

Sunday Morning Message

June 17, 2018

The People's Response to the Preaching

Text – Nehemiah 10

Congregational Reading – Nehemiah 10:28 - 29

Introduction

This morning, we want to quickly review what we have been learning from the great revival recorded in the Book of Nehemiah, and then put a final capstone on our discussion of ingredients necessary for revival. Briefly, we saw that in order for revival to take place in any period of time, including today, there must be: an emphasis on the Word of God; a focus on prayer, praise and worship; and, a commitment to obey the Lord.

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 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 the first message (*A Pattern for Preaching*) 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. (See Nehemiah 8:1 – 3; 5 – 6; 8)

In chapter nine, we saw an emphasis on prayer and praise. (*A Precedent for Prayer and Praise*) The people were corporately confessing their sins, and then praising God for having mercy on them. (See Nehemiah 9:1 – 3)

This morning, we will examine the third ingredient for revival, found in chapter ten, which is obedience to the Word of God. In chapter ten, the people make commitments to obey 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)

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2:15-17)

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Romans 12:1-2)

Warren Wiersbe made an interesting observation regarding separation:

The Jews eventually became so accustomed to the sinful ways of their pagan neighbors that those ways didn't seem sinful any more. The Jews then became interested in how their neighbors worshiped, until finally Israel started to live like their enemies and imitate their ways. For believers today, the first step away from the Lord is "friendship with the world" (James 4:4), which then leads to our being spotted by the world (1:27). The next step is to "love the world" (1 John 2:15) and gradually become "conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:2). This can lead to being "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32), the kind of judgment that came to Lot (Gen. 19), Samson (Jdg. 16), and Saul (1 Sam. 15, 31)¹

Separation is not strictly an Old Testament doctrine, and it is not merely an old fashioned idea. It is Bible principle. Jesus said that we are to be "in" the world, but not "of" the world. We are not supposed to be isolated, but we are supposed to be separated. We are supposed to be both "salt" and "light" to this dark and godless world. Our lives are supposed to influence this world for Jesus, but unfortunately this world that we live in is influencing many Christians away from God.

The Bible says that we are to be "strangers and pilgrims" on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11) We are ambassadors:

"And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." (2 Corinthians 5:18-20)

Our citizenship is in Heaven:

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1994). Be Available (p. 16). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

"For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:" (Philippians 3:20)

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)

The Sabbath was a day that was intended for rest. It eventually became a day when the people of God both rested and reflected on God through worship. The Jews rested on the seventh day and during the time of Christ, would go to the synagogues on Saturday. Our sabbath in the New Testament culture is Sunday, the first day of the week; the day of the resurrection.

Illustrate – In America, when I was a boy, everything was closed on Sunday. Most people went to church.

America was a better place when she rested on Sunday and went to church.

You need a Sabbath, a day of rest and reflection.

Spurgeon stated that working people get more done in a week by resting on Sunday.

Look at the mower in the summer's day. With so much to cut down before the sun sets, he pauses in his labor. Is he a sluggard? He looks for a stone and begins to draw it up and down his scythe, rink a tink, rink a tink, rink a tink. He's sharpening his blade. Is that idle music? Is he wasting precious moments? How much he might have mown while he was ringing out those notes on his blade. But he is sharpening his tool. And he will do far more, when once again he gives his strength to those long sweeps which lay the grass prostrate in rows before him. Even thus a little pause prepares the mind for greater service in a good cause.

Fishermen must mend their nets and we must, every now and then, repair our mental states and set our machinery in order for future service. It is wisdom to take occasional furloughs. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less.²

If you are in ministry, you must find another day to be your Sabbath.

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

² Farrar, Steve. *Overcoming Overload: Seven Ways to Find Rest in Your Chaotic World* (pp. 54-55). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

The people committed to making sure the House of God would be supported. They knew that the Temple was a critical part of their relationship with God. The church also plays a vital role in your life and family. Your budget should reflect that.

Haggai rebuked the returning captives from Babylon and Persia because they started construction of the Temple when they first returned to Jerusalem, and then they abandoned the project to work on their own houses. (See Haggai 1:1 – 13)

"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts." (Malachi 3:8-12)

You and I are not under the Old Testament Law to give ten percent. But, remember the principle of tithing preceded the Law, and the practice of tithing was commended by Jesus. Tithing is a good place to start for the Christian. Paul reminded the Philippian Church that because they were faithful to give, God was going to take care of them.

"But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."
(Philippians 4:19)

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33)

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)

Don't forsake church. Make church a priority for your family. You are not under law to go to church, but you are far better off spiritually when you make every effort to be faithful to God's house.

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Conclusion

The great revival of Nehemiah and Ezra's day would not have happened unless the people were willing to obey that which God taught them in the word. The people's response to the preaching was obedience.

Let's review the process:

1. God spoke to the people through the reading of the Word of God.

2. The Levites made sure the people understood what they read.
3. The people rejoiced and praised the Lord for all that He had done for them, for forgiving them and restoring them back into their land; and, for giving them the Word of God.
4. The people commit to obey what they have learned from the Bible.

We need to read the Word of God, make sure that we understand what God is saying, and then put into practice that which he teaches us.

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." (James 1:22-25)

Howard Hendricks said, "the opposite of ignorance is not knowledge, it is obedience."

The Book of Ezra tells us that Ezra was not just a hearer, but a doer of the Word.

"For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." (Ezra 7:10)

Illustrate Walking with God sheets. – "What Does God Want Me to Do"

When you do your devotions, read the Word, meditate upon it, and then allow God to impress upon you ways to apply it to your life.

When it comes to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. Be looking for ways to apply the teaching to your life. Make a decision to obey what you learn.