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March 19, 1995

Time for Spring Cleaning!

Did you feel the change this week? Ahh! the nose of Spring is once again nudging it's way out of the covers. The daffodils and Camellia flowers began to open up their heads this week, up at the house. The weather looks like it's going to warm up for awhile. We had some gorgeous days this week. It felt great just to stand outside and get a good sun massage on my back. It kind of makes you want to begin thinking about doing a little poking around in the flower beds getting ready for spring. You begin wondering about what to plant in your garden this year. You also think, about that dreaded compulsion that haunts some of us every year. Yes, it's that instinctively bred yearning to do some spring cleaning. For many of us it's probably a love-hate relationship. We'd love to have our house cleaned up from a year of clutter and dust...but hate to think we might have to do it. It's one of our favorite things to procrastinate because it can seem quite overwhelming. The process is filled with decisions of what to hang onto and what to toss in the garbage.

It was time for spring cleaning at a woman's house in Saint Louis. But, as an unemployed cleaning lady the last thing she wanted to do was get her own house in shape...so she kind of ignored things. She had noticed hearing a few buzzing sounds from bees in her attic, but since they were only a few bees. It didn't seem worth her effort to deal with them. She'd live and let live. A few bees could live in her attic if they didn't come downstairs to bother her. All through the summer the bees continued to fly in and out of the attic vent while the woman remained unconcerned at the growing metropolis of bees that lived overhead. Eventually, the whole attic became one huge beehive and the second story ceiling finally caved in under the weight of hundreds of pounds of honey and thousands of angry bees. I definitely think it would have been worth her while to do a little spring cleaning in the attic.

So how is your house looking? Is there some garbage that needs to be tossed out. Is there some junk that could go to the dump. Are there some things that need some organization. Some furniture moved around. Maybe a little cleaning here and there? Some of you are thinking, "Well, My kids room could use a little fumigation." How are things looking in your home? I'm not talking about your physical house, I'm talking about the place where God has chosen to dwell. Where does God live? He lives within my heart. II Cor. 6:16 "Do you not know that you are the temple of God?" He has chosen to live in the believer. The question for today is.. Is your temple a clean and holy place for God to live. Do you think He is perfectly happy residing in your heart, mind and soul? As He looks around does He see anything He might like to clean out?

My purpose this morning is to exhort God's people to look inside their temple, their hearts and ask God where He would like me to begin some Spring cleaning. We all have some areas that could use a little sprucing up, a little organization. There may be some trash that needs to be thrown out, a habit that needs some suffocation. Some areas may require some major fumigation. My purpose is for us to stop and quietly ask God. Where God? I look at this mess and I get overwhelmed. I know your not a God overwhelmed people when were trying. Just point to me the one area I can begin to do some Spring cleaning in my life. I don't want to continue to ignore those bees in my attic that desperately need to be dealt with...show me where to begin. To do that were going to need some help from God. (PRAY).

Take your Bibles and turn with me to Nehemiah 13. Last week in Chapter 12 we saw the people of God experiencing great joy during the dedication of the wall. They were correct in making sure that their hearts were pure before they went onto the parade. Holiness must always precedes happiness. Many years go by in Jerusalem with Nehemiah as a righteous governor. He came to Jerusalem in the 20th year of King Artaxerses and now it's the 32nd year. 12 years have past since He left the Persian capitol to come to Jerusalem and build a wall. It was time to go back and touch base with the king. This periodic face to face reaffirmation of allegiance to the king was a common practice in these times and though Nehemiah hated to leave Jerusalem, back he

traveled to Susa. Read with me beginning in verse 1. The chronological flow is a little tricky here so I'll try to walk you through it. (READ)

We look at the time markers in the passage and we see in verse 1 "On that day" v.4 "Now prior to this" v. 6 " But during this time" After some time.. and I came to Jerusalem" On first glance reading I assumed that "on that day" referred to a continuation of events that occurred on the big Dedication of the Wall day in chapter 12. However, let me offer a more plausible order of events for these 9 verses based on these temporal markers in the text. I think it's best if we start at verse 6. Nehemiah is writing in the first person. During this time I was not in Jerusalem. For in the 32nd year I Left Jerusalem to go back to the King...for some time. So Nehemiah had been in Jerusalem for 12 years and then left. End of verse 6 "After some time I asked leave of the king".. to go back to Jerusalem. We don't know how long that "some time" was but we know it was a 4 month long trip there and 4 months back and he possibly stayed one year to make it worth his while. So..it could have been one to two years that Nehemiah was away from Jerusalem. In v.4 four we see that some things occurred prior to the reading "on that day" While Nehemiah was on his trip back to Babylon..the high priest Eliashib prepares a penthouse suite for none other than that dreaded enemy named Tobiah the Ammonite. The movie drama would all raise the boo hiss card. Verse 7 Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem, riding on a white camel. The applause card "yeah!" Verse 7 says "and I came to Jerusalem and learned about the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah" I think it is no coincidence that very near the time when Nehemiah returns, possibly at his return to office welcome back celebration...the people are once again reading God's Word. Isn't it an interesting coincidence that the passage Duet 23:3-5 is chosen. It is my guess that either God or Nehemiah was behind the choosing of that passage to read. Nehemiah found out the mice were playing while the cat had been away to Susa. He needed to resensitize the people to the holiness of God. They were allowing some things to go on that were not right and they needed to be changed. What is the best way to effect change in ones' life? The best way to begin Spring cleaning in the heart, cleaning up where God lives, is to begin in the Word.

If we were serious about doing some Spring cleaning with God, we first must Go to God's Word. Look at verse one and see where the people were. They were reading God's Word. If we are going to have any possible chance of finding out where God wants us to begin our Spring cleaning of the heart we first must be reading what He has to say. Does that make sense? Then why do we spend so little time in the Word. That's where the truth is. I'm thinking these Israelites hadn't kept up their out loud readings while Nehemiah took his vacation back East. They might have grown tired of the boredom the same old Bible stuff...but what they had lost their thirst for was keeping them alive and on the right track. Have you lost your thirst for the Word? Do you look in your life and see a little need for some cleaning but aren't sure where to begin? Then Go to God's Word. Psalm 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy Word. Ps 119:11 Thy Word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against Thee. Psalm 119:105 "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" Are you interested in cleaning things up? Then get out the best scouring detergent on the market. Get into the Word.

Second, If your truly serious about doing some Spring cleaning in your life. Not only do you need to Get into the Word, You must discover God's truth. In verse 1 it says "There was found written in it that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God." They didn't read the passage and say "My what well written beautiful lines of prose" Isn't it neat that God wrote us this great looking book...amazing isn't it." No...they read God didn't want an Ammonite in the Assembly of God and they looked in their own mirror. Are we guilty of doing that? They searched the Scripture and asked "Is this passage speaking to me? Am I supposed to be acting on a truth that God has revealed to me? The people of Jerusalem said "yes. We are missing the mark from where God wants us to be...we must obey."

Do you want to clean house? First, go to God's Word. Second, Discover God's truth. Third, Clean out the garbage. In verse 3 we read how the people responded to the truth that was discovered. They cleaned it out. Verse 3 we read that they excluded all those people who weren't qualified to be in the assembly of God. The people were moving to act on God's truth, but Nehemiah the spiritual giant was leading the

way. He went for the throat of the enemy. Verse 4 begins with an example of blatant disregard for God's truth. Here is the high priest, Eliashib preparing a luxury suite, v.5 "it was a great room" for no other than that scoundrel Tobiah. The readers are asking "Is this the same Toabiah that fought Nehemiah that whole way during the wall building? Yes. Is this the Tobiah in chapter 2:10 that was an Ammonite official greatly displeased that Nehemiah was looking out for the betterment of the sons of Israel? Is this the Tobiah in chapter 2 :19 that mocked and despised the wall builders" that said in chapter 4 a light little fox jumping on the wall would break it down. In chapter 6 he conspired with Sanballet to hire an assassin and wrote threatening letter to Nehemiah? Yep. So what is he doing with a luxury suite in the temple prepared by the priest? It seems Tobiah was a relative by marriage to Eliashib. Eliashib who once had been a part of the wall building effort, now decided that family harmony was more important than being true to God. While Nehemiah was gone the spiritual leaders dropped the ball. They failed to stand against the articulate captivating personality of Tobiah. He finessed himself into their favor. Nehemiah didn't let him past the wall. These folks prepared a bed for him to sleep in the temple storage rooms. If you are a leader, be sure your taking your clues not from the popularity polls, but from scripture.

Nehemiah comes into the temple court and is dressed to do some Spring cleaning of Tobiah's stuff. Read verse 8 Can you imagine when Tobiah comes home that evening after work to see his stuff thrown out in front of the temple gate. You can see his anger just boiling red up to his ears as he storms into the temple. There stands Nehemiah smiling broadly with his arms crossed and the backup temple singer chant in unison, "Heee's Baack!" Nehemiah cleaned out the Holy Space. Had this book stopped with the dedication of the wall everything would have appeared simple and effective, but we are dealing here in real life. Evil does not get stamped out easily. We cannot allow ourselves the luxury of compromise with the enemy. Isn't it amazing how much is acquired over the years? We must keep constantly asking God what stuff He wants us to throw out. Nehemiah acted on sin. There's a time to pray don't get me wrong, But He didn't just fold his hands and say Oh this Tobiah how could he do such a thing this is so say we really need to pray about this".

No.. he knew that boy's belonging's weren't where they belonged. Did you catch in verse 9 "he even cleansed the rooms" He didn't even want the smell of Tobiah's aftershave hanging around the temple. He fumagated the place. Are we determined not to live with wrong in a place that was built for right? Are we determined to clean out the garbage from the temple of the Holy Spirit within us?

Right now the Spirit may be prompting you of some furniture in your life that needs to be tossed out. Maybe it's some of those magazines you've hidden in the garage that God would like to see you toss in the garbage. Maybe it's a few of those paper back romance screamers in your night stand next to your bed. Maybe it's over on the music rack some tunes with words that glorify sin. Maybe you need to toss out a few of those TV. shows some of that daytime garbage or night time junk? Is it a video? computer program that needs to be purged? What are you allowing in the place where God lives? Does some anger need cleaning out? some lust? selfishness or Pride? In I John 1:9 it says if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to clean us up."

Do you want to do some Spring Cleaning with God? First, Go to God's Word, Next, Discover God's truth, clean out the garbage. Finally, we need to fill us up with the good stuff. Read the last of verse 9. The priest had cleaned out the rooms of the temple utensils and priest portion of the tithe to make room for old Tobiah. Nehemiah cleans out Tobiah's junk and replaces it with the right stuff. The Holy things. When God begins to work and clean up our lives we needs to make sure were replacing it with the good stuff. We need to ask God to fill us up with the fruit of the Spirit. Gal 5:22,23 The fruit of the Spirit is Love joy peace patience kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. When we allow God to begin His work in us he'll take us where were at and work on just one thing at a time. It Satan that like to overwhelm us and tell us were no good and we could never begin to Spring clean our lives.

The cleaning experts tell us if you are a messy and have difficulty tackling that overwhelming task of cleaning your home. You need to go to the front door of the house and start cleaning clockwise. Set your alarm for only one hour. Go as far as you can then stop until the next cleaning day. Next time pick up where you left off and continue around

each room clockwise one bit at time till it's all cleaned up. It may take several months but little by little it will get done without overwhelming. That's what God wants to do I our lives. Little by little in every way, little by little every day Jesus wants to do some spring cleaning in his temple. This afternoon I want us all to ask God, "Where do you want me to take my mop? Where shall we begin our Spring Cleaning?"