

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

06.14.2026 | Set Apart | Nehemiah 10 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible, I want to invite you to turn with me to Nehemiah chapter 10. This morning we're going to be in Nehemiah chapter 10 as we continue our study through the book of Nehemiah. We've been at this study for a couple of months now, so we've been walking through the book of Nehemiah. We're coming down to the last couple of weeks of this study. We'll end, Lord willing, the book of Nehemiah at the end of June. And a couple of weeks ago, as we were studying this book, we kind of hit a turning point. You might remember Nehemiah was called by God back to Israel. He had never lived there, but the people of God were being called back. But he was called to Jerusalem to help rebuild the city and the people of Jerusalem. And what we saw in chapter 7, 6 and 7, is that the wall was rebuilt. The work physically was completed. But yet the work of rebuilding and renewal still needed to happen in the people's lives.

This is important for us to hear because this is what we're considering as we study the book, is that the work of rebuilding and renewal was not always just about a specific project that God wants to do. It was never just about building a wall around Jerusalem. God is at the work in rebuilding and renewing his people continuously. He wants to rebuild and renew our lives and our church. What we saw in Nehemiah chapter 8 at that kind of turning point was the people together, they came under the Word as a whole community. Under God's Word, they heard the Word of God clearly taught. They were met with conviction as they recognized their sin. And they were met with comfort as they believed that the joy of the Lord is their strength. And they began to respond in obedience and just following the commands that were specifically given them in that festival and in that time.

And we saw last week in Nehemiah chapter 9 that God continued this work of rebuilding and renewing his people as he helped them to confront their sin, to confess their sin, to repent from their sin. Now as the people have confessed their sin and turned from their sin, they renew their commitment to God. In fact the very last verse in Nehemiah chapter 9 that we saw last week was that it says the people made a firm covenant to the Lord. Then it says in verse 38 of Nehemiah chapter 9 that these are the names of the people that sign their names to this covenant or to this document. And that's where Nehemiah chapter 10 picks up.

Nehemiah chapter 10 verses 1 through 27 is a list of those names that were signed on the document. Now for the sake of time we're not going to read through all those names. We're going to pick up in verse 28, but I want us to see what is happening in the people. As they have now come under the word together, they have confessed their sin and renewed their commitment. And here's how we see them renewing their commitment and making this covenant together in chapter 10. I'm going to read verses 28 through 39 which is the end of the chapter. It says the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, and all who have knowledge and understanding. Join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk into God's law that was given by Moses, the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord, our Lord, and his rules and his statutes. We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. And we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.

We also take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God. For the showbread, the regular grain offering, the regular burnt offering, the Sabbaths, the new moons, the appointed feasts, the holy things, and the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel and for all the work of the house of our God. We, the priests, the Levites, and the people have likewise cast lots for the wood offering to bring it into the house of our God. According to our Father's houses, at times appointed year by year to burn on the altar of the Lord our God as it is written in the law. We obligate ourselves to bring the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all the fruit of every tree year by year to the house of the Lord. Also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the first born of our sons and of our cattle, as it is written in the law, and the first born of our herds and our flocks. And to bring the first of our dough and our contributions, the first of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God. And to bring to the Levites the tithes from our ground, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our towns where we labor. And the priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive the tithes. And the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers

of the storehouse. For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the chambers where the vessels of the sanctuary are, as well as the priests who minister and the gatekeepers and the singers. We will not neglect the house of our God.

This morning I had the opportunity to teach our youth, and they're looking at different gospel movements that have happened throughout church history. And this morning we were looking at people called the Moravians, and the role that they played in the Great Awakening. The Moravians were a small branch of Christianity. At this time in the 1720s they were gathered in Germany in a little town called Herrnhut. And they were living together, and they are known especially for their commitment to prayer and to sending out missionaries. In 1727 the Moravians started a 24-hour prayer ministry that lasted for more than 100 years. In those 100 years they sent out hundreds of missionaries from this little town in Germany all around the world to bring the gospel to people. But this movement of the Moravians and the impact that they were able to have around the world almost didn't happen. As you see in the 1720s as these Moravians came together, they were really refugees fleeing persecution from other parts of Europe. And they all gathered in this little town of Herrnhut. When you've got people from different countries, different backgrounds, even kind of different religious Christianity strands coming together, what can often happen is there's conflict. There's cultural differences. There's division. There's fighting. And this began to happen amongst the Moravians in that town. The people were deeply divided. There was lots of conflict. And a man who was kind of the leader of that town named Zinzendorf stood up and said, "We are going to be unified as God's people." He called the people to love and to repentance and to unity. He drafted up this covenant. They now know it as the Brotherly Agreement. And he had all the people in the town sign this Brotherly Agreement basically saying, "We are committing to agree upon the things which are central to our faith. We are committing to love the Lord and love each other and to seek God together as his people." And because they entered into this covenant together, God worked through this people in a mighty way.

You know what happened in May, 299 years ago there in Herrnhut as the people make this covenant, what it was, it was a people remembering who they are and committing to live like it. And that's really the same thing that's happening in Nehemiah chapter 10. What you have in Nehemiah chapter 10 is the people of God, of Israel at the time, remembering who they are and committing to live like it. When the people get together and it says at the end of chapter 9 they make this firm covenant, and we read about this covenant that they're entering into in chapter 10, they're not making a new covenant. In fact, what they say is that they are going to live under the covenant that they were already brought under, under the law of Moses. They weren't making a new covenant as much as they were renewing the covenant that they were already in. They were remembering that they were a people. And they were remembering that that means that they are supposed to live in a certain way, and they were making a commitment to God and to each other to live like it. This is so important for us because in the same way that people renewed their covenant in Nehemiah's day, it's the same way that renewal happens in our lives. If we want rebuilding and renewal to happen in our lives and in our church, we need to follow the same thing that we see in Nehemiah chapter 10. We need to remember who we are, and we need to remember what it looks like to live like it.

And the two words that I just want us to remember and think about as we walk through Nehemiah chapter 10, as we think about remembering who we are and what it means to live like the people that we are, is the two words set apart. I think you could summarize Nehemiah chapter 10 by saying that the people are remembering that they are a people set apart. And so they commit to living lives that are set apart. That's just how I want us to think about Nehemiah chapter 10, it's just in those two sections. So first, let's just think about the fact that they're remembering that they are a people set apart. The first part about being renewed by God is remembering who we are. And the people of God in this time, they needed to remember that they were a people set apart. The whole first part of this chapter is all about identifying the people who named themselves as the people of God, who identified themselves as being part of this people that are set apart. Again, verses 1 through 27, it's a long list of names. And sometimes you might read the Bible and you might think, why did God choose to include all these names? I mean, this is the Word of God, he knows this is going to be around for hundreds of years, for thousands of years forever. Why did he choose to include these names, these families in this part of scripture?

There's probably different answers for different parts of scripture, but what we see in this chapter is these names are included because they represent the people that said we are a part of the people of God. These names represent those who were willing to identify themselves as ones who were set apart as the people of God. It says these people sign their

names to the document. You can almost just imagine maybe a picture of people lined up, waiting to add their signature to the seal of the document, saying, I want to be included in this list because I want to identify myself as part of a set apart people. I think about those pictures we often see of our founding fathers 250 years ago, lining up to sign the Declaration of Independence, wanting to put their name on it because they wanted to show that they were in support of what was being expressed in this document. In the same way, all the names that we have in verses 1 through 27 are similar. Here you have people who are wanting to be identified specifically as part of the people of God. They were wanting to be noted as being part of this covenant community, a people set apart. But of course, the names in verses 1 through 27 are just a representation of all the people. Notice what Nehemiah says in verse 28.

He says, "The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding." Basically meaning all the way down to the youngest child who could understand what was happening. Nehemiah says it wasn't just about the names that you read in verses 1 through 27. He's trying to show this is happening amongst all the people. He's trying to show the vastness by naming all the groups of people that would be a part of this. In fact, some people think that probably what's happening here is not just Israelites who are identifying themselves, but also non-Israelites are being a part of this group. The way it talks about people who have separated themselves from the peoples of the land. Some people think that maybe non-Jews, Gentiles, or people who are only half Jewish, were joining in with this group because they were saying, "I want to be marked as a person in this community. A people set apart."

And notice why I would use that phrase, "a people that are set apart." Because how are the people described? They're so varying. They're so diverse. I mean, there are all sorts of different professions. There are heads of houses, wives, sons, and daughters, all who can understand, but how are they unique? It says, "All the people who have separated themselves from the peoples of the land into the law of God." This is a people who are set apart, who have been set apart from something into something. A people who have been set apart from the world, from not just the peoples of the land, but from the idols of the land, from the worship of the land, from all the things that people would place their hope in in the world. These are a people who have separated themselves from that, set apart from that, but also set apart to something. We as the people of God are never just separated or set apart from the world, or set apart from our old lives, or from sin. We're always set apart to something, or specifically to someone. The people here are identified as those who have separated themselves from peoples of the land to the law of God. A people set apart by God for his own possession, diverse, probably in many different ways. I believe even in ethnicity, race, diverse in their backgrounds and their careers, but distinct as they are set apart.

The Bible says this is still true of the people of God today. That what was happening here was not just about a certain nation state, or a certain ethnicity of people that Israelites kind of claiming to be separate from the rest of the world. What was happening here is a picture of the way the people of God are set apart by God in the world. And that still happens today in us as the people of God. Listen to what Peter writes in 1 Peter chapter 2, as he speaks to the church, and he describes the way that we now are a people set apart. In 1 Peter chapter 2 verses 9 and 10 he says, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." You see that? You have been called out of something to something. You have been set apart, being called out of the kingdom of darkness into God's marvelous light.

This is verse 10, "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." You see, the people of Israel, they were reminding themselves of who they were. Specifically, they were a people in a covenantal relationship with God through the law of Moses. God, when he brought his people out of Egypt, began to form them as his people, he gave them a law and he said, "This is the covenantal relationship that you have with me, that you live as my people. You live under this law." But do you notice what Peter says here in 1 Peter chapter 2? That we are now part of the people of God, not by our own works, our own ability to keep the law, but because we have received mercy.

You see, when Jesus Christ came, the Bible says he brought a new covenant. That the covenant that the people of Israel were under in Nehemiah's time is different than the covenant that we are under. The people of God now are no longer under a covenant of works or of law. We do not identify ourselves as people who keep the law of Moses. We identify

ourselves as people who have received mercy and grace through Jesus Christ. We are people set apart, not because we are special or because we've done anything to earn it, but simply because God has been merciful and gracious to us. Which means this opportunity to be a part of a set apart people is available to everyone. If you're here this morning and you've not trusted in Jesus Christ and what he has done for you, if you're here this morning and you've not placed your faith in Jesus and begun to live in a relationship with God, I want you to know that there is a place for you to belong. There's a community for you to belong to, not because of who you are or because of what you do, but simply because of what Jesus Christ has done. Bible says he has given us a way to be a part of this new community. He has given us a way to be a part of a people set apart from the world and set apart to God. How did Peter describe it? We can be a people for his own possession simply by the mercy and grace of God through Jesus Christ. My hope today is that you would, if you haven't already, place your faith in Jesus Christ and be a part of this set apart people through what he has done for you.

Now these people here, they are remembering the covenant that they are under and they are renewing their covenant by having this kind of physical thing that they do. We read that they sign this document, they seal this document. We read in chapter 10 that they take this oath and this curse upon themselves. It's a way of formalizing their commitment, of kind of physically acting out this covenant that they are under with God. Don't you know that as people of God today, we still have ways of signifying the covenant that we have with God. We don't have a document that we sign or something that is sealed, but God has given us ways to signify this covenant that we have with him, this relationship that we have with him through Jesus Christ. There's two primary ways that we signify this covenant.

The first is through baptism. When someone is baptized, they are not merely standing in the water just to kind of go through a religious ritual, just to kind of do what people have always done in Christian churches before. When someone is being baptized, what they are doing is they are professing their faith in Jesus and they are identifying themselves now as part of the people of God. They are saying their hope is in what Jesus Christ has done for them and they now believe that through their faith in Jesus Christ, they have been united to Christ and to the people of God. They are saying, "I now belong to this set-apart people." Like a wedding ceremony in which a husband and wife enter into a covenantal relationship before God and before friends and family, a baptism service or a baptism ceremony that happens is a way of signifying this covenantal relationship as you enter into becoming part of the bride of Christ. As you stand before the people of God, you are saying, "I am part of this community." It's a way of signifying this covenantal relationship that you have. If you are here this morning and you have placed your faith in Jesus but you have never been baptized, I want to encourage you to do so.

I love when we have baptisms in our church because we have people getting to stand before the community and identify themselves as part of the people of God. Getting to profess their faith in Jesus and tell the story that God has written in their lives. We have a way of welcoming them into this relationship that we have with them because why? It is showing the covenantal relationship God has brought us into. I would encourage you if you are interested in baptism, come talk to me or come talk to someone in our church after the service. We would love to talk with you about this because this is the way that we have been given as the people of God to signify this covenantal relationship that we are now in through Christ.

The people here are not starting a new covenant. They are reminding themselves and renewing the covenant that they are already under. We have a way of doing that regularly. The way that we regularly renew our covenant, remind ourselves of the covenant we have with God is through taking of the Lord's Supper. As we partake of communion on a regular basis, what we are doing is we are renewing our covenant with God. What do I read for us every time we partake of the Lord's Supper? From 1 Corinthians 11. That Jesus, when he took the cup, he said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." What we are doing every time we come to the table is we are identifying ourselves as part of a set apart people. We are adding our name to the list of those names, saying, "I belong to the people of God through my faith in Jesus Christ." Each time we eat the bread and drink the cup, we are reminded that we are now in this new covenant under Jesus Christ and we are committing our lives to live for him. I would pray that you would see partaking of the Lord's Supper in this way. That it would never just be some kind of empty thing that we do on a Sunday morning because it's a tradition that we always do. But I pray it would be a way that we confess our sins, that we confess our faith in Jesus, that we renew our commitment in the covenant that we have with God through Jesus Christ.

It's very important in the process of renewal to be reminded of who you are. God has given us these ways as we come together to be reminded of who we are. We are a set apart people. And as a set apart people, we should live lives that are set apart. This is the second part of just considering this chapter. A people set apart, a people identified as the people of God, and then lives that are set apart. Actually living like people that are set apart. One of the things that we've seen in the last couple of weeks is that when God begins this work of rebuilding and renewing his people, it shows outwardly. Like as the people came under the Word in Nehemiah chapter 8, something happened. They were convicted. They began to obey the commandments of following the festivals and the feasts that they were called to. Nehemiah chapter 9, Tim last week, helped us to see that when God is doing the work of rebuilding and renewal, there's real change. We confess our sins and we repent of our sins. It's not just in word, but it's in action. It's in real change. There is an outward expression of the renewing that God does inwardly. There is fruit that is born whenever God does this work amongst his people.

And that's what we see in Nehemiah chapter 10. The people, they come together and they say, we recognize that we are a set apart people and we need to live like it. We are under this covenant of living under the law of God and so let us begin to live like it. This is just the general application for us today. Is that we also would live lives that are set apart. That we would be distinct from the world. That we're supposed to be in this world, but not of this world. That in some ways, even while we live amongst all the other people that aren't part of the set apart people, we would separate ourselves in some way. That we would be separated from the world and to God and it would show up in our lives. As we live according to God's design. As we follow his commandments. As we live in his love and his truth.

Specifically, the people here in this section, they identify three ways that they're going to live set apart lives. So I just thought it'd be good for us to consider the ways that they identified in themselves and draw out specific application for us. So what we see in the rest of chapter 10 is three specific areas where the people say we need to live lives set apart in this area. The first area is in marriage and relationships. The second area is in work and in Sabbath. And the third is in their finances and in their giving to God, the temple, to the house of the Lord. So let's just consider these three marriage and relationships work in Sabbath and are giving specifically giving to the Lord. Notice what they say in verse 31. Excuse me, verse 30. They say we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.

One of the commitments that they make is to say we will not have our families intermarry with the people of the land. Now you can read that. You could think, oh, this is just all about kind of being ethnocentric or is it just kind of separating yourself from people who are come from different families or different cultures or backgrounds of you. That's actually not what it's about at all. This is about separating based on faith. This is the people saying we are no longer going to join our families with people who build on a different foundation than we do. If we're supposed to be a people that are set apart, we are not going to join ourselves with those who are not set apart. This has nothing to do with race or ethnicity. This has to do with faith in God. And similarly, in our relationships, the Bible has nothing to say against marriage, interracial marriage or marrying people of different ethnicities. In fact, there's something maybe beautiful about that diversity. But what is being said here is that in our most intimate relationships, in our deepest relationships, we should be set apart, which means we should be joined with those who are set apart. It's really important to know that this is not saying that we need to be cutting off or closing off relationships to those who aren't Christians.

One of the marks actually of being set apart of the people of God is a love for people who are different than you, a love for people who believe differently than you do. So there should be a love from the people of God towards those who are not part of the people of God. In fact, those Moravians that I talked about, they had a unique love for each other and a covenant they entered into with each other, and that actually gave them a passion to go out and reach the lost. So we talk about being set apart in our relationships. We're not talking about cutting off people who are not Christians. What we're saying is you can't be joined with someone who's building on a different foundation than you. You can't enter into a close relationship, the deepest, most intimate relationship with someone who's on a different path than you are. If you are going to truly be set apart, there's going to be something unique about your relationships. It's still true for marriage. The Bible teaches that it is good for Christians to marry Christians because two people are building their lives upon the same foundation. Now if you're here today and you're a Christian and you're already married to a non-Christian, the Bible has clear instruction for you. It says live a set-apart life there in that relationship in hopes that God would work through that. So you remain in that relationship. But the Bible also has instruction for us that as you consider marriage, as you consider deep friendships, as you consider those who you build your lives with, how are you going to be a people

set apart? You think about why would the people even be interested in marrying their sons or daughters to the peoples of the land? Probably there was a lot of benefit. Maybe a lot of safety, a lot of political benefit, maybe a lot of financial gain for joining different families. They said instead of trusting in all those things that we could maybe control, we're going to trust God, be set apart in our relationships.

As people who are set apart, who live lives set apart, that should affect our relationships. It should also affect our work. The ways that we trust God should affect the ways that we view our job and the way God provides. Look at what they say in verse 31. What is this about? Well the law said on the Sabbath day, the seventh day, you're not supposed to work. And probably the people were obeying that. They weren't working on the Sabbath day. But they had found a loophole. What if other people work? I could just buy from them. I'm not doing the work, but I'm still making sure my needs are met. You see, the Sabbath wasn't just about rest. It was about trusting that God provides. The people were to take one day off a week from their work, not just to rest, that was a big part of it, yes, but also to trust that God provides more than we provide for ourselves. What are they doing with this loophole? They're not trusting that God would provide. They're finding a way to meet their needs themselves.

Talk about trusting God, that really happens in the Sabbath year. When they talk about the seventh year, not getting their crops or not taking on or exacting debts, what they're saying is every seven years, they were supposed to let their harvest, their crops rest. They weren't supposed to harvest their crops, and they were supposed to forgive all their debts. Think about that. When you live in an agrarian society, taking a year off from your crops is a big deal. You really have to trust God to do that. When you depend upon what you've given out to other people coming back to you, you really have to trust God to just forgive debts. The people say, "If we're going to be a people set apart, we need to live like it. It needs to show up in our work." Do we really trust God?

Listen, in San Francisco and Silicon Valley, it's probably not very uncommon for us to put a lot of hope in our jobs, in our careers, in our companies, in our investments. Why? Because we think we need to be in control to make sure our needs are met. Do we really trust God? Do we trust God enough to take time off of work and give it to him, to our families, to his people, to reaching the loss? Do we trust God enough to make sure we only follow ethical business practices? Do we trust God enough to say, "I'm not going to find my identity in my career, but in Christ? He's the one who is going to meet all my needs. He's the one that ultimately is going to satisfy." How set apart would we be if we actually believe this and live like this? People of God, they recognize they need to be set apart in their relationships and in their work, and then thirdly, in their finances or specifically in their giving.

The whole last section, we're not going to read it all again, but it's really all about the temple. They don't ever use the word temple, but it's about the house of God. Verses 33 through 39, you'll see, or excuse me, 32 through 39, you'll see the words house of God, house of the Lord, used time and time again. What the people are saying is, we're going to quit withholding and give to the house of God. This is how the section begins in verse 32. "We will take on ourselves the obligation to give yearly a third part of the shekel for the service of the house of our God." And they begin to get all the specifics of what this looks like, all that they're going to give, the people they're going to support, the priests, the Levites, the places of worship. But the whole section ends like this in verse 39, "For the people of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of grain, wine, and oil to the chambers, where the vessels of the sanctuary are, as well as the priests who minister, the gatekeepers and the singers." And here's the key phrase, "We will not neglect the house of our God." People basically said, if we're going to be people who are set apart, our lives need to be marked by this. Well, we're not just going to build up our own houses while the house of God is neglected. We are going to give sacrificially so that the house of God is where it is supposed to be, that worship happens there, that we support the ministry that happens there.

I think the same principle is still true for us today. Don't get me wrong, our church building is not the temple. The people of God, though, are the temple. I think there is still a call for us to give financially, for us to give sacrificially, to support the work of ministry, to support the love of neighbor, to care for those in need, to support the worship that happens here. You know, we don't regularly in our service have a time of collecting the offering. When I grew up as a kid, there was a time in every service where you pass the offering plate. People put their envelopes or their money in the plate. Now most people give on their phone or online or things like that, so we often don't pass the plate. One of the things that grieves me a little bit is I think sometimes we can lose sight of the fact that an important part of worship as the

people of God is giving to the work of God. It's not neglecting the house of the Lord. Giving financially, sacrificially is an important part of worship. I don't bring this up often because I often don't want to try to guilt you into giving. The Lord has sustained this church for 177 years. I think he'll continue to do so. Not so much about I want to try to get your money. I just want you to know I think this is an important part of worship. The people say we are going to live lives that are set apart and it is going to look like us being generous with our finances to support the work of ministry, the worship that happens in the house of the Lord.

How set apart would we be if we gave sacrificially? Don't get me wrong. I think a lot of people in San Francisco give money because they're rich. They have money to give. What would really set us apart is if we gave sacrificially. Like if something was different about our standard of living because our standard of giving was so high. I'm preaching to myself here, but do we ever give in ways that we actually kind of feel it? We actually give in ways that are sacrificial. I think that's what would make us set apart. What would actually lead us to do that? What would actually lead us to give in such a way? Is it not coming to the table and remembering that Jesus Christ gave his life for us? How can we be stingy with the resources God gives us when he gave everything for us?

I mean, isn't it remembering that we are under a covenant of grace that would lead us to be gracious and generous with what God has given us to support people who are in need, support the work of ministry? See, all of it comes back to remembering who we already are. Remembering who we are in Christ, renewing this covenant. This is what leads us to live lives that are set apart. This morning as you come to the table, see it as a way of renewing your covenant, your commitment with the Lord. See it away as reminding yourself you're under a covenant of grace because of Jesus Christ. But then walk away from the table and leave this place today seeking to live a life that is set apart. How is God calling you to be the salt and the light distinct from this world in a way for his glory today and this week?