

Nehemiah 9:1-3 *Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them. The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and they stood and confessed their sins and the wrongdoings of their fathers. While they stood in their place, they read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a fourth of the day; and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God.*

The bigger purpose of studying Ezra and Nehemiah is for us coming out of an exile of the past few years, apart from fellowship and relationships. At the end of the 70 years of exile, some were released to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Others were born in exile and that is all that they knew. That applies to us today, either having a time of separation or withdrawal from a church community or those that have never been apart of a church community. What does it look like to come out of exile? For the Israelites, they re-established the place of worship - rebuilding the temple. Today as we see Jesus taking the sacrifice, we became the temple with the Holy Spirit dwelling in each of us. Revival.

The people began to rebuild their own hearts in **Nehemiah 9**. Nehemiah's prayer is the longest in God's Word. The people stood for 3 hours while God's Word was read, and then spent another 3 hours of confession and worship. It revealed God as a merciful and forgiving God.

Sackcloth and dirt reveals a sense of mourning. It was a sign of maturing - of revealing spiritual progress. To know God means you must know your own condition. It is becoming so aware of our own failures with God in life, knowing that God is God and we are not. Our society tends to want to conceal failures. Yet, the Israelites confessed. **Proverbs 28:13** *One who conceals his wrongdoings will not prosper, but one who confesses and abandons them will find compassion.*

Are you stuck in your trespasses? Nehemiah gives us a roadmap to get free from our human condition. **2 Corinthians 7:10** *For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation...* Do you need salvation? The first salvation is the confession of Jesus as Lord. But we also need rescued from something. This confession is never regretted and has the hope of what God promises to give.

Leonard Ravenhill says, "The self-sufficient do not pray. The self-satisfied will not pray. The self-righteous cannot pray." Nehemiah's prayer is of Israel's failures and God's faithfulness and forgiveness to them. God remains faithful in spite of our failures. **1 Timothy 1:15** *It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost.* We need a Savior.

Nehemiah's prayer has 4 points: failure, forgiveness, faithfulness, following.

1. Acknowledge Failure. We are prone to sin - it's our nature since the fall in the garden. We need to acknowledge our problem of sin. **Nehemiah 9:15-17, 21** *You provided bread from heaven for them for their hunger, You brought out water from a rock for them for their thirst, And You told them to enter in order to take possession of The land which You swore to give them. "But they, our fathers, acted arrogantly; They became stubborn and would not listen to Your commandments. They refused to listen, and did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You performed among them; So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But You are a God of forgiveness, Gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger and abounding in mercy; And You did not abandon them. 21 Indeed, for forty years You provided for them in the wilderness and they were not lacking; Their clothes did not wear out, nor did their feet swell up.* They lacked nothing; they appreciated nothing. How often does that mimic our lives? Do we see what God is doing for us?

Nehemiah 9:26, 28, 33 This prayer highlights our sin. Paul admitted his sin problem in the New Testament as did the Israelites. Nehemiah 9 has the history of humanity and the history of sin, beginning at creation, listing all the ways Israel has failed. We cannot experience God's faithfulness until we will deal with our sinfulness and confess before God.

The Israelites confession flowed out of the reading of God's Word. Their response was to confess sins and express worship. God's Word is the great revealer. The Word is the standard by which we judge our lives not by the standards of others. As we read and commit to His Word, God is faithful to reveal the areas that are unsubmitted and unrelented to Him. As we bring those areas before God, we experience His salvation, His faithfulness, His forgiveness. **Hebrews 4:12** *For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, even penetrating as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

2. Forgiveness is our provision. Nehemiah 9:17b *But You are a God of forgiveness, Gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger and abounding in mercy; And You did not abandon them.* God is ready to pardon. There is no sin that is a surprise to God. He is waiting to forgive our confession. Do we sometimes avoid God because we are unsure of His reaction? Confession to God is always met with forgiveness. Breaking free begins with confessing before God. Be willing to confess. **I John 1:8-9** *If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous, so that He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* That is a promise of God. **Romans 3:23** *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* Our God is gracious and compassionate (merciful). Grace is getting what we don't deserve. Mercy is not getting what we do deserve. Jesus laid His life down for us to receive what we did not deserve. God is waiting for our confession.

3. Faithfulness is His promise. Romans 5:20... *but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.* God's faithfulness is revealed and promised to us. God is quick and faithful to provide forgiveness. Acknowledge sin for what it is - sin. The smallest sin was enough to separate us from God. God is faithful and ready to pardon. He waits for us.

4. Following is our priority. Nehemiah 9:38 *Now because of all this, we are making an agreement in writing; and on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites, and our priests.* This prayer is a confession of the people with an action of repentance. How serious are we of dealing with our sin? Are we willing to give up or change habits and take hold of Jesus? It is not just about turning but about turning to and following Jesus. They committed to make change in their lives. They committed to the Word - the whole.

This agreement was:

- Personal - They didn't blame anyone else. They owned it. We aren't to blame our circumstances, our "If only" statements, or our world around us. Be willing to confess without blame.
- Practical - They gave the Word power, not committing to just parts, not just what was convenient, but the whole. Commit to follow the whole Word.
- Public - They committed publicly for themselves and for the nation. It's the power of community. **James 5:16** *Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. A prayer of a righteous person, when it is brought about, can accomplish much.*

1. What was important for you personally in Nehemiah's prayer? (Nehemiah 9)
2. How do you handle your failures?
3. How can we be more transparent in our failures? and how do we follow our failures?