

Confession & Revival

Text: Nehemiah 9:1-38

Introduction:

1. Chapters 8-10 reveal the three key pillars in spiritual revival: 1. Concentration on the Word (8) 2. Confession of sin (9) 3. Commitment to Holiness. Sequence instructive. God's Word brings light and uncovers our sins. We repent and confess and then resolve to walk differently (repentance = change of mind resulting in change of life)
2. This chapter stands alongside Ezra 9 and Daniel 9 as the great "national prayers" of Israel.
3. Revival involves "turning from our wicked ways" (2 Chr. 7:14)
4. True confession goes beyond admitting our sins in a general way. It involves the "painful and humbling experience of naming specific sins in the presence of God." (Lacey) rehearsal

I. The Process of their Confession (Vs. 1-3)

A. Sacrifice (Vs. 1)

1. In the previous chapter they had been feasting, now they are fasting. God's Word had done its probing work in the conscience.
2. Fasting an important accessory to prayer at certain times.
3. Purpose was to put aside the physical appetites in order to concentrate completely on spiritual things (prayer & God's Word)

B. Sorrow (Vs. 1)

1. 'sackclothes' = made from coarse hair (e.g. goat or camel) and worn in times of mourning
2. "earth upon them" = also a sign of mourning
3. This was evidence of the depth and sincerity of their repentance.

C. Separation (Vs. 2)

1. The wall that had been built symbolized separation from the heathen nations but a personal, heart commitment had to be made on the part of the people of God.
2. A return to separation from the world an integral part of true revival
3. Ezra 6:21 *"And the children of Israel, which were come again out of the captivity, and all such as had separated themselves **from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel...**"*
4. 2 Cor. 6:17-18 *"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."*

D. Scriptures (Vs. 3)

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1. They had been saturated in the Word in the preceding days (chapter 8)
2. The Word of God is again turned to in order to prepare their hearts for true confession.
3. “one fourth” = In Bible times days and nights divided into four parts so this would be 3 hours. Significant time was given to the Word of God. Decline in time given to spiritual matters reveals a serious problem in our churches.
4. Sequence is important: The Word of God, like a mirror, shows us our true state. Like a sword it probes the hidden places of the heart.
5. Butler: “The longer one is in the presence of the Word, the more he will be conscious of his sin. Sometimes when people are growing in the Lord because of spending more time reading the Word, they feel they are becoming more sinful when, in fact, they are becoming more holy. Being in the Word simply made them more aware of their evil conduct, but it has not added to their evil conduct. Being more aware of one’s sins, however, makes one feel he is becoming more evil. When a person falls in the mud in a dark alley, he will not readily see how dirty he has become. But when he progresses towards a street light, he will see his filthiness. And the closer he comes to the light, the dirtier he will see himself. So it is with the Word of God. Little time in the Word means little consciousness of one’s sin. Much time in the Word brings much consciousness of sin in one’s life which promotes repentance as it did in our text.”

II. The Prayer of Confession (Vs. 4-31)

2 themes dominate this prayer: 1. The faithfulness of God 2. The failure of God’s people

A. God’s Character (Vs. 5-6a)

1. His Name is glorious & exalted
2. He alone is God

B. God’s Creative Power (Vs. 6b)

1. He is the Creator of all things
2. He is the Sustainer of all things
3. He is the Receiver of heavenly worship

C. God’s Choice of Abraham (Vs. 7-8)

1. God’s grace towards Abraham
2. God’s fulfilment of His promises – what God says and what God does are in perfect harmony

D. God’s Carrying out of Israel (Vs. 9-11)

1. His power demonstrated in Egypt (Vs. 9a & 10)
2. His power demonstrated at the Red Sea (Vs. 9b & 11)

E. God’s Care in the Wilderness (Vs. 12-15)

1. Direction in the way (Vs. 12)
2. Revelation of God’s Word (Vs. 13-14)
3. Provision of needs (Vs. 15a)
4. Promise of inheritance

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F. Israel's Callous Disobedience (Vs. 16-22)

Against the backdrop of God's abundant goodness, the evil disobedience of Israel is confessed. Note: Praising the Majesty of God leads to confessing the depravity of man.

1. Israel's failure (Vs. 16-18)
 - a. Pride (Vs. 16) – stubbornness & rebellion. “hardened their necks” = picture of un-submissive ox, refusing the yoke
 - b. Disobedience (Vs. 17a)
 - c. Un-thankfulness (17b)
 - d. Idolatry (Vs. 18)
2. God's forgiveness (Vs. 17)
 - a. God's disposition to mercy – “ready to pardon”, “gracious and merciful”, “slow to anger”, “of great kindness”
 - b. Isaiah 28:21 – Judgment is His strange work
 - c. “ manifold mercies” (Vs. 19) – abundant in quality and quantity
3. God's faithfulness (Vs. 19-23)

He “forsook them not” (See also Vs. 17). Evidence of this enumerated:

 - a. He led them (Vs. 19)
 - b. He taught them (Vs. 20a)
 - c. He fed them (Vs. 20b)
 - d. He sustained them (Vs. 21)
 - e. He provided for them (Vs. 22)
 - f. He multiplied them (Vs. 23)

G. God's Conquering of Canaan (Vs. 23-25)

1. God kept His promise (Vs. 23)
2. God gave victory over the enemy (Vs. 24)
3. God blessed them abundantly (Vs. 25)

H. Israel's Cycle of Compromise (Vs. 26-31)

1. Rebellion
 - a. Note: They rebelled despite all the blessings described in the previous verse (Vs. 25). We are vulnerable to backslidings in times of prosperity as well as times of adversity. (See Deut. 8:6-18)
 - b. “cast thy law behind their backs” = disregard for the Scriptures
 - c. “slew they prophets” = silenced God's spokesmen
 - d. “great provocations” = God had shown them “great kindness” (Vs. 17) and “great goodness” (Vs. 25), yet in return they gave “great provocations”
2. Chastisement
3. Supplication
4. Deliverance
5. Relapse

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III. The Plea in their Confession (Vs. 32-38)

A. The fervency of the plea (Vs. 32)

1. 'therefore' = request uttered in light of God's faithful, gracious dealings with Israel in the past
2. "seem little before thee" = "let our affliction be regarded by thee as great and heavy"

B. The humility of the plea (Vs. 33-35)

1. God's justice declared (Vs. 33) Acknowledgement the punishment is deserved is a good sign of repentance.
2. Man's sinfulness confessed (Vs. 34-35)
 - a. Specific confession
 - b. Finney: "Self-examination consists in looking at your lives, in considering your actions, in calling up the past, and learning its true character. Look back over your past history. Take up your individual sins one by one and look at them. I do not mean that you should just glance at your past life, and see that it has been full of sins, and then go to God and make a sort of general confession and ask for pardon. That is not the way. You must take them up one by one...General confessions of sin will never do. Your sins were committed one by one; and as far as you can come at them, they ought to be reviewed and repented of one by one." Pg. 36-37
 - c. Sins of past linked to the present bondage

C. The honesty of the plea (Vs. 36-37)

1. They were in bondage to heathen kings
2. They were in great distress

D. The sincerity of the plea (Vs. 38)

Conclusion:

1. How much time and attention are we giving to spiritual growth? E.g. Fasting, prayer & the Word of God
2. Are we turning from our "wicked ways" and confessing our sins before the Lord?