

Turning Grains of Sand Into Pearls For God
Sermon Outline — Nehemiah 13
Sermon Series: Nehemiah > Repair, Rebuild & Restore
Sunday, May 28, 2023
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1. Have you ever noticed that godly living is not simply gaining victory over a series of problems and then moving on to new ones. Sometimes it is battling the same ones over and over again. In what ways have you personally experienced this and how did you respond?
2. Your greatest test of faith will always be the next one. And your greatest display of character has yet to happen. This means that past victories do not guarantee future victories. Why do you think people tend to think that past victories guarantee future ones?
3. Oysters are known for occasionally make pearls. A grain of sand inside an oyster creates an irritation. It deals with this irritation by slowly secreting layers of aragonite and conchiolin. This white secretion covers the the irritating grain of sand and removes the irritation. In the same way, sin is like a grain of sand. It brings irritation, frustration, failure, depression, hopelessness, trouble, fatigue and many more negative results. It has to be dealt with by “secreting” the Word of God in your life. When and where have you personally experienced this? What were the results, the toll on you and others? If you eventually dealt with that sin, how and what were the results?
4. For Nehemiah, he has been gone for around 12 years. He was summoned back to King Artaxerxes in Persia. While the “cat” has been away, the “mice” chose to play. In this case, sin. The first sin Nehemiah has to deal with when he returns at the ripe old age of 70, is the sin of compromise.
 - a. When Nehemiah returns, he learns that his old arch enemies — Sanballat and Tobiah— have led the Jewish people to compromise. Read [Nehemiah 13:4-5](#) in your sermon notes. Read [Deuteronomy 23:3](#) in your sermon notes. God has placed restrictions on who could enter the Tabernacle and later the Temple. No Ammonite and no Moabite were allowed. Why? Moab and Ammon had been conceived by incest when Lot’s daughters got their father drunk and had sex with him.
 - b. The high priest named Eliashib was related to Sanballat, who was a Moabite. Eliashib allowed Tobiah, who was friends with Sanballat, to take up residence in a storage room in the Temple ([Neh. 13:28](#)). Tobiah was an Ammonite. So, you have two friends who are both governors appointed by the Persian King Artaxerxes who are leading the people to compromise. Sanballat was governor over Samaria and Tobiah was governor over Moab. Both hated the Jews because God had rejected them due to the incest of their forefather Lot.
 - c. We learn from a Jewish historian named Josephus, who lived around the time of Jesus, that when Nehemiah kicked out Eliashib, Sanballat and Tobiah from Jerusalem, that Sanballat’s grandson named Manasseh (not the same one in the tribes of Israel), established a hybrid religion of Judaism in Samaria on Mt. Gerezim.
 - i. In [John 4](#), Jesus engages with a Samaritan woman at the well. This issue surfaces in her conversation with Jesus. In some way she tosses some contempt at Jesus in her comments. In [John 4:9b](#), we read this: *“She said to Jesus, ‘You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?’”* (NLT).
 - ii. After more conversation we read this in [John 4:19-20](#), *“Sir,” the woman said, “You must be a prophet. ²⁰So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?”* (NLT). There was bitter blood between Jews and Samaritans (who, as Jews, had intermarried with Assyrians when they had been conquered by Assyria in 722 BC).
 - iii. When it comes to the sin of compromise, have you noticed how people, when confronted, try to deflect their wrong? Rationalize their sin? Excuse their sin? What sins do you do this with in your life?
 - d. Chuck Swindoll writes: *“Inviting Tobiah to live in the Jewish temple was like inviting a fox to live in the chicken coop. Having Tobiah present in the temple was like having a bust of Martin Luther in the Vatican!” Sometimes that is how the enemy of God’s people works. Even to this day, satan does not always fight churches; sometimes he simply joins them.”*¹ What do you think of this quote?
 - e. Read [Nehemiah 13:8-9](#) in your sermon notes. Nehemiah had a “melt-down.” He had Tobiah removed and banned from Jerusalem, all his belongings thrown out the that room “purified.”
 - i. The Hebrew word translated as “purified” is [יִטְהַרַוּ, yetaharu] and it means *“to sterilize, to fumigate, and to sanitize.”* We are not given the specifics on how Nehemiah did this. It is possible Nehemiah did what [2 Chronicles 29:3-31:21](#) did to purify this room in the Temple.
 - ii. When it comes to your own sin, how do you “purify” your temple — your heart for God?
 - iii. Are there New Testament equivalents of what Nehemiah did? Yes. We could build a huge list, but let’s focus on a few in your sermon notes. Read [1 Corinthians 3:16](#) and [1 Corinthians 9:19-20](#). Answer these questions please: Has sin taken up residency in your temple? Have you set up a suite of rooms and invited sin to come live inside the holy temple of God? Have you secretly decorated some room in your heart and invited lust, pride, dishonesty, or some other sin to make itself at home? If so, what will you do about it?

¹ Charles R. Swindoll, [Hand Me Another Brick](#), Apple Books, p. 144.

5. There is a second grain of sand (sin) Nehemiah had to deal with when he returned — selfishness. Read [Nehemiah 13:10](#) in your sermon notes. Now read [Numbers 18 :21-24](#) in your sermon notes. When the 12 tribes of Israel conquered the Promised Land, God distributed land to 11 of the 12 tribes for farming and making a living. The 12th tribe, Levi, God appointed this tribe to be the worship leaders for the Jews and stated in the Old Testament Law that the other 11 tribes were required to give financially to their support.
 - a. Nehemiah left Jerusalem on a high because the people had experienced a revival and recommitted their lives to God. When he returned some 12 years later at the age of 70, he finds all that God had accomplished the first time he was there had been undone by Sanballat, Tobish, Geshum and the high priest Eliashib. How do you think he felt seeing he fires of revival snuffed out?
 - b. Read [Nehemiah 13:11-12](#) in your sermon notes. Nehemiah, a layman and governor appointed over Jerusalem and Judea by the Persian king, Artaxerxes, first reprimanded the leaders he had entrusted to keep discipling the people after he left. This just shows that revivals are not a once in a lifetime experience. What you experience on a Sunday at church will not last on its own. Part of the principles in the Second Law of Thermodynamics is this: *“Anything left in a given state will deteriorate unless there is an outside force greater than the force deterioration impacting it.”* A good example is: aging. A second good example: spiritual growth, maturity and discipleship. Reflect back on your spiritual life — where have you experienced spiritual deterioration in your life and why?
6. There is a third grain of sand (sin) that had to be dealt with when Nehemiah returned — materialism. We tend to think that materialism is a modern struggle but it has been going on ever since sin entered the world. We learned in Nehemiah 8 that Nehemiah had the Old Testament Law read to the people. They stood for 6 hours with their children and upon hearing God’s law for the first time, they repented.
 - a. Nehemiah left Jerusalem on a high because the people had experienced a revival and recommitted their lives to God. When he returned some 12 years later at the age of 70, he finds all that God had accomplished the first time he was there had been undone by Sanballat, Tobish, Geshum and the high priest Eliashib. How do you think he felt seeing he fires of revival snuffed out?
 - b. Read [Nehemiah 13:15-19](#) in your sermon notes. Nehemiah sees the Jewish breaking one of the Ten Commandments. Read [Exodus 20:8-11](#) in your Bible. These Jews were selling on the Sabbath — meaning they are working 7 days a week. Do you take a consistent Sabbath day to rest or do you do work for your work or work around the house or school work 7 or any other work 7 days a week?
 - c. There is nothing wrong in having nice things. One of the ways we can know we are materialistic is we have to finance things we want and today, we do that primarily through credit cards. Last week you were shown how in America, the average American household debt is \$158,209. The average American household credit card debt is \$14,241. What does that tell you about materialism in America?
 - d. Where would you say you fall in this sin of materialism and why?
 - e. Read [Nehemiah 13:22](#) in your sermon notes. Did you notice that Nehemiah prayed to God AFTER he took action. He didn’t pray to God before he took action. Why? Whatever God has commanded us to do, we just do it. Consider these New Testament mandates from God:
 - i. Read [1 Thessalonians 4:3](#) in your sermon notes. “Sexual immorality” is any sexual experience outside the marriage between a man and a woman. Yet people, even Christian people, don’t obey this. They move-in with their partner. And then they try to justify by saying, *“But we’re engaged . . .”* or *“I love him/her” . . .* of *“Everyone in our culture does it today.”* What do you believe about this today and why?
 - ii. Read [Romans 13:7b](#) in your sermon notes. The mandate from God is that we we our taxes. We don’t cheat or lie on our taxes. We pay them. You don’t have to pray about this. There is nothing wrong in taking every legal exemption the IRS allows. BUT the temptation to be dishonest with our taxes is real possibility. Have you ever experienced this or know someone who did? What does this teach you?
 - f. Read [Nehemiah 13:20-21](#). Nehemiah threatened them with arrest for violating the Sabbath command by selling their stuff at the gates around Jerusalem. Now, that is a deterrent. Being a “gatekeeper” is the job description of every spiritual leader, especially parents. What kind of “gatekeeper” would you say you are?
7. The fourth grain of sand (sin) that Nehemiah had to deal with when he returned was — disobedience.
 - a. Read [Nehemiah 13:23-24](#) in your sermon notes. The Jewish men in Jerusalem had married non-Jewish women and their children were not speaking Hebrew, nor honoring Jewish customs and laws. Nehemiah knew that if these children did not know Hebrew, then they could not read the Old Testament so as to obey it. Read [Nehemiah 13:28](#) in your sermon notes. The main culprit behind this was the high priest — Eliashib. Nehemiah banished him from Jerusalem. Have you known any spiritual leaders to fall? What was the impact?
 - b. William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army once said: *“I want you to always bear in mind that it is the nature of a fire to go out; you must keep it stirred and fed and the ashes continually removed for the fire to keep burning.”*² What do you do to keep your spiritual fires going?
 - c. Read [Nehemiah 13:31b](#) and the four final points in your sermon notes on how to deal with the grains of sand (sin) in your own life. Will you commit to doing this? Why or why not? What are the challenges for you to do this?
 - d. Read [Joshua 25:15b](#) and [Joshua 25:15c](#) in your sermon notes. Will you make the pledge that Joshua made? Why or why not? What will it take for you to keep this pledge if you make it?

² Quoted by Warren Wiersbe in [Be Determined](#), p. 139.