

## THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

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

**A TIME TO MOURN (NEHEMIAH 9:1-5a)**

**THE CELEBRATION WAS OVER**

After the Jews celebrated the grace and provision of God (chap. 8), they now get down to the business of intentionally addressing sin and working to become holy people.

- Fasting, wearing sackcloth, and putting dust on their heads was a way they outwardly showed their inward grief or repentance of sin.

**TAKING OWNERSHIP FOR MISTAKES**

The Jews separated from the foreigners in order to address their sins and the sins of their forefathers. Some believe this meant they actually divorced their foreign spouses.

- The point is that **they not only owned their mistakes and felt remorse for them, they also confessed, repented, and read the Word for more clarity.**

**THEY ALSO CRIED OUT FOR HELP**

Some of the men got up on the platform built for the reading of the Word and cried out in loud voices for God to hear and help His people.

- **It takes humility and desperation to reach the point of crying out to God for help. Have we reached this point yet? What will it take to get there? Even if we are fine, do we cry out for our people?**

**KNOWING GOD WILL COME THROUGH**

A 2nd group made up of Levites instructed the people to praise God in the midst of their confusion because **though we can make life chaotic, God is always faithful.**

- We often forget that God is "everlasting to everlasting," and outside of and greater than our space and time. **We must remember how great He is!**

**FAITHFUL (NEHEMIAH 9:5b-15)**

**THE PRAYER**

The Levites (priests) led the Jewish people in a prayer that they were to "amen," or agree with. The prayer begins with acknowledging that **God is the only God despite what our imaginations may come up with.**

- Maybe the most offensive thing about the Bible is its claim that **Jesus is exclusively the only pathway to salvation.**

**LEVELS OF HEAVEN?**

The Jews believed in a tiered universe. The "highest heavens" was the dwelling place of God, the "heavens" was the visible universe, and the "earth" is of course earth.

- The reason this is mentioned is to reflect on Genesis 1-2. God is the Creator of all things and gives life to all things.

**THE CREATOR IS A PERSONAL GOD**

Not only is God powerful and magnificent, He also cares about His creation and chooses to build a relationship with us. This is shown many times in the Word, but to the Jews the connection to Abraham was the most important.

- To the Christian it's the revelation of Jesus. **The fact that the Creator would initiate a relationship with us should amaze us.**

**NOT ONLY PERSONAL, GOOD AND FAITHFUL**

Because God made a promise to Abraham to preserve his descendants, we are able to see God's faithfulness to the Jews throughout history. The 1st example in this prayer is the exodus from Egypt.

- God plagued the Egyptians to humble them, miraculously delivered the Jews, and protected them on their long journey.

**GOD EVEN APPROACHED MOSES**

God not only met with the leader of the exodus, but Nehemiah records that God gave Moses "impartial," "reliable," and "good" instructions and principles on how to live.

- **God provided spiritually, socially, politically, and even miraculously provided food.** God even had a promised land "sworn" to them.

**BUT US... (NEHEMIAH 9:16-25)**

**THE PROBLEM IS ALWAYS US**

Though God had been gracious, giving, and clear to His people, they "acted arrogantly... and did not listen to [His] commands." The people "refused to listen" and they had forgotten the great things God had done for them.

- We often refuse to listen to anything that doesn't affirm us. We also have constant distractions and forget the things of God.

**THEY EVEN WORSHIPED FALSE GOD**

Not only did the Jews become arrogant and apathetic, they went so far as to create idols and attribute their success to the false gods.

- We have become absolute masters of this in our society. **The God of our age is self, and we construct everything to be a glorification of this false god** (Rom. 1:25).

**GOD WAS STILL FAITHFUL**

Even though the Jews had done atrocious acts against God, God "did not abandon them in the wilderness because of [His] great compassion."

- God even made their families flourish and gave them favor as they overcame evil kingdoms on their way to the Promised Land.

**FOR A TIME, THE PEOPLE WERE GRATEFUL (V25)**

As things were looking good and the people seemed to always succeed, the Jews were "delighted in [God's] great goodness." This cycle will move us into the next section.

- **We often love God when things are good, but sometimes we get apathetic in those times as well. Will we still connect with God in times of strife?**

• **Deut. 6:10-12**

**CYCLICAL (NEHEMIAH 9:26-31)**

**ANOTHER "BUT..."**

The Jewish people slipped right back into disobedience and rebelling and "flung [God's] laws behind their backs" and even went so far as to kill some prophets of God.

- **Notice not only a cycle of sin, but an escalation of it as we get closer to the end of time.** We are still in an escalating cycle today.

**"SO YOU HANDED THEM OVER..."**

Because the people of God didn't want anything to do with Him, God turned them over to their enemies "who oppressed them" (Rom. 13). The point of this was to get His people's attention and humble them.

- Is it possible a similar thing has been happening for the last several decades in this "**nation under God?**"

**"AS SOON AS THEY HAD RELIEF..."**

Sometimes we run from God during trials, other times we run to Him, but **when it gets good again we forget God and His grace.**

- So, the cycle continued and the people were overcome by enemies again because of their arrogance and sin. But **remarkably, God forgave in His "abundant compassion" and didn't abandon His people.**

**TODAY (NEHEMIAH 9:32-37)**

**NOW THE PRAYER TURNS MORE PERSONAL**

The Levites move from the mistakes of the past to their current situation. The Jews had nothing to lean on except God's goodness and mercy. Time had proven that people perpetually fall short without God.

- **God's grace should move us to separate from sin, not continue in it believing God is a pushover.**

**SLAVES BECAUSE OF SIN AND REBELLION**

Because the people of God "did not obey [God's] law or listen to [God's] commands and warnings," their prosperity and freedom, in a land promised to them, was sacrificed and under the rule of a pagan kingdom.

- **Our sin compromises the good things God has for us. God has a perfect will, but we must choose to live in it.**

**"WE ARE IN GREAT DISTRESS"**

The people of God had to reach a point of desperation. Many are blinded by darkness, but even still, it is pretty easy to see the chaos we live in today.

- **The real question is how we will respond. Will we be humble, cry out to God, and choose to live everyday by His principles? Will we slide back if life levels out?**

**ADDRESSING SIN**

- Do we understand that until we confess and choose to move away from the things God disapproves of, we will never find peace and contentment?
- Do we also understand the eternal ramifications of a sinful lifestyle? **Yes, God is gracious, but eventually our actions will be held into account.**

**IN TIMES OF COMFORT OR STRIFE**

- When things are going well, will we thank God for that or grow entitled and lazy?
- When times are hard will we run to God out of selfishness or true humility and desperation?
- Do we trust God at all times? Are we in a relationship with Him in all seasons of life? **What if it doesn't get easier?**

**BREAKING THE CYCLE?**

- Though we will always make mistakes, we can break the cycle of living in rebellion and sin. We do this through **repentance, prayer, and learning and living out the teachings of the Word.**
- Can we get out of the rut? Yes, but **it takes intentional effort to connect and grow in a relationship with God.**