

A FAITHFUL GOD CONFRONTS A FAITHLESS PEOPLE

Nehemiah 9

Last week we left God's people in Neh. 8 –A GREAT day!

People are excited and united.

They're committed to LISTEN to God's voice.

They're committed to DO God's will.

Though homes in the city are still in shambles...

Their real estate market's a mess!...

Yet they believe God is about to do something.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL OF COVENANT 8-13

Physical issues dealt with, *spiritual* issues become focus.

RECONFIRMATION OF COVENANT 8-10

God's people need to reaffirm their submission to God.

Conforms to pattern in Deuteronomy:

First, *basic* issue of *trust and submission* to God.

Later, specific stipulations affecting lifestyle. 11-13

3 STEPS TO RENEWAL–The 3 "R"s of RENEWAL

1st step: **READING OF GOD'S WORD 8**

2nd step: **REPENTANCE BY GOD'S PEOPLE 9:1-37**

Boice: Essential element of any revival: **RECOGNITION OF SIN**

Welsh revivals of 19th C., Wesleyan revival in 18th C.,

the Reformation, Nineveh revival (response to Jonah)

1st evidence of movement of Holy Spirit: awakened conscience,
leading to genuine sorrow for sin.

Three parts to this revival:

1) **Preaching and hearing God's Word 8**

2) **Sorrow for sin and repentance 9**

3) **Resulting change of life 10**

REPENTANCE – "*Changing our mind*"

ISRAEL'S VIEW up to this point: (Often ours too!)

We're pretty good. God has gone far away.

CORRECT VIEW:

Only God is good—great and faithful.

We've gone far away—unfaithful, rebellious, failure

Until we change our mind

about Who God is and what He's like

and about who we are and what we're like,

THERE WILL NEVER BE RENEWAL!

After reading God's Word for 3 hours a day,

and praising Him for 3 hours a day for 3 weeks,

Now, they're ready to do business with God.

Day 1—early morning to midday

—reading God's Word and praising Him. 8:1-3

Day 2—Leaders come to listen to God's Word 8:13

Daily—Living in booths, remembering what God has done 8:17

Every day—they keep coming to listen 8:18

Feast concludes on 22nd day.

24th day, people gather again—a day of repentance.

Last Day—3 hr reading + 3 hr praising & confessing sin 9:3

=> lot of thinking about God and what He's done for them!

WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE IS ON THEIR MINDS???

Starts with **reading God's Word => reveals sinfulness =>**

Ready to change mind about God—about ourselves.

They realize how far short they've come

from being what God wants His people to be.

WE'VE GOT A GREAT GOD! WE'VE GOT A BIG PROBLEM!

They don't just criticize the previous generation.

Acknowledge *their* failure to be what God wants *them* to be.

Their separation and confession 9:1-4 1-3

On the 24th of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads.² Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers.³ They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God.

How do they prepare for this time of corporate confession?

Fasting demonstrates commitment to do business with God.

They lay aside food to focus on what they want from God.

- A request they feel intensely about
- Distress and sorrow over a severe situation
- Repentance to straighten out relationship with God.

In this case, the last two purposes unite.

Expression of sorrow links with repentance.

Sackcloth – coarse material made of goat's hair (=> burlap) indicates mourning.

Dust thrown on the head serves same purpose.

Why do they **separate from all foreigners?**

Book points to need to extricate selves from pagan society.

Their commitment is half-way, half-hearted commitment.

Neh. 9 prepares them for total commitment, rehearsing past in prayer of confession (6-37).

God's people recognize how far they've drifted and turn back to Him:

THREE ELEMENTS included in prayer:

- * **Recognize God's faithfulness**
- * **Recognize OUR failure**
- * **Recognize our dependence on faithful God
– **call on Him for assistance.****

The form [united with reading God's Word] commends itself for prayer in general; for acts of renewal in particular.

Observe elements as we read their prayer: 9:5-37

Their confession is linked to reading the law.

Their confession is corporate, AND individual.

They recognize they're part of a sinful people.

9:2 *Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers.*

When revival comes, people stop trying to excuse themselves based on what others, even their parents, have done; they confess *their* sin and wrongdoing openly.

Their praise to the Lord 9:5-15

Most of Neh. 9 is prayer, led by Levites on the platform.

This is no ordinary prayer meeting!

It begins with reading God's Word. =>

That motivates them to confess their sin. =>

God's forgiveness **motivates them to praise Him.**

It directs people to recognize goodness and power of God.

It prepares them for final appeal for mercy.

Prayer outlines **historical development of O.T.**

[Their praise] Because of His creation 9:5-6

The Levites ...[names] said: “Stand up and praise the LORD your God, Who is from everlasting to everlasting.” “Blessed be your glorious name; may it be exalted above all blessing and praise. ⁶You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

When we consider greatness and beauty of God’s creation, it ought to provoke praise.

Because of His covenant 9:7-8 *“You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. 8 You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land ...[names nations] ...You have kept your promise because you are righteous.*

When Israel thinks about their privilege, as God’s people, it motivates them to praise Him.

While our heritage is different, as we **celebrate our freedom**, and think about how God has dealt with **our nation**, it ought to motivate **US** to praise Him.

Because of His deliverance 9:9-12 *“You saw the suffering of our forefathers in Egypt; you heard their cry at the Red Sea. ¹⁰ You sent miraculous signs and wonders against Pharaoh ...¹¹ You divided the sea before them, so they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled their pursuers into the depths...*

When they consider how God delivered them from enemies who would destroy them, they praise Him.

When we consider how God delivers *US* from enemies, His deliverance should motivate *US* to praise Him.

Because of His revelation 9:13-15

"You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right....¹⁵ In their hunger you gave them bread from heaven and in their thirst you brought them water from the rock; you told them to go in and take possession of the land you had sworn ... to give them.

When they think about God's provision, they praise Him.

When *WE* consider God's provision; God's Word in our hand, our language, it should motivate *us* to praise Him.

They have many reasons to praise Him.

As **we** think about what God has done for us,

we have many reasons to praise Him also!

Are we filled with joy & gratitude? Motivated to praise Him?

Their confession of national failure 9:16-37

In contrast to God's grace and faithfulness, they acknowledge their unfaithfulness.

Contrast goes back and forth between recognition of God's goodness, greatness and faithfulness, and their rebellion and disobedience.

Every act of love on God's part is met and matched by one of disloyalty on the part of his people.

Like **Newton's Third Law of Motion**: "*For every action there's an equal and opposite reaction.*"

Prayer of confession reveals the 3 KEY ELEMENTS:

The people recognize God's faithfulness.

The people recognize their failure.

The people recognize dependence on God

If God doesn't show us mercy, ... we're finished!

Without Him, we don't stand a chance!

Notice how they follow the pattern:

9:16-37 ***“But they,** our forefathers, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and did not obey your commands.¹⁷ They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. **But you** are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. ...¹⁹ “Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the desert....²⁰ You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst.²¹ For forty years you sustained them in the desert; they lacked nothing, their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen.²² “You gave them kingdoms and nations, ...²³ You made their sons as numerous as the stars in the sky, and you brought them into the land that you told their fathers to enter and possess....*

*²⁶ **“But they** were disobedient and rebelled against you....²⁷ So you handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. **But** when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven **you heard them**, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies....*

*²⁹ “You warned them to return to your law, **but they** became arrogant and disobeyed your commands....³¹ But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God....³³ In all that has happened to us,*

*you have been just; you have acted faithfully, while we did wrong....*³⁵ *Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways.*³⁶ *“But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave our forefathers so they could eat its fruit and the other good things it produces.*³⁷ ***Because of our sins***, its abundant harvest goes to the kings you have placed over us. They rule over our bodies and our cattle as they please. ***We’re in great distress.***

God's love and faithfulness should have been met by love and faithfulness,

but it was met by the opposite reaction.

They're in this sad condition because of their own failure.

They deserve what they've received.

If we think that we have no wicked ways,

we'll never turn from them—we're fooling ourselves.

If we only look at our neighbor's sins,

we'll never find God's forgiveness for our own sins.

3rd step to renewal: After repentance, Levites led 3rd step:

[1st: Reading God's Word 2nd: Repentance by God's people]

RESTORATION OF COMMITMENT TO GOD'S COVENANT 9:38-10:39

Aware of where they've come from, **they pledge themselves to a binding agreement with God.**

Restoration never comes, unless preceded by ...

Reading of God's Word

Changing our mind about who God is

Changing our mind about ourselves

Commitment to do God's will

If such a prayer were written by members of this body, what would OUR prayer include? Specifically, ...

- Evidences of God's greatness and faithfulness?***
- Evidences of our unfaithfulness?***
- Call for help– Recognition of dependence on God.***

If God's people become the people God wants us to be, it will be the result of God's Spirit, working in our lives.

It starts with reading God's Word.

It involves a change of mind—about God—about us.

It involves a commitment to do God's will.

Where does it need to start in YOUR life?

What does God want you to do about it?

PRAYER => CHANGE MY HEART, O GOD