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NEHEMIAH 10:30

Series: Life Lessons from Nehemiah

[PRAYER] Lord, I am so grateful that your mercies are new every morning. Lord, we need that because by the time the day is over, we're hungry for mercy. To know that tomorrow when we get up those mercies are new every morning, it gives us courage, it gives us strength and hope. So I pray for those who are here today who might feel discouraged, that they would experience your mercies that are new today. Not yesterday's mercies or the day before, but today's mercies that you provide for us. Lord, it's a privilege to sing together and worship you. Thank you for that privilege. Now as we open your word, we ask that you would use it to teach us. Bless this Bible study that we do to honor you. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

What does it mean to be committed to God? That's the question we're looking at. You can look in a lot of different places in the Bible to see people being committed to the Lord or expressing their commitment to God. But in particular we're looking at Nehemiah 10. Starting in verse 28 and following we see that the people, after reading the Bible for several days over a period of time, they come to an understanding that this is something they want. They want to commit themselves to God. So there are four commitments at the end of chapter 10 in the book of Nehemiah. We're going to be looking at all of those.

Last Sunday we looked at our first one, which was commitment to obey God. It is the most important decision that any of us make in our lives to obey God. So let me just say that if you have never made that commitment in your life to trust the Lord, to honor Him in your whole heart, then you would do that today. That you would accept Jesus Christ into your life, recognizing that you're a sinner and you need a Savior. Jesus is that Savior and He wants to come into your life, He wants to run your life, He wants to be honored in everything that you do. That's decision number one. That's commitment number one is to know God and obey Him.

Another commitment to God has to do with marriage. That's the second commitment we're going to see in this passage. It's commitment to God regarding marriage. Now imagine the scene as we see it laid out there in the passage. It says starting back in verse 28 that the men and the women and the *children who were able to understand* were present. So young people, you are able to understand and we're going to talk today honestly about marriage. We're going to talk about issues relating to marriage today so that you can understand what God has for marriage, for you as you prepare to get married at some point. So we're going to talk about what God has to say about that. So in part this message is directed to young people as they're trying to make decisions about finding a mate.

Well I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's start by reading the passage that we have in God's word. One verse. If you would stand with me. The verse in Nehemiah 10:30 identifies the second commitment that the people had. As they're committing themselves to the Lord they say – *We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons.* That's the second promise or commitment.

Another verse I want to read while you're standing comes from Hebrews. It expresses a similar commitment in the New Testament. *Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*

You may be seated.

The customs that existed in that time were different than ours. In that time when someone was to find a mate, it was a parent who would find that mate for them. In our culture we don't do it that way. For some they are grateful that we don't do it that way. But you can imagine if you're a dad and you really love your son and you want to find a wife for him, you would find the best possible wife that you could. That was their thinking and that's what they were trying to do in those days. But the principles about finding a mate are the same in God's word. Whether it's the parents finding this mate or you're trying to find that mate yourself.

One of the key things that we need to see in the scriptures here is that marriage is to be honored. That means it's to be valued, it's to be raised up. That's very important. That's news to most Americans. Marriage isn't that important in our society. In fact I'd like to first talk about why it isn't valued. Not just why it isn't valued in the world. I can understand why people in the world don't value marriage. Let's talk about why marriage is devalued in our own lives as Christians. Why do we tend to devalue marriage in our own lives? I want to make some suggestions about why we don't value marriage as much as we should.

I think one reason we don't value marriage is because of experience. Some of you have had a bad experience in marriage. So in that bad experience in marriage you're going wow, marriage isn't what it's cracked up to be. It's a problem for some people. But some of you have parents, you were raised in a home where you saw parents yelling at each other. You're going, "Marriage? I don't know." You're like these kids up here saying I don't know if I want to get married. As you listen or just look at your own experience, we all know people who experience bad marriages. So the question about marriage or its value starts to decrease in our mind when we look at our own personal experience.

The second one has to do with feelings and passions that sometimes you just feel so passionate about this person and you're committed, and so in our culture sex is devalued too. In the midst of all of that there's this sense that I don't need to get married, I'm just committed to this person. So people move forward without valuing marriage as God designed it.

The third reason that we might devalue marriage as Christians is because of culture and school. You see in our culture what really drives our culture is a humanistic mentality. It's different than a biblical worldview. So we have a biblical worldview and we have a humanistic worldview. In a biblical worldview you start with *in the beginning, God.* If you start *in the beginning, God,*

everything else in life makes sense because it takes you through all the purpose of marriage and our commitment to God and how all the things tie in together. That's a biblical worldview. In a humanistic worldview, you start with the concept of chance. That the things happen and then things evolve and then other things. So marriage becomes this cultural practice that may be outdated and then we don't need to value it today.

In fact if you're in school you're being taught some very important things about this subject, about marriage. For example, the idea that gender doesn't have to deal with biological plumbing. It has to do with how you feel – whether you feel like you're a man or you feel like you're a woman, or what you feel like you're attracted to. So the idea of gender has been so confused and has developed in a way that's opened up the door for all kinds of unnatural things. I use that word intentionally. Because you're going to hear all kinds of things in school. I know you already do. You feel the pressure in school about gender tolerance and being open. In fact it's perceived that if you don't believe in those things, if you don't have the freedom to endorse (not only accept, but endorse) an alternative lifestyle, then you are somehow either out of date or an enemy of some sort.

I want you to see that the Bible has some very important things to say about this subject. This is just one passage that talks about this alternative lifestyle or misunderstanding of gender. As he was talking about commitment to the Lord, he says – *Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.* That's the biblical term. *Unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust (as opposed to love) for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.*

It is pretty clear if you understand a biblical worldview that there is no room for L or G or B or T or Q. When I say there's no room that doesn't mean we're not compassionate for people who are in error or misunderstanding these ideas. Compassion has to be a high priority in our lives when we work with anyone. But that doesn't mean we compromise the truths of a biblical worldview and what the Bible says about these subjects.

In fact I want you to know, students, because you're under this pressure when you have gay pride week, for example, that if you don't cooperate in the customs of gay pride week then you are ostracized or attacked in one way or another. But I want you to know as this whole argument is developed for tolerance in this area, that there are biblical ways of thinking about the same things. You just have to know that.

Let me just give you an example. There's an argument for same sex attraction and marriage that these people experience from this very beginning of who they are. From their birth they're experiencing these kinds of things. That's just evidence for the fact that it must be something that's biological, not just their choices. Well I would want to tell you a biblical worldview about that idea. A biblical worldview says this: You're right that there are some people who experience same sex attraction from their birth. They seem to be born with this. That's what the Bible would say. In the same way that the Bible says there's some people that seem to be born angry. There's some people that seem to be born dishonest. There's some people that seem to be born with addictive personalities. Just because you're born with these things doesn't make them right. In

fact God calls that a sin nature. That we're all born with a sin nature, which is a propensity to sin. That sin comes out in different ways in different people. That doesn't make it right. We don't justify it just because a person has a sin nature that whatever they do is then justifiable. So some people devalue marriage because of culture in school.

Another reason that people devalue marriage is because of entertainment. You can't hardly watch a movie today without people expressing this whole view of marriage. Forget the marriage part, just this view of love and attraction. That you fall in love with someone and they're in bed within the first...in the hour and a half you've got all these things happening and that's what happened. So I just want to say that perversion of marriage and sex has to do with people cohabiting together or having sex before they're married. All of those are things that are outside of God's designed plan and marriage then is devalued.

I want to suggest today that we need to value marriage more. That's what's happening in our passage in Nehemiah. It says we are promising to do something different. Now you have to realize that the people in the passage are people that have grown up in a worldly environment. They've been over in different cultures where the things were different. Many of them grew up in a society where they didn't really know God and they were doing different things. I suspect some of them had married outside of their faith. And now they're back in Jerusalem and they're making a commitment that this is a priority in our lives. We are going to value marriage. Especially for the next generation since we may not have held it ourselves in the way that we should.

I want to suggest that all of these are not the basis for making a decision about marriage and its value. Really if we are going to value marriage we must understand the plan of God. God has designed marriage, He created marriage, and He designed it with a purpose in mind. If we understand that idea, then it takes us in a whole different plane when it comes to marriage. God has some advice for us about moving in a direction toward marriage that is wise, godly. That's why in Nehemiah 10 they're making their commitment. We're going to do this marriage things differently. We're going to do this marriage thing right. We're going to commit ourselves to finding a mate in a way that is godly.

To understand this idea I want to take you into a passage in Genesis 24. This is a story about a dad who loves his son so much he wants to find a wife for him. And so he sends his godly servant out to the place where they were born. Because he doesn't want to get some worldly person. He wants someone of the same faith. So he's sending them back to find this wife. So here this godly servant has a job to do. How do I find a wife for Isaac? How do I find this person? So it's out of this question and out of this story that again we find ideas and principles that we can apply in our own lives that you want to teach your children and, young people, you want to embrace because there's value in this concept to understand what God is saying in the midst of this. So this is a love story developed a little bit differently than you'll see in entertainment, but yet still the same.

Genesis 24 is a beautiful passage of scripture because Abraham gives the servant a message and says, "I want you to go find this wife," and gives him specific guidelines, but doesn't tell him who it is. So the story starts – *Then the servant left, taking with him ten of his master's camels*

loaded with all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Naharaim and made his way to the town of Nahor. He had the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water. Then he prayed.

This is what makes this so exciting. Here's a guy who's committed to doing this the right way. He wants God's input, he wants to follow the Lord, he wants God to lead him to the right wife. That's what he wants. I think that should be your prayer as a young person. You don't want to fall in love, get married, and that's something separate than your spirituality somehow. You want your commitment to God to be very much a part of how you find this mate that God has for you.

So he prayed, "Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a young woman, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."

I want you to see that he has some ideas in advance. He's not just going to passionately or emotionally find this person. But he's got a plan, he knows what he's looking for in the wife, and he wants to be careful. He's asking, "God, guide me to this person that embodies these things that are important in my understanding of what is best for a wife."

So I want to suggest to young people you want a plan for your love life. Don't fall in love. You fall overboard or fall downstairs or fall in a hole. You don't fall in love. You plan your love life. That's what's happening here. He's planning this and he's looking out and he's saying, "Okay, this is the kind of person I want. Lord, would you provide the person for me?" There's a trust factor in this. There's God working in the situation. It's just amazing what can happen when you see God work in this part of your life.

Well I would suggest that when the world tries to find (and this is what the world will teach you) that when you're going to build a relationship there are different foundations. The world will say you want to build this relationship based on two things – attraction and, if you really want to do it well, you'll base it on compatibility. Attraction and compatibility become the foundations of many marriages today. In fact that's the movement. Make sure you find someone that's compatible with you. I think that's very dangerous. If you're trying to build a foundation on compatibility and attraction, you've got a problem. Here's what the problem is: People change. Right? So five years down the road, you might not be attracted to that same person. What she's wearing in her head looks like radar at bed. So you're wondering, "I don't know if..." So attraction may be questionable at that point. Or compatibility, you don't enjoy the same things that you enjoyed before. So people can move apart. People change. You can't build a relationship based on simply attraction and compatibility. Those are great things to have, no doubt. They are not the best foundation.

In fact I would suggest that better foundations have to do with values and purpose. The best and strongest one is the spiritual oneness that the Nehemiah believers are expressing. I'm going to promise to honor God in the way I find a wife for my son or I find a husband for my daughter. I

want to honor the Lord in the way I do that. They're making this valuable commitment to marriage and spiritual oneness is going to be right at the center of that. When you have spiritual oneness that's fueling the relationship, it doesn't change because it's built on the Lord and amazing things can happen in that process. It just elevates this whole idea of marriage.

Let's go back to our story because the story continues to develop. It says – *Before he had finished praying, Rebekah (she's the one) came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milkah, who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor. The woman was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever slept with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again.*

The word *virgin* can mean someone who's sexually pure or it can mean someone who is just a young lady. So it's very clear in the passage in the elaboration that this is one who is sexually pure. Sexual purity is a valuable thing that we want to raise. It's valuable. In school you will hear this idea that somehow what's wrong with you. There must be something wrong with you if you haven't lost your virginity yet. Sexual purity is important. It's valuable. So in our passage in Hebrews 13 it's saying the same thing. Raise sex to this important place that God has designed it for.

Let me just show you how important it is and how valuable it is. If we go back to our diagram, where do you think sex fits in? Well if you're in the world and you're thinking worldly, humanistically that sex is just a biological pleasure that we experience as a result of chance that has taken place, then simply you're going to put it with attraction. And that's it's so easy to move from attraction to sex in a movie because that's what's taking place. You're just thinking that way. But in God's economy, as God designed this whole beautiful picture, God puts sex down in spiritual oneness. That's what sex is.

Let me show you a passage. Because I don't want you to just rely on me; I want you to see what the Bible has to say about this concept. *Flee sexual immorality. So we're talking about sex in this passage. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. Notice we have come to the term honor in marriage. Now we see honor God with your body in regards to sexual purity.*

The idea here is that in the Old Testament God met with His people in the tabernacle. There was a meeting that took place. When the temple was built then God met with His people at the temple and there was the Holy of Holies guarded by this huge curtain. The Bible tells us when Jesus Christ died on the cross in the gospels that that curtain was torn in two, illustrating the fact that we have access to God's presence. So now when we come to meet with God, we don't do it in a building, we meet with God in our hearts. Our heart is the temple of the Holy Spirit. It's this place of connection with God. We come together to celebrate the fact that we have done something inside of our hearts. God meets with us. It's very spiritual and that's why he's taking this passage and saying okay, well let's talk about sex because sex is a spiritual activity. It's part of your devotions if you're married. It's part of a deep commitment and connection that you enjoy with your spouse.

Let's go back to our story. *The servant hurried to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water from your jar."*

"Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink. After she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink."

You can imagine if you are looking for someone as a mate, you're coming to that place and you see this girl and she has the things that are on your wish list, these things that you know God wants for you to have, you're going, "Wow, I think this must be the one." That's what he must be thinking in that moment.

"I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink." So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels. Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful. He's watching her. What is watching for? He's watching to see if she has the qualities necessary to be a wife. And what is the quality that is looked at her? What is the trying to see? Does she have enough willingness to sacrifice and be kind? How big is her kindness in her life? Is it big enough?

As you're trying to evaluate and find a mate, young people, I would suggest that you look for someone who's kind as opposed to someone who's angry. An angry person ruins relationships. An angry person is always finding something wrong with somebody. And that's a very sad place to be in a marriage relationship. You want someone who's kind.

I listened to Ravi Zacharias and he's made this statement. It's a bold statement. I don't know if I can make this yet myself, but this what he said. He said, "There's never a time when a Christian should be unkind." That is very bold of a statement. Never a time when a Christian should be unkind. And certainly not in a marriage relationship.

So this man is watching. I would encourage you to watch. The idea is he was stepping back and looking at what was going on. As he was watching what was happening, that was very important. He's watching what's going on. He's kind of checking things out.

I think you want to watch. You want to see. How does he treat his mom? How does he treat his siblings? How does he respond to the Lord? All these things you want to be watching because as you do that you're going to see what he's really like before you find yourself getting involved in a marriage commitment with that person.

When the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose ring weighing a beka and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels. Then he asked, "Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?"

She answered him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milkah bore to Nahor." And she added, "We have plenty of straw and fodder, as well as room for you to spend the night."

So the man is saying to himself, the servant is saying, “Yes! This is the one!” So what he does is he goes right back to the Lord and is praying and saying, “Yes, I found the one.” And he’s saying, *“Praise be to the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the journey to the house of my master’s relatives.”*

We’re going to leave this story. I encourage you to read it. It’s a great story. But the purpose that I want out of this story is the process of getting there, the journey that he spoke about. Because young person, as you are on this journey toward finding a mate, you want to do it right. There’s a way to do this that’s honoring to God. But it’s a way to do this that will maximize the relationship that you can have with this other person. It’s strategic for us to make the choices like the Nehemiah believers are committed to the Lord. Where they’re saying we promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the people around us. They take their daughters. We promise to approach marriage with a high value for marriage. We promise to do that. We make a commitment before you. Keeping in mind these people grew up with other kind of influence. They didn’t really know the Lord. So now they probably made mistakes in their relationship.

I just want to draw attention not only to those who are pursuing marriage, but all those people who are already in marriages. Maybe you’re in a marriage now and when you’re in a marriage you want to be able to be sensitive to the warning lights that go off that tell you, “Oh be careful.” You see there are a lot of warning lights on cars, especially the newer cars today. You get a warning about all kinds of things. You get a warning if you’re turning out of your lane. It even wants to correct you. You get a warning about your tire pressure and about your windshield fluid level. You get a warning about your fuel, of course. I would suggest you don’t ignore that one. You can’t ignore the light. When the light comes on, you’ve avoided a long time to get your fuel and your fuel is low. Get fuel it says. I would suggest there are warning lights in a relationship. Warning lights that come on and say if you don’t make a decision here quickly, you’re going to regret sitting on the side of the road here without any gas. That’s the same thing that happens in a marriage relationship. If you ignore the warning signs, danger is looming.

I would suggest that the solution is to fuel up with this idea of spiritual oneness. That you’re praying together, that you’re serving the Lord, you’re sharing about God’s word together. Because what that does is it increases that oneness. I know that there are some people who entered marriage just wanting to serve the Lord, loving God, keeping themselves pure till marriage, but they find themselves in a marriage that’s really difficult and for whatever reason doesn’t work.

The reality is that we live in a broken world. Sometimes the marriage is dissolved, not because of one person necessarily. It’s just bad things happen. You might look at the marriage and say, “Well I didn’t do this right,” and fine, you can learn from that experience. But sometimes we find ourselves in very difficult and broken situations. The beautiful thing is that God’s mercies are new every morning. We can enjoy those mercies and we can pursue them. Even if we’ve been a part of something that’s failed we can still acknowledge that God is in control and we can promise the Lord, “Lord, I’m going to value marriage and I’m going to pass that on to the next generation,” because there is a way to do this that’s God’s design and following Him.

Spiritual oneness is the emphasis in the passage. The idea is that they're going to choose among those who have faith to follow the Lord. But I want to encourage you Christians to make sure you understand this. Young people, don't just choose someone who's a Christian, who says they're a Christian, or they go to church somewhere, or they grew up in a Christian family. That's not enough. They need to be a Christ-follower, someone who's sold out, on fire for Jesus Christ. You want that. You can control yourself and your spiritual application to the marriage, but you can't control the other person. So make sure you're watching. Make sure you're looking. Make sure you're not saying, "Oh I'm going to lead him to the Lord later." Right now you want to find a person who's committed to Jesus and you want to make sure that person is growing in their faith, trusting in the Lord. Because it's in that mutual oneness, that spiritual oneness that God is able to do some great work in our lives.

I would just encourage you, value marriage. Our society doesn't do that. So you want to lift marriage up and understand its value for you and for the next generation as God is continuing to work on your heart and do His work in your life.

Those are two commitments that we see in the passage. We look at obeying God and we see then this idea of holding marriage up high. We'll enter another commitment next week as we continue to look at this passage and glean what does it mean to be committed to the Lord.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, I know that you want us to commit ourselves to you. As we do that, we see some real work ahead. We need to do some work in our own obedience to you, in our relationships, marriage, passing the faith onto our kids in these areas. So Lord, I ask that you would give wisdom to each of us. We want to love you and we want to serve you with all of our hearts. In this special area of marriage, Lord, help us to resist the worldly influence that exists that would lead us down a path that's not right. Give us a great commitment to the family and to the marriage relationship as these people in Nehemiah experienced as well. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.