

Re-Building The Walls: Part #7 Nehemiah ch. 9 & 10 Putting First things First

By Rev. P. Michael Williamson October 25th 2009

Introduction: The walls are complete, the gates have been installed, the opposition both inside and outside the community has been overcome, selfish behaviour by the rich exploiting the poor has been corrected by Nehemiah's intervention and God's word has been heard by all the people of understanding including women and children. The community had celebrated The Feast of Tabernacles.

The communities' first response to hearing God's word in Ch. 8:9 & 10 was weeping and that was the correct response but it came more out of guilt and fear. So Nehemiah sent the people away to celebrate the Feast.

1. The People confess their sins (Ch. 9)

After the feast, when the people had experienced and celebrated God's redeeming and loving presence, they were ready to confess. God's word has a way of capturing the people's attention.

I. The Word of God v.1-5

The word of God is read for 3 hours and then the people prayed and confessed for 3 hours one to another and to God. The word of God had brought, not condemnation, (condemnation comes from the enemy and leads to death and destruction) but conviction (conviction comes from God and it leads to renewal of life and faith): The word of God had brought conviction to the people because they had not been living in line with what they had heard.

II. The God of the Universe v.5b-38

In Ch 9 we hear about three of the attributes of God.

We heard about the **Greatness of God**: Our God is a glorious God, who is the powerful creature of the heavens and the earth. God's greatness was celebrated by the Levites as they prayed this prayer. We heard of the **Goodness of God**: How God is faithful, and concerned for the needs of the Israelites. In his goodness, God forgave the people when they turned and repented, God was longsuffering when the people sinned again and again and again. But God continued in His goodness and pursued the Israelites with love even when they continuously rebelled. We heard about **The Grace of God**: who was generous and who always went far beyond what the people deserved. God always kept his promise of covenant love even if and when the people were unfaithful God was and will always be faithful. You see God cannot but be faithful because it is an integral part of God's character. He will relentlessly keep his promises, he can't help it that is just who God is it is part of his character.

2. After we say Amen.

The prayer of confession ended with "amen" meaning "so be it". The Israelites then started to live out their personal and spiritual resolve to live a life of obedience. The people wanted a new beginning. The psalmist knew that change was hard for the people, and he recorded how God guided his life and how God responded to his failure.

Psalm 37:23-24: **Let's say this together**: The steps of a good man (or women) are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be *utterly cast down*; for the Lord upholds him with His hand (NKJV) When people confess the Lord will always restore those who have failed.

In the book of Nehemiah the nation had sinned but now through divine revelation from God's word the people were taking steps which consisted of; confession, obedience and dedication. What were the signs of their dedication?

I. Submission to the Word of God

The Israelites heard the word of God and released that they had to do something about it. They knew the way back to God was open to them in prayer and confession. This was a time a national renewal, as the people ratified and reaffirmed the covenant that God had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

When the Israelites had entered the Promised Land they were instructed not to intermarry with the Canaanite families but they had failed to obey this instruction, now they had been reminded of this original directive.

II. Separation as the people of God

They were the people of God and God had chosen them to be distinct from the nations that surrounded them. How could the nation of Israel be, the hope of the world, if nobody could tell them apart from their neighbour? Separation was a sign of who they belonged to, God. It was simply sign of their total devotion to God, no matter what the cost.

As an illustration marriage is a positive example of total separation. A man and woman get married and they separate themselves from all other possible mates and give themselves exclusively to each other. And that is what God wanted from the People of Israel.

The Sabbath was another unique feature of the Jewish community, the Sabbath was holy and a sacred day of rest, there was to be no trading no work, and a time to reconnect with God. The people committed to restore the Sabbath rest as they had been instructed through their reading of the Law of Moses. They pledged to bar the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath so there could be no trading in the market.

III. Support for the House of God

The people pledged their support for the Temple so that it could function as the place that the community could worship God and celebrate God's loving presence. It was the central institution of the community and an integral part of who they were as a distinct godly society. These three aspects of faith were an external gauge of the Israelites resolve to renew their commitment to God.

What is the Application for us today?

3. After we say Hallelujah

At the end of our worship we conclude with: ***Let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Thanks be to God Hallelujah!***

In a way we are saying: "we are now going out into the world to put into practice all that we have heard and learned here today."

This is when we start to live out our personal and spiritual resolve to live a life of obedience. But we can't do it on our own we always need God's help to inspire and guide our resolve, and thanks be to God who has given us the Holy Spirit for this very purpose.

I. Submission to the Word of God

Unlike the Israelites our faith is not based on our promises to God but on God's incredible promises to us. Our obedience to God's word is based on all that God has accomplished in and through Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:1ff Rules for Holy Living).

Col 3 v.17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

"We don't succeed as Christians because we make promises to God, but because we believe the promises of God and act upon them." Commentary on Nehemiah.

We are motivated by God's love; we believe and respond in obedience to his word.

We hear God's word at church, and I hope you are reading the scriptures for yourself during the week: the key is application of the word into our lives; "In word and deed...." Paul instructs the Philippians in ch. 2:12. "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling..."

In other words take faith seriously, live it out. But remember "when we fail to do the things we should do." there is always the open door of repentance. Have you noticed the Christian life is a series of new beginnings?

Jude 24 "To him (Jesus) who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his (God's) glorious presence without fault and great joy...." That is what Jesus will do for all who believe that he is the Christ the son of the living God. There is a song that the Holy Spirit has been speaking through to me over the past couple of weeks. It's

called "The day will come" but the line I remember is "I'll be blameless on that Day." Let me explain.

II. Separation but not isolation as the people of God

Jesus said that as Christians we are to be "in the world but not of the world." The problem is the world keeps leaking into my life when I am in the world, sometimes it is my own selfish desires. Either of these scenarios requires the cleansing power of confession. ----- And then we have to plunge right back into the world. Jesus gave us another warning about being in the world. "In this world you will have trouble But take heart I have overcome the world."

This is both reassuring and comforting because Jesus reveals the truth about the world .. and yet he still sends us out into the world to build bridges into the Kingdom of God and so to make disciples.

I believe that is God's word to us and it is very clear, it has a way of capturing our attention, that is the work of the Holy Spirit, but hearing is not enough. James reminds us in 1:22 "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." Or "don't just be hearers of God's word do what it says, put it into practice"

I believe this is our growing edge as a community that we need to be active in serving and interacting in our communities outside the church. Now I know some of you are active in the community already and that is fantastic....

III. Support for the Kingdom of God

These three things

- i. Submission to the Word of God
- ii. Separation but not isolation as the people of God
- iii. Support for the Kingdom of God

each one is a barometer, a gauge of faith, a reflection of our commitment to God.

Giving is a way of putting our faith into practice by supporting the work of God's kingdom here on earth. Our giving becomes a joyful overflow of our faith. We participate in ministry through our giving as well as showing up for ministry opportunities as God provides them through the week and through the church.

Jesus declared "For where your treasure is there will your heart be also." Matt 6:21

Sir Winston Churchill said "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

Give yes to this church community but what are we going to give to the community outside we need to give our selves in service to others. Opportunity this week... Come with me....

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4. The People confess their sins (Ch. 9)

The people were now ready to confess.



III. The Word of God v.1-5

The word of God had brought conviction.

IV. The God of the Universe v.5b-38

Three of the attributes of God.

The Greatness of God:

The Goodness of God: God is faithful, and concerned for the needs of the Israelites.

The Grace of God: God is generous and who always goes beyond what we deserve.

5. After we say Amen.

The people wanted a new beginning.

Psalm 37:23-24 says as much: The steps of a good man (or women) are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be *utterly cast down*; for the Lord upholds him with His hand NKJV

What were the signs of their dedication?

IV. Submission to the Word of God

This was a time a national renewal.

V. Separation as the people of God

God had chosen the Israelites to be a distinct people.

Separation is simply total devotion to God, no matter what the cost.

Marriage is a positive example of separation.
The Sabbath

VI. Support for the House of God

The people pledged their support for the Temple

Application for our Lives

6. After we say Hallelujah

IV. Submission to the Word of God



“Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling...”
Philippians in ch. 2:12.

“We don't succeed as Christians because we make promises to God, but because we believe the promises of God and act upon them.” Commentary on Nehemiah.

V. Separation but not isolation as the people of God



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