, why is \_\_\_\_\_ happening to me.
- Why do I suffer and people who don't believe in Christ prosper?

Mal. 1:2a I have loved you, saith the LORD. [Hebrew = I continue to love you]

- Their reply is shocking: How have You loved us?
- They are too focused on their problems and are oblivious to God's great covenant love towards them.

Mal. 3:6 For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore, ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

Apathy: Lack of feeling, emotion or concern

Spiritual Apathy: Indifference towards what God desires of us

Why do we grow indifferent or apathetic?

1. We forget the urgency of His message

Mal. 1:1 The burden, of the Word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

- Burden points to a message that weighs heavily on the bearer.  
Malachi is pleading with souls in light of God's coming judgment and eternity beyond.
- These people were born into the covenant community of Israel. Familiarity

Consider: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."

- "That's nice. Hey, did you hear about the big football game?"

2. We focus on our circumstances rather than on God's purpose.

- Get discouraged when things are not like we expect.
- Back in the land for well over 100 years. The temple had been rebuilt, the walls were complete, but there only about 100,000 Jews back in the land.
- No army to protect themselves. Under the thumb of the Persian king.
- Farms were not producing well because of drought. [Mal. 3:10-11]

"If this is the Promised Land, I'd hate to see the unpromised land."

Listen to our prophets: They were predicting a golden era for Israel when the land would yield abundant produce, the people would dwell securely under the reign of their Messiah and other nations would flock to Jerusalem as the center of the earth.

[Isa. 49:19-23; 54:1-3; Jer. 23:5-6; Ezek. 25-30; Zech. 8:1-8, 12-15, 20-24]

NONE of this was happening! Malachi: "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your lives."

- You are kidding! How does God love us?

Key Point: We will grow indifferent to God's great love for us if we focus on difficult circumstances rather than on God's purpose for history.

Key: If we focus on our problems, they will consume us. However, IF we focus on God's purpose to extend His kingdom over all the earth and He has saved us to be part of His great purpose, we will gain the proper perspective. Keep our eyes on Jesus and His kingdom.

3. We grow indifferent to God's love when we drift into routine religion instead of a vital relationship with God.

- They were worshiping at the temple. They offered the sacrifices.
- They went through all the rituals prescribed by Moses.
- They followed God's program, but lost touch with His person.
- Their religious observance blinded them to their true condition.

A High School boy who had been at a summer camp was asked, "How did you get along as a Christian there?" He replied, "Oh, they never found out I was a Christian."

Warning Alert: Fish Gate needs to be repaired.

If your salvation experience is real, then the realization of how God has rescued you from hell itself, redeemed your unworthy soul, and added you to the family of God, will compel you to witness to others. Be obedient to...

Message of the Fish Gate: You are my witnesses! Transform & Protect the Marketplace

We have allowed this gate to be broken down, burned with fire, and for all practical purposes destroyed. The ruins of this gate are in desperate need of repair in our lives and in the church.

- Repair = chazaq = used 35 times in Nehemiah 3
- Idea of strengthening, encouraging, making something able to be used

Eph. 4:12-13 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: <sup>13</sup> Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

Gal. 4:19 My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, Without continual spiritual growth and discipleship, our zeal for the Lord and His Word diminishes.

Neh. 3:3-5 But the fish gate did the sons of Hassenah build, who also laid the beams thereof, and set up the doors thereof, the locks thereof, and the bars thereof.

<sup>4</sup> And next unto them repaired Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz. And next unto them repaired Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabeel. And next unto them repaired Zadok the son of Baana. <sup>5</sup> And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their LORD.

The Size of your Ego limits the Size of your Service.

Nehemiah 3 consists of a list [mainly of clans, families and other groups] of those who participated in the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. He notes 3 kinds of builders:

1. The Overinflated Had no excuse, BUT did not work hard

Neh. 3:5a And next unto them the Tekoites repaired;

- The regular Tekoites seemed to be a hard-working clan who were more than willing to work. They are mentioned as building another section of the wall in Neh. 3:27
- They are one of only 3 groups [Tekoites, the Priests, & Meremoth] listed as working on more than one project.

Neh. 3:5b but their nobles put not their necks [shoulders] to the work of their LORD.

- Literally, the idea in the Hebrew: They would not "bend their necks" to what God wanted them to do. The real issue was submission.
- They had NO excuse not to give their absolute best.
- Overinflated PRIDE stood in their way.
- Stand in infamy as the only people mentioned in Neh. 3 who did not join in the work!

2. The Overcomers Had an excuse, BUT did work hard

As an important leader in Jerusalem, Shallum's family would have been expected to contribute to the rebuilding effort. However, with only daughters and no sons, the Shallum family had a legitimate excuse not to work. Women were not expected to engage in this sort of labor.

His family did not use excuse. They are the only women mentioned as builders in Nehemiah.

- A disability doesn't have to disable us; a disadvantage does not mean defeat.
- The woman with no money can encourage the woman with no hope.

➤ An old man with a criminal past can steer a young man away from a criminal future.

Phil. 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me."

II Cor. 12:9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

3. The Overachievers Had no excuse and worked the hardest

Baruch who worked hard on rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was not concerned with:

➤ how his work matched up with others

➤ with his status or whether the work was suitable for his station in life.

Neh. 3:20 And so Baruch gave his all to the job; "Baruch" means "blessed" which is translated as happiness: specifically, happiness that arises from feeling the hand of God on your life.

I Cor. 9:24 "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receives the prize? So run, that ye may obtain."

II Tim. 4:7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

The Call Of Andrew: Not one of the inner 3: Peter, James & John

His activities are mentioned 3x, BUT each time he was fishing and brought his catch to Jesus.

1. John 1:35-39 Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples;

<sup>36</sup> And looking upon Jesus as He walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!

<sup>37</sup> And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.

Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, [Master] where dwellest thou? <sup>39</sup> He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.

➤ Something began in Andrew's heart that prepared him for the direct call of Christ

➤ Andrew became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, and he took action:

John 1:41-42 He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus.

2. Andrew found a boy with loaves and fish and brought him to Jesus. Just a little boy.

Only one? Unimportant? From this catch 5000 were fed. [John 6]

3. John 12:20-21 Some Greeks approached Philip, one of Andrew's fellow disciples, wanting to see Jesus. Philip told Andrew what the Greeks wanted. Together Andrew and Philip brought the matter to Jesus [v. 22].

In bringing Greeks to Jesus, Andrew believed that Jesus' intention was to save all men.

Jesus responded by referencing His crucifixion, saying,

John 12:23 "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."

His death and resurrection would be the way by which all men, from all races and creeds and families, would be saved. These are the "fish of every kind" from Jesus' parable of the dragnet [Matt. 13:47-50]. Andrew was one of the first to be involved in an evangelical effort that extended beyond the Jewish people.

The incident with the curious Greeks anticipated the day when God would reveal to Peter, Andrew's brother, that all people are welcome to come to Jesus. [Acts 10:1-48] Some commentators refer to Andrew as "the overshadowed saint", in that he appears to be constantly overshadowed by his more exuberant and outgoing brother. Despite this, Andrew continues with his task of serving Christ, and excels as "a bringer of others to Jesus."

He brought his brother, the lad with the loaves and fishes, and later the Greeks.

People may remember Peter for his great spiritual exploits, but in eternity there will be an equally great reward for Andrew—the man through whom the whole story of Peter began.

Hubbleman: "Oh, for a church of Andrews!" — simple, loving men, content to bring people to Jesus. Men like him are so valuable because everybody can be an Andrew. Not a greatly gifted man, but a greatly faithful man; not a man who would dispute with Peter as to who should be primate, or with John and James as to who shall sit on the left hand of Christ and who on the right, but a man who simply, humbly and lovingly does the work that lies nearest to him. He surely is of those last in the world's estimate who are first in the Kingdom of God. Andrew, an ordinary person, was used by God to be a superb 'fisherman.'

Charles Spurgeon "...it is another and a higher miracle to make us who were fish to become fishers—to make the convert into a converter—the receiver of the gospel into an imparter of that same gospel to other people. If you are saved yourself, the work is but half done until you are employed to bring others to Christ. You are as yet but half formed in the image of your Lord. You have not attained to the full development of the Christ-life in you unless you have commenced in some feeble way to tell to others of the grace of God: and I trust that you will find no rest to the sole of your foot till you have been the means of leading many to that blessed Savior who is your confidence and your hope. If Christ has caught us, we must catch others. Let us ask him to give us grace to go a-fishing, and so to cast our nets that we may take a great multitude of fishes. Oh, that the Holy Ghost may raise up from among us some master-fishers, who shall sail their boats in many a sea, and surround great shoals of fish!

We need to walk out these doors today like they were the fish gate, and beyond is a great sea of people who need to get hooked on Jesus!

China Missionary J. Hudson Taylor told of one of his converts whom he took on a voyage to England on a very large vessel. They had just set out to sea when the man fell overboard. It was impossible for them to retrieve him onto the huge ship, but a small fishing boat was nearby. Taylor began screaming at the men to help his drowning friend. But they were unloading their nets of fish they had just pulled in...they said to wait and they would come over. He shouted all the more about the urgency saying, "You must hurry, he's just a grab away!" They waited until they had every single fish into their boat, then they rowed over but it was too late, he was already gone. Taylor said, today when I think of those fishermen I think how evil and selfish and complacent they were, but really, we're no different. Jesus has commanded us to be fishers of men, but we aren't, we're too busy dragging other things into our boat. Possessions, sports, pleasures, vacations and the like. We are so concerned w/ the things of this life that we are letting people drown all around us, and they are only a grab away. And they will drown not in an ocean, but in the lake of fire.