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A Charge to Keep I Have

Text: Nehemiah 12:44-47

 Last week I watched an NFL Films presentation. It was a behind-the-scenes look at Head Coach Bill Belichick and the 2014 season of the New England Patriots. In the film, Coach Belichick talked about what he expects from his players and coaches. Belichick doesn’t expect his players to be perfect. He *does* expectthemto

Run

Extend plays

Rush

Block

Run moving routes

Run crossing routes

Make decisions

Execute

 The title of the film is, *Do Your Job.*

If this text were a game, allow me to introduce the team.

* Priests
* Levites
* Singers
* Gatekeepers
* Chiefs of the singers

They all had specific roles to play in the worship life of Judah. Verse 45 is key. Everybody *kept the charge of their God*...according to the commands of David and his son, Solomon. Cf. 13:10-13 for assignment of tasks. Nehemiah urges the priests and Levites to do that to which they were assigned, by David, more than 500 years prior to Nehemiah’s time. Cf. 1 Chronicles 23-26. I want to observe two movements in this text.

1. Appointment (44) What is it? If we were to fast forward to the second testament, we would call this the identification and implementation of one’s spiritual gifts. In Nehemiah 13:11-13, we read of Nehemiah appointing treasurers and distributors. Those appointed gave themselves to their tasks. “To what does this giving of oneself to one’s appointment lead?” I’m glad you asked. The effective fulfillment of one’s appointment *should* lead to widespread joy (44b).
2. Perseverance (45)- Those that had been appointed, *kept* their charges. That is, they did what they were appointed to do and stayed at it. I want to suggest that perseverance might be the demonstration of our appointment. Anybody can remain in a ministry for three weeks. I want to know if you can do it for many years. This text celebrates longevity and consistency as much as it celebrates calling or appointment or assignment. The first clause of v. 45 suggests that the charge was not only human but divine as well. Did you see it? Yes, these priests had charge of the purification rites, according to the command of David and Solomon. However, their charge was *also* “the charge of their God”. What a reminder for me and for you. The work I do is not only for the Crossroads Church or the St. Stephen’s Church of God in Christ or the churches and conferences I serve as an occasional guest preacher or concert artist. My work is *also* for God!!

**Illus.**

My mother was sharing her frustration over a mail carrier who came to her door to deliver a package. The carrier did not ring the bell but did leave a note saying Mother had a package. Mother had to go to the post office to retrieve the package that should have been left at the door. When I visited her, I saw the package. It could have fit in her mailbox. It didn’t require a signature. When I heard the story, I blurted out, “I just want the carrier to do his job”.

Do your job!!

That is what is expected of every singer, gatekeeper, Levite, priest, bible study leader, worship planner, janitor, office manager, bus driver, teacher, assembly line worker, airline pilot, landscaper, plumber, salon owner, barber, county supervisor, politico, salesperson, news anchor and manufacturer. Do your job!

**Closing**

 Leviticus 8:35 says,

*Therefore, you shall stay at the door of the tabernacle of meeting day and night for seven days, and* ***keep the charge of the Lord,*** *so that you may not die; for so I have been commanded.*

Commenting on that verse, Matthew Henry wrote,

“We have every one of us a charge to keep, an eternal God to glorify, an immortal soul to provide for, needful duty to be done, our generation to serve; and it must be our daily care to keep this charge, for it is the charge of the Lord our Master, who will shortly call us to an account about it, and it is our peril if we neglect it. Keep it ‘that ye die not’; it is death, eternal death, to betray the truth we are charged with.”

The hymn writer, Charles Wesley (1707-1788) penned more than 8,000 hymns. Here is his text based on that Matthew Henry commentary on Leviticus 8:35:

1. A charge to keep I have,

A God to glorify,

A never dying soul to save,

And fit it for the sky.

2. To serve the present age,

My calling to fulfill:

O may it all my powers engage

To do my Master's will!

3. Arm me with jealous care,

As in Thy sight to live;

And O Thy servant, Lord, prepare

A strict account to give!

4. Help me to watch and pray,

And on Thyself rely,

Assured if I my trust betray,

I shall forever die.

“Hymnology scholar Fred D. Gealy notes that there have been several attempts to alter the final lines in order to soften the ominous judgment that is implied. The Historical Companion to the influential Hymns Ancient and Modern concludes the hymn with these two lines:

And let me ne’er my trust betray,
But press to realms on high.

The British Methodist hymnal, Hymns and Psalms (1983) altered the final two lines as follows:

So shall I not my trust betray,
nor love within me die.

Professor Gealy notes that the ‘alteration [of these lines] weakens the intensity of the hymn. The Gospel always comes with [both] threat and promise.’ ”[[1]](#footnote-2)

**Benediction**

**1 Kings 2:3**

And **keep the charge of the Lord your God**: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn.

Amen

1. umcdicipleship.org [↑](#footnote-ref-2)