

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 12TH, 2021 // BOOK OF NEHEMIAH

MOURNING (NEHEMIAH 9:1-5a) HUMBLE REPENTANCE

The walls were built and functioning as expected. After hearing God's Word (Ch. 8) and responding in obedience, the Holy Spirit was at work and the people were moved to humble repentance.

- The realization of God's greatness and our inability to stack up should **humble us and reveal the necessity for repentance.**

GATHERED WITH FASTING

They went from feasting to fasting as the Word brought conviction and people started confessing. Not meeting our physical needs by abstaining from food is a response to a realization of a deeper spiritual need.

- Fasting places us in complete dependence of God, signifying sorrow and deep remorse for having done wrong.

GATHERED IN SACKCLOTH

Sackcloth was a dark, coarse material, like a burlap bag. Because of their sin, the people would have worn this rough fabric forcing them to be as uncomfortable externally as they were internally.

- **Are we so troubled by the sin in our lives, that the normal comforts of life become unimportant?**

GATHERED WITH DUST ON THEIR HEADS

They would have taken handfuls of dirt and rubbed it on their face. Throwing dust or putting it on your head would have been a sign of humiliation.

- The visible filth on their heads would have been the **external representation of the internal filth** that likewise needed to be cleaned up.

SEPARATE ASSEMBLY

They separated themselves from anyone who was not a descendent of Israel and confessed their sins and the sins of their fathers.

- The foreigners (non-Israelites) were excluded because they had no part in the former sins of Israel that was the cause for mourning and repentance.

CONFESSED THEIR SINS

We sin when we do what God has told us not to do, or when do not do what He has told us to do.

- The word sin is an archery term that means "to miss the mark." God sets the target and missing the mark by an inch or by a several feet is still sin either way. **We all have missed the mark** (Rom. 3:23)!

CONFESSED THE INIQUITIES OF THEIR ANCESTORS

This does not mean there was some type of "generational curse" that had to be broken. In a culture that glorified their forefathers, it was important to also address that they came from sinful ancestors.

- There is propensity to repeat the sins of our family, but there is always a choice. We decide if we repeat the sins of our fathers.

PRAISE (NEHEMIAH 9:5b-15) HE IS WORTHY

They begin their prayer with praise, confessing God's worthiness. They are acknowledging how great is the name of God.

- God is worthy of our praise not because we decided He was worthy, but because He alone is the Lord. He alone is worthy of our praise.

HE IS HOLY

In their praise they acknowledge that there is one God, and everything is created and sustained by Him.

- There is nothing that exists outside of the expressed desire of God, and nothing can continue to exist apart from His provision. God's characteristics of creator and sustainer set Him apart from everything.

HE IS FAITHFUL

They praise Him because His promises are true.

- They recount the promises God made with Abraham. God chose Abraham and made a covenant with him and his descendants. They were standing in the land that was promised to them as proof of His faithfulness.

HE IS ACTIVE

They offer praise to God for delivering Israel from Egypt and providing for them in the wilderness.

- He brought them out of Egypt and led them in the wilderness. He came down and spoke to Moses to deliver clear commands and instructions. **God is not distant, He is active in the lives of His people.**

REBELLION (NEHEMIAH 9:16-21) WE SIN AGAINST A GOOD GOD

The word "but" is a terrible way to begin v.16. They had just praised God for how good He had been to Israel, "but [their] ancestors acted arrogantly and did not listen to your commands."

- Sin is made especially bad when we consider it against a God who has been so good to us.

WE SIN AGAINST A GRACIOUS GOD

v17b says, "But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love."

- The Israelites rebelled, created a Golden Calf and worshipped it, yet God did not forsake them. He still provided, led them, and fed them.

Instead of looking at how "we" have sinned against a gracious God, we are quick to notice how "they" have sinned against a gracious God.

- **"God's mercy with a sinner is only equaled and perhaps outmatched by His patience with the saints, with you and me."** (Alan Redpath)

GRACIOUS (NEHEMIAH 9:22-31)

THE CYCLE OF GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH US

The cycle begins with God showing His goodness to His people. (v22) "You gave them kingdoms and nations." (v25b). "They ate, were filled, became prosperous, and delighted in your great goodness."

- Then, in a time of comfort and abundance, God's people turn from Him. (v.26) "But they were disobedient and rebelled against you."

God gives warning through the prophets "in order to turn them back to [Him] (v26b)."

- Then, God brings correction to His people. (v27a) "So you handed them over to their enemies."

- God's people then turn back to Him. (v27b) "In their time of distress, they cried out to you."

God delivers them. (v27b) "You heard from heaven" and "rescued them from the power of their enemies."

- God's people again turn from Him and the cycle continues. (v28) "But after they had relief, they again did what was evil in your sight."

GOD REMAINS THE SAME

Throughout this cycle of rebellion, God does not change. (v31) However, in your abundant compassion, you did not destroy them or abandon them, for you are a gracious and compassionate God."

- **God will not desert us! Not because we are good, but because He is good!**

FAITHFUL (NEHEMIAH 9:32-38) PETITION

Remembering God's faithfulness towards his people, their prayer then presents a final plea in regard to their current state.

- Israel at this time was not an independent nation. They were a province of the Empire of Persia. They petition God to deliver them once more!

COVENANT

Israel needed the knowledge of who God is and knowing who they are. (v38) "In view of all of this, we are making a binding agreement" with God.

- Israel had come to a place of decision, realizing that the work of God is more than a wonderful experience, but something that shapes the future.

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- **Praise** – We turn the focus on God and honor Him for who He is and what He has done.
- **Repentance** – Should be a natural response to God's greatness and holiness.
- **Ask** – When we ask God, we are acknowledging our dependence on Him.
- **Yield** – In the end we yield everything to God. Trusting that He desires what is best for us.