

Nehemiah 9:1-38

In our last study in the book of Nehemiah we'd come to the conclusion of the building of the walls, everything was in order both practically and spiritually so Nehemiah gave charge of Jerusalem over to both his brother and another fella because they were both *faithful*, and they *feared God*. 2 Absolute prerequisites for man of God who would be entrusted into a position of authority in the body of Christ, and we discovered that it was the 7th month which meant that they were to celebrate the feast of trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the feast of tabernacles. It was a season set aside for celebration and great gladness.\

You recall that they brought Ezra forward and there was a great assembly of both men and women, all those who could hear with understanding (meaning old enough to understand what was being taught to them) and from the rising of the sun, for about 6 hours he would read from the Word of God. The ears of all the people being attentive to the Book of the Law, and when he opened the book in the sight of all the people, all the people stood up, and as Ezra blessed the Lord they all raised their hands, shouted "Amen, Amen" in agreement with Ezra and then fell to their faces in worship of the Lord. And Ezra would read from the word, giving time at various points for the Levites to mingle (in what was probably designated parameters to each of them) and they would help the people understand the Word that was being read, they gave them the "sense" of the passage. Which is another way to say that they expounded and explained the word to the people, took the principles and made them personal, made them practical. And the people being convicted by the word began to weep, but Nehemiah, Ezra and the various priests told the people, "Don't weep, it's not a day for weeping, but a day for *rejoicing*! Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." and They encouraged the people to rejoice in the work God had done and was doing, to eat and drink, to send portions to those who had nothing and celebrate together. And that's exactly what they did because we read that the people understood the words that were declared to them. There was more than just a mental assent to what was being said here, there was a meaningful assimilation and incorporation of the word into their hearts and lives and the people were responding in accordance with what they were being taught.

Well, the next day the leaders assembled again to take in even more of the Word. They discovered the feast of tabernacles was right around the corner, so they instructed the people to go out and get various branches and palm leaves, branches from leafy trees that they might make these little booths to live in for the week of feasting. The Word instructed them that from the 15th day of the 7th month thru the 22nd day of the month that they were to live in these little booths to remind them of their days spent in the wilderness as a nation having been delivered from Egypt. And they were to instruct their children as to the goodness and faithfulness of God to them throughout that 40 yr period of wilderness wandering. They basically camped out as a family for a week and just rejoiced in God's work *for* them and faithfulness *to* them as a nation. And so that's exactly what they did, and we read in vs 18 of ch 8 that on the 8th day, after the feast there was a sacred, or a solemn assembly according to the prescribed manner.

Literally it speaks of a restraining, it was a time to restrain your emotions, reflect on the Lord, be still *before* Him, offer sacrifices *unto* Him, they weren't to occupy themselves with work that day or anything like that, it was a day given to the Lord. Ch 9 picks up on what begins to take place the next day.

Vs1-3

The time for feasting is over, now its time for fasting, they heard the word, responded in worship.

3 hours worth of preaching followed up by 3 hours worth of praying. Repentance, renewal and revival is breaking through, back in ch 8 they were told not to weep, but to rejoice, now the feast is over and they're returning to this mentality of mourning, and repenting in humility before the Lord having been cut to the heart and convicted over their sin in the light of God's Word.

And whenever someone is truly convicted over their sin, it brings about notable changes in their lives. And though the details are brought out here for us to see, the overall emphasis that's being communicated is a sanctifying of their lives. And setting aside (or we would say a *crucifying*) of the things of the flesh, followed by a submitting of themselves to the things of the Spirit, that is, an obedience to the Word of God.

We read in vs 1 of fasting, wearing sackcloth (which would be like wearing a burlap sack) usually it was a garment of goats hair or something of that nature, just generally unpleasant and irritating to the skin, and then they place dust and dirt in their hair, over their heads. And all of these things deal with a denial of the pleasures and pursuits of the flesh life. And they're all outward demonstrations of the inward integration of the working power of the word of God. It's saying outwardly, "This is how I feel about my sin inwardly, I'm sick of the flesh, of my sin, I'm depriving my flesh, no longer am I going to serve my flesh or be subject to its lusts." In the book of Rom Paul put it like this; "*Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.*" Rom 13:13-14 Conviction of sin inwardly will display itself by a change in my life outwardly, no longer am I going to make provision for my flesh. That is, place myself in an arena whereby my flesh can be provided for, where I'll be tempted to feed its lusts. If I can't walk into a gas station with out buying 40 oz bottle of beer, I'm not going to get gas any longer anywhere that I can't pay at the pump. I'm not going to subject myself to that environment anymore, I'm denying, crucifying my flesh, rather than providing for it.

So there was a denying of the flesh, and then 2^{ndly} in vs 2 a separating from foreigners. Which speaks of those who served idols, those who weren't of the lineage of Israel, it was a "coming out from among the unclean." The key word there is "Separation" or as we mentioned a minute ago this is all pointing to *sanctification*. The bible is clear, "*Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.'*" 1 Cor 15:33.

And what I'm wanting you to see in all of this is that though you're *positionally* perfectly sanctified in Christ, practically there's work to be done in us, and it's a work that the Lord does *with* us. What I mean by that is that it's going to take cooperation and discipline on my part, on your part, if sanctification is to become a practical reality in our lives. God wasn't forcing them to fast, or deny the flesh; He didn't force them to separate themselves from the ungodly. He would *enable* them, but it had to be their choice, so sanctification is yours *positionally*, but you'd only be deceiving yourself to think that it doesn't take discipline *personally* on this side of eternity. 1 Way they disciplined themselves was to deny the flesh, another way was to remove themselves from the ungodly, safeguarding their relationship with the Lord. Remember what we read there in 2nd Cor? "*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.'* Therefore '*Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you. 'I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.*'" 2 Cor 6:14-18

Now I'm not saying we're not to evangelize the lost, that's exactly what Israel was to do, it's what we're to do. But willfully subjecting yourself to ungodly environments doesn't *help* them, it *hurts* you, you've got to separate yourself from that junk and be holy for the Lord your God is holy, and that's what we have happening here.

Next we read that they confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. Now this isn't speaking of a generational curse here, or the sins of the fathers being imputed to the proceeding generations, but what it is saying is that they weren't deceived about the lives and lifestyles of the families from which they came. And they weren't choosing to remember things in a manner that glorified the previous generations, they called the shots for what they were before God, they were leaving no stone unturned. "Lord we've sinned, our father's have sinned, we've disobeyed Your Word, and dishonored Your name." They'd missed the mark as a people, that's what sin is; it's an old archery term meaning to miss the mark. You pull back the bow, let the arrow fly, and it doesn't matter if you miss the mark by an inch or a mile, you'd be called a sinner, one who missed the mark, you'd sinned. So they were confessing how they'd missed the mark before God, weren't accurate in their aim. A lot of Christians feel like they don't have a whole lot to confess, but a truly convicted heart has no problem airing out its confession before God. As we read the word, and evaluate our own heart in the light of desire and the standard of God's Word for your life, believe me there's plenty to confess before God, and the unfortunate thing for us on this side of eternity is that there will *always* be plenty to confess.

And we've spoken before of what confession is, it's seeing my sin is the same way God sees my sin, its agreeing with God about my sin. It's not simply making a statement of wrong because I'm told it's wrong, or because I got busted over it. But I agree that it's wrong, and see it for the appalling unrighteousness that it is, and recognize my need for cleansing and I'm crying out to You and confessing that accordingly, seeking deliverance, repentance specifically.

Confession and repentance are like Hand in glove, they go together, and what we're seeing here is that repentance and growth are virtually synonymous. Realize the context of when this is taking place, it's happening after a great victory, and a great celebration in their lives both personally and nationally, both practically and spiritually. But even after this great time in the Spirit, as they're brought back to the Word, they find a need to repent. What's my point? That repentance is something that's over once we've come to Christ; it's a continual process of growth, as we draw nearer to the Lord through the understanding of His Word we'll grow in further repentance as well. Charles Spurgeon said this, "Repentance grows as faith grows. Do not make any mistake about it; repentance is not a thing of days and weeks, a temporary penance to be got over as fast as possible! No it is the grace of a lifetime, like faith itself. Repentance is the inseparable companion of faith."

So as the people separated themselves from the world, they were simultaneously drawing nearer to the Lord, and that's important to see. Because separation with out devotion to the Lord is isolation, but devotion with out separation is what, hypocrisy.

In vs 3 what do we see? That both the Word of God, as well as prayer and worship before God received equal time in the service. 3 hours dedicated to the Word, 3 hours dedicated to prayer and worship. We need all 3 equally balanced in our lives, the Word of God, the Worship of God, and prayer/confession before God, brokenness before the Lord. Drawing near *to* God, an interest and application of the Word *of* God, and a brokenness leading to repentance *before* God, these are all signs of revival.

Vs4-5a

So we have this handful of Levites who are crying out *to* the Lord, making confession *before* the Lord on behalf of the people. Now this is one of, if not *the* longest prayer recorded in the bible.

Yet it takes about 6-7 minutes to read from beginning to end non-stop. We say from time and again but the strength of prayer is not found in the length of prayer, some of the most powerful prayers uttered in scripture are but a few sentences. Sometimes we think that if we haven't spent 45 minutes on our face before God that we're dismal failures, not so, study the prayers of the scripture, they're surprisingly short.

Vs5b-6

What do we have here? Proper perspective, “You alone are the Lord, You have made the heavens, the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and everything *on* it, the seas and everything *in* them, and You preserve *all* of them.” It’s always good in prayer to be reminded of the greatness of God, and that’s one of the things that this prayer emphasizes, the greatness of God. Along with that the goodness of God, and the grace of God, but there’s something about remembering how big God *is* to help us realize how big our problems *aren’t*. When you consider the magnitude of creation, is there anything too hard for God? He’s both the giver and sustainer of all life; He created all things and preserves them all. And when my problem is placed in the scope of the enormity of creation (which we won’t get into) and to think that it all came into existence not even by Him lifting His hand but by simply speaking the Word, my problem is paled in comparison *radically* God can handle my situation.

Vs7-8

So they’ve moved from the greatness of God into the rehearsing of the goodness, and faithfulness of God. He chose Abram, not because of anything in him (we’ve discussed that on a recent Sunday morning in the book of Rom) Ab was idolater, surrounded by an idolatrous people, and God in His own sovereign goodness, according to the purpose of His own sovereign will spoke to Ab, gave to Ab His Word, and Ab responded to the Word of God. But that doesn’t speak to the goodness of Ab, but rather the goodness of God.

But I like that 1st phrase in vs 8, “You found His heart faithful before You.” I wrote in my bible, “May God find *my* heart faithful before Him.” I find that we as a people are so generally *unfaithful* to God, man I want to be the exception to that rule, don’t you? I don’t want the Lord to come to me and find me sleeping rather than watching for just one hour, God help us to be found faithful in this wicked and perverse generation.

And I underlined the last phrase in vs 8 as well, (read). Why has God performed His Words? Because He is righteous, God is not a man that He should lie, as it is written let God be true, and every man a liar. Man is unrighteous, we don’t keep our word, in Christ we’re to be a people of our word, one of the ways God’s righteousness is revealed is in the keeping of His Word to us. One of the ways people will see God’s righteousness in you is in your keeping of your word to them. If you can’t be trusted to keep your word, be it in performing a certain job, or committing to a certain task or whatever, but you represent the Lord to them...we have a problem, because God keeps His Word, but when I am representing the Lord, but don’t keep my word, I’m sending mixed messages to them. When you tell someone you’ll do something, do it, it’s a good witness.

Vs9-15

We’ve spoken of the signs of revival as seen by the hunger for the Word *of* God, a drawing near *to* God, brokenness/repentance *before* God, here we’re seeing that reflection on the *goodness* of God, His unfailing faithfulness to them from their beginning as a nation, and even that was a sheer act of grace.

But as we go through this prayer you might draw attention to the overwhelming goodness, and giving nature of God. We've read here how He *gave* them light by which to travel by night, cloudy pillar by day, He *gave* them His Word, made *known* His holy Sabbath, God *gave* them bread, *brought* them water, *told* them to go in and possess the land. We serve a generous, overwhelmingly giving God, and one of the ways our faith can grow with regards to future hardship, is to rehearse God's past faithfulness. How many times has God ever not come through for you? He's always seen you through every time with out exception, so why would now be any different? The Lord says in Isaiah, "*Remember this, and show yourselves men; Recall to mind, O you transgressors. Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me,*" Isa 46:8-9 We're to remember the goodness, and the faithfulness of God, but more than not man responds in rebellion, notice.

Vs16-17

How many times the lens that people view God through is one of a harsh judgmental God in the OT, but a gracious and loving God in the NT, God has always been ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness. God had been so good to them, but they weren't mindful of His works, responded in pride *towards* and rebellion *against* Him. But I want to be careful not to be too hard on the pattern here of not appreciating God when He's blessing, but crying out to Him when they're in trouble, because that's so often the way we are. We're not mindful of His works *for* us, or all His goodness *to* us, but when we're in trouble, "O God rescue me, be not far from me!!" and All that, but then when we're out of the sling, "Thanks God don't call me, I'll call You." I read somewhere, "That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons that history has to teach." and Unfortunately that's true, but we thank God that as much as He hates the sin, He loves the sinner more.

Vs18-21

This is powerful stuff with respect to the loving/gracious/compassionate nature of God, they acted in pride, refused God's authority, hardened their necks, didn't submit to His will, refused to obey, even appointed a leader to take them back to Egypt, made a golden calf and told the people, "This is your god, that brought you up out of Egypt." and They provoked the Lord greatly, how did God respond? With manifold mercies, He continued to give them a pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night. He showed them the way they should go, gave to them His good Spirit to instruct them (which is how God instructs us today as well, by His Holy Spirit), He didn't withhold manna from their mouth, or water for their thirst, He sustained them in the desert for 40 yrs (notice in vs 21) they lacked *nothing* their clothes didn't wear out, and their feet didn't swell. He supernaturally sustained them, they *disdained* Him, He *sustained* them, we serve an awesome God, but the list goes on. He'd have been just to simply forsake them, leave them to themselves and all of Israel would've disappeared off the planet. Because apart from His divine intervention there's no way a desert can sustain millions of people, they rebelled against Him, He cared for them. Alan Redpath once said "God's mercy with a sinner is only equaled and perhaps outmatched by His patience with the saints." and That may very well be true.

Vs22-31

God was tending to them, they were rebelling against Him, and even in that God would send them prophets to try and lead them back to the truth, lead them to repentance that they might submit to the Word of God once again. But they killed the prophets, so God let them be defeated by their enemies, they cried out to Him, He rescued them.

That's the general gist of the entire book of Judges, the people sin, God allows them to be overwhelmed by the enemy, they cry out to God, He raises up a deliverer, they enjoy a season of rest. And in the time of blessing, they forget about God, begin to sin again, and the cycle begins all over. We're reminded of it from time to time, but it's not during the hard times that we generally have difficulty drawing near to God. We're crying out *to* Him, calling *upon* Him perpetually for deliverance, but it's when God's blessing that we have to be so careful, we begin to neglect our relationship with the Lord, feel like we don't need Him as much. I don't know how accurate it is but I would think that for every 30-40 people that would be able to live godly in poverty, you might find 1 or 2 who would be able to live godly in prosperity. Human nature has a tendency to forget God in prosperity; it's sad, but true. But we're encouraged here to realize that God never gets tired *of* us, and is always prepared to show grace and mercy *to* us as we come to Him with a repentant heart.

Vs32-33

There's the heart of this prayer right there, "You have dealt *faithfully*, but we have done *wickedly*." They aren't making excuses for themselves, trying to somehow justify their actions either in the past or the present, this is confession, agreeing with God. Glorious is the moment that we stop arguing with God, trying to defend our actions or our attitude before God, and simply agree with God regarding His righteousness, and our wickedness. Because as we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness. If we walk in the light as He is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another (we with God) and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

Vs34-38

Isn't this a great prayer? "God here we are again, we're here due to no fault of Yours this is completely on us, no different than all of our history has shown. Yet in all that You've shown mercy and grace, compassion and abundant kindness. Now we're back in the land, but we're still under the oppression of these Persian kings, all the increase of the land goes to them. Now we've gotten ourselves into this, we've acted wickedly, You've acted righteously, and as You've showed Yourself faithful to us in the past, would You do it again in the present?" They're just pouring their hearts out before God in confession and repentance, and ultimately they were brought to a decision. This is another one of those signs of revival, hungering after God's Word, confession *of* sin, (brokenness *over* sin) repentance *from* sin, reflecting on the goodness of God, and here's the final one we see tonight, a *renewal in obedience to* God.

We're making a covenant with You God, and we're going to write it down and we're going to follow through. They're signing their names on the dotted line, they made a practical decision to stand *for* God and against *ungodliness*. Subservience to the Word of God, that's the covenant they enter into (we'll see it next time.)

Prayer Points: Lord it's good to be reminded of Your greatness, of Your goodness, and of Your graciousness. That You've created all things and by Your will they exist and are sustained. We thank You that there's nothing too hard for You, You're faithful, gracious, merciful, ready to pardon, and full of compassion. Father we're reminded of our own *unfaithfulness*, God forgive us for our failures, strength our resolve to follow Christ whole heartedly, may we hunger after Your Word, spend time in prayer before You, in worship *of* You. Show us the things you want to change *in* us, give us hearts broken over sin, grant us the gift of repentance, and teach us obedience to Your Word. Thank You again for Your lovingkindness.