

Sunday Morning Message

May 27, 2018

A Precedent for Corporate Prayer, Praise, and Worship

Text – Nehemiah 9

Congregational Reading – Nehemiah 9:1 - 3

Introduction

The Book of Nehemiah is a post exilic writing, meaning that it was written after the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon and Persia. The first group of exiles returned to Jerusalem in 538 BC under the direction of Zerubbabel; and, through the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah the Temple was finally finished some twenty years later in 515 BC. Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem in 444 BC, almost one hundred years after the Jews were first granted permission to return. We read last week from Nehemiah 1:1 – 4 and 2:11 – 18, where we saw that Jerusalem was in bad shape, with the walls and the gates broken down.

The beginning chapters of the Book of Nehemiah focus on the re-building of the walls and gates of Jerusalem, and the fortification of the city. In chapter seven, the reconstruction project lead by Nehemiah is complete, and the city is secure. However, there is still a lot of rebuilding and renovation that must be done within the walls of the city. Nehemiah who is known as the “Tirshatha”, or governor, along with Ezra the priest will continue rebuilding Jerusalem.

When we get to chapters eight through ten, the focus shifts from structural rebuilding to spiritual revival, and this revival seems to have been driven by the people, not the priests. (Nehemiah 8:1) In these chapters, we find one of the greatest revivals that God’s people have ever experienced. In these three chapters, we see all of the necessary ingredients for revival.

Chapter eight was the focus of last week’s message where we saw that as the people gathered from morning until mid-day there was a heavy emphasis upon the reading and understanding of God’s word. The word of God was read by Ezra or perhaps even one of the other men that were standing on the pulpit of wood, and then there were men out in the crowd who helped the people understand.

In chapter nine, which is where we will park for a while this morning, there is an emphasis on prayer and praise. The people are corporately confessing their sins, and then praising God for having mercy on them. (See Nehemiah 9:1 – 3)

We also briefly discussed the third ingredient for revival, which is obedience to the Word of God. In chapter ten, the people make commitments to God: (See Nehemiah 10:28 – 29)

1. They would live separated lives and would not intermarry with people who were not saved. (Nehemiah 10:30)

"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14)

2. They will keep the Sabbath. (See Nehemiah 10:31)

"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." (Exodus 20:8-11)

3. They will tithe and make sure the priests and Levites were taken care of. (See Nehemiah 10:32 – 38)

4. They committed to not forsake the House of God. (See Nehemiah 10:39)

"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." (Hebrews 10:23-25)

All of these things are ingredients that can be seen during times of revival. Whether it is a personal revival, a church revival, or a regional revival, it does not matter. When a person or group of people are revived spiritually, all of these ingredients will be present. The people will have a desire for the Word of God, for prayer, praise and worship. People will be humble and contrite before God, confessing all known sins to Him. People will be obedient to what they know God wants them to do: they will live separated lives; they will set apart Sunday as a special day; they will tithe; and they will not forsake God or His house, which today is the local church.

Transition – This morning, I want to circle back to chapter nine and examine in light of this time of revival the corporate prayer, praise, and worship that took place in this great revival.

I The Practice of Prayer, Worship, and Praise Explained (vs. 1 – 3)

Here we see that the people are still gathering together 23 days after the revival began on the first day of the seventh month, which is the month Tisri. Notice in these three verses the pattern that was established in the corporate worship before the Lord.

1. Here the people are again said to be assembled together. In chapter eight, the Bible told us that they were assembled "as one man", meaning that they were together, they had unity. God is very pleased when His people come together "as one man".

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1)

Paul told the Church at Philippi:

"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;" (Philippians 1:27)

The Church at Jerusalem were "in one accord", and had "singleness of heart".

Here in Nehemiah, we see the people were together, and they had one purpose – God.

God's people today need to assemble together often, but they also need to be assembled together for one purpose – worshipping God.

2. We see also that “they [God's People] separated themselves from all strangers. They came out from among the world, and together separated themselves unto God. God's people today need to be separated from something and to something.
 - a. We need to be separated from the world.
 - b. We also need to be separated unto God:

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,"
(Romans 1:1)

3. We see also that they were contrite and humble. They “*were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them.*” They were confessing their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.
4. They spent several hours reading and understanding the Bible, and then they spent several more hours praying and praising God. (v. 3)

II The Pattern of Prayer, Worship, and Praise Exhibited (vs. 4 – 37)

In this lengthy passage of Scripture we will see a few things by way of example that need to be a pattern for our worship of God within the context of the local church in the twenty-first century.

1. The people were not ashamed to publicly and loudly proclaim their corporate prayer requests and their public praise in front of other people.
2. The people were quick to publicly admit their failures, both past and present.
3. The people were also bold in their assertion that everything good that happened to them happened because God made it happen. They did not try to take the glory away from God. They were also unanimous in their declaration that God had been repeatedly merciful to them, even though they were completely undeserving.

III The Product of Prayer, Praise, and Worship Exercised (vs. 38)

In v. 38, we see the result or product of their time spent in the Word of God, as well as their time spent praying, praising, and worshipping God, which is obedience – a commitment or covenant to live for God.

These people made a decision, and it was both a public and corporate decision that they would serve God.

Our church has a covenant as most churches do. Did you ever read it? Most people have not.

Having been led, as we believe by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and, on the profession of faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and of the Holy Ghost, we do now, in the presence of God, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, in holiness, and in comfort; to promote it's prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrine; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spreading of the Gospel through all nations.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings; faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; abstain from the sale of, and use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage and of tobacco; to be zealous in our efforts to advance the Kingdom of our Savior. We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and Christian courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offence, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of our Savior without delay.

We moreover engage when we remove from this place we will, as soon as possible, unite with another church of like faith and practice where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and principles of God's Word.

That was the covenant our church made with God when this church was formally organized. It's a good one. It was also what you and I covenanted to do when we joined this church. But this covenant was not just pulled out of thin air. It was the result of diligent Bible study, and corporate time spent praying, worshipping, and praising God.

Conclusion

1. Jersey Shore Baptist Church needs to be a praying church – both privately and publicly:

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James 5:16)

"The church that is not jealously protected by mighty intercession and sacrificial labors will before long become the abode of every evil bird and the hiding place for unsuspected corruption. The creeping wilderness will soon take over that church that trusts in its own strength and forgets to watch and pray." (A. W. Tozer)

"Prayer is of transcendent importance. Prayer is the mightiest agent to advance God's work. Praying hearts and hands only can do God's work. Prayer succeeds when all else fails. ... We can do nothing without prayer. All things can be done by importunate prayer. It surmounts or removes all obstacles, overcomes every resisting force and gains its ends in the face of invincible hindrances." (E. M. Bounds)

“Whether we like it or not, asking is the rule of the Kingdom. If you may have everything by asking in His Name, and nothing without asking, I beg you to see how absolutely vital **prayer** is.”
(Charles Spurgeon)

Illustration (Charles Spurgeon preached to over 10,000,000 people) Five young college students were spending a Sunday in London, so they went to hear the famed C.H. Spurgeon preach. While waiting for the doors to open, the students were greeted by a man who asked, "Gentlemen, let me show you around. Would you like to see the heating plant of this church?" They were not particularly interested, for it was a hot day in July. But they didn't want to offend the stranger, so they consented. The young men were taken down a stairway, a door was quietly opened, and their guide whispered, "This is our heating plant." Surprised, the students saw 700 people bowed in prayer, seeking a blessing on the service that was soon to begin in the auditorium above. Softly closing the door, the gentleman then introduced himself. It was none other than Charles Spurgeon. (*Our Daily Bread*, April 24.)

Steve Farrar said: “Prayer is the escape vehicle that lets you decompress from the pressures of life. It provides oxygen for the soul. Without it, your spiritual life will become cold and dead. Without it, you will eventually succumb, and “overload” will claim another victim. A prayerless person is like someone who eats and sleeps but forgets to breathe!”¹

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

"I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."
(1 Timothy 2:8)

Prayer is so necessary in our church, and yet, it is so lacking. We need to pray.

2. Jersey Shore Baptist Church needs to be a praising church

"Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations." (Psalm 100:1-5)

"Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD." (Psalm 150:1-6)

¹ Farrar, Steve. *Overcoming Overload: Seven Ways to Find Rest in Your Chaotic World* (p. 122). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.