

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 11TH - 12TH, 2021 // BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

A SOLEMN ASSEMBLY (NEHEMIAH 9:1-5)

After the wall was completed and the citizenship & leadership of Jerusalem had been established (ch. 7), the people had heard and obeyed God's Word (ch. 8).

- The Holy Spirit was doing a significant work in the lives of these people- after their feast of thanksgiving, now we see a scene of dramatic, humble repentance as the people assemble to fast and pray (vs. 1).

Sackcloth was a rough fabric (like burlap) that ancient Jews often wore to show their complete poverty of spirit before God, and earth (or dust/ashes) on their heads signified a lowly state before God.

- This public display of humility reflected an attitude of the heart that showed grief, remorse and sorrow over their sin and need for God's power to renew and revive them.

In this assembly, the people separated themselves from the world as they drew near to the Lord (vs. 2).

- The nation of Israel was chosen by God to be a special people, separate from pagan nations around them (Lev. 20:26). Peter applied this idea to Christian believers in the church today (1 Pet. 1:15).
- We are to be different, distinct, and set apart AND we are to more grieved over our own sin than we are angered by the sins of the unbelieving world.

Not only did the people assemble to repent and confess sin, but they also came to hear the Word and worship (vs. 3-5).

- The Levites leading the congregation called on the people to, "Stand up and bless the Lord your God" (vs. 5)- sometimes we need to get over our pride and self-consciousness and audibly pray, praise, and humble ourselves before God.
- "Humility comes before honor" (Prov. 18:12)

A GRACIOUS & MERCIFUL GOD (NEHEMIAH 9:6-31)

Obviously, all eight of Levites mentioned in vs. 4-5 didn't pray the following prayer at the same time.

- Maybe it was written out and they took turns, maybe it was spontaneously prayed in succession, or maybe (and according to tradition), Ezra prayed this prayer.
- The following prayer is one of the longest in the Bible-yet it only takes 6 ½ minutes to say (prayer doesn't have to be long to be effective).

PRaise TO THE GOD OF ALL CREATION (VS.5-6)

We offer praise to the name of God because He is Lord alone, and He is the creator of all things - heaven & the heaven of heavens (the sky, outer space, and the place of God's dwelling), nature, and all the angels who worship Him.

- When we consider the magnitude of God's creation and His power, greatness, and eternity, it causes us fear and amazement.

PRaise TO THE GOD OF ABRAHAM (VS.7-8)

It was an act of pure grace for God to choose to make a nation of Abraham and to give him the land of promise.

- Abraham had lapses of faith, yet over His life He trusted the Lord and walked in obedience.
- God kept His promise to Abraham to make Him a great nation-and God keeps His promises to us! We praise the Lord for His faithfulness.

PRaise TO THE GOD OF EXODUS (VS.9-15)

God hears the cries of His people and sees their affliction and He intervenes actively to save and deliver them.

- The story of the Exodus is an account of God's power, providence, protection, and provision (vs. 15) for His people.
- In saving the people, He gave them His holy law so that in their civil, personal, and spiritual lives they'd know the will of God (vs. 13-14).

THE SINFUL RESPONSE OF MAN (VS.16-17)

How did the people respond? They refused to bow to His authority ("stiffened their neck")-this is the same root sin we all still find in us.

- They "acted presumptuously"- they were proud and presumed they didn't need God.
- So, they appointed a leader to go back to Egypt.
- We all are guilty of doing the exact same thing at different times in our spiritual lives.

GOD'S GRACIOUS RESPONSE (VS.17-21)

Even when Israel formed a golden calf and worshipped it, God didn't forsake them.

- He was always ready to forgive, be gracious, merciful, slow to anger, & abounding in steadfast love.
- He instructed them with His Spirit, He didn't withhold manna or water, and He sustained them in the wilderness.
- God is patient with His people! He somehow holds back His terrible judgment against the people who treat Him so disrespectfully.

THE CYCLE OF ISRAEL'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (VS.22-31)

God blessed Israel with power, wealth, and prosperity. In their prosperity, "they ate... were filled...became fat & delighted themselves in God's great goodness" (vs. 25).

- The Psalmist calls us to delight ourselves in the LORD (Ps. 37:4), not solely in His gifts.
- Prosperity and abundance can be MASSIVE spiritual landmines.

During their times of comfort and abundance, God's people often turn away from Him.

- Then, God brings correction as a "wake-up call" to His people (vs. 27a).
- Then God's people cry out, God raises up deliverers, then God's people turn back to Him (vs. 27b).
- Then blessed and satisfied, God's people again turn from Him, and the cycle continues (vs. 28).

For some of us, this "crazy cycle" describes our relationship with God- we fall into hard times, call out to God, see Him come through, get comfortable, and then fall away (only to repeat the cycle).

- We sometimes feel like God's gotten tired of us and so we can't ask Him to forgive us for something He has forgiven us for so many times before.
- But God never gets tired of us (vs. 31), and He never turns away the repentant heart.

A PLEA FOR INTERVENTION (NEHEMIAH 9:32-37)

Even though the people of Israel had a rebuilt Jerusalem to live in and establish a national identity within once more, Israel was certainly not an independent or free nation.

- They were still a province of the Empire of Persia and were under heavy Persian taxes and obligations.
- They were still essentially slaves living in the land that God had given them (vs. 36-37).

In their humility, the people recognized that God was righteous in allowing this judgment to fall upon them, because they had acted wickedly (vs. 33).

- The Lord disciplines those whom He loves (Prov. 3:12, Heb. 12:6).
- Real repentance and confession is the recognition that God is right and we are wrong- it's an agreement with God about both things.

Nevertheless, God's people called upon Him to see their hardship and great distress (vs. 32, 37).

- They were not necessarily asking God for deliverance from their specific situation-more than anything, they were surrendering themselves to Him as their Master and seeking His help.
- Are we seeking God's hand or are we seeking His face? (Psalm 27:8).

A POINT OF DECISION (NEHEMIAH 9:38)

The people had acknowledged God's goodness, grace, and mercy, and they'd also acknowledged their sin.

- They'd called upon God to see their hardship and distress.
- But they'd come together not just to pray-they'd come to make a covenant with God and visibly commit themselves to His ways by even writing it down.

God's work in us through the Spirit brings us almost always to a place of conscious decision and response.

- We can attend a prayer service, worship night, or revival where we experience God's presence and power in mighty ways-but if that's not followed up with genuine commitments to obedience and holiness, it's not revival.
- Real renewal is often a matter of the will.

"WE MAKE A FIRM COVENANT..."

For any experience we have with the Lord to last beyond the short term and actually shape our future, we must decide upon obedience NOW.

- We have to consciously decide that we will take actual, practical steps to align our lives in obedience to God's Word.
- What does that look like for you today? What is the point of decision God's calling you to?

"IN WRITING ON THE SEALED DOCUMENT..."

Public professions of commitment to the Lord (whether it's renewing our commitment or committing for the first time) are becoming increasingly rare in the church today.

- Faith is becoming more privatized and we're becoming less bold.
- But sometimes we need to have moments in our lives where we publicly and openly profess commitment to the Lord.

TWO SURE SIGNS OF GENUINE REVIVAL ARE...

1. An **honest recognition** of our own **sinfulness**.
 2. A **committed renewal** of our **obedience**.
- **Pride is what most often keeps the people of God from seeing moves of God.**
 - **Have you considered the magnitude of God's creation, power, greatness, and eternity?**
 - **Have you considered His faithfulness, kindness, grace, and mercy towards you?**
 - **Are you more grieved over your own sin or are you more angry at the sins of the unbelieving world (or even others in the Church)? What does that say about the state of your heart?**
 - **Have you found yourself in the "crazy cycle"? Are you disinterested in the Lord now because you're delighting in His gifts, but not Him?**
 - **Are you being disciplined? How are you responding to Him right now? In humility or pride?**
 - **Will you today make a public and open profession to commit yourself to the Lord?**