

Sermon Outline

“The People Confess Their Sin”

Nehemiah series, part 7 – Nehemiah 9 – Joshua Harris – March 20, 2011

Introduction

1. When Nehemiah first heard that the walls of Jerusalem lay in ruins (Nehemiah 1:4), he sat down and wept, fasted and prayed. Nehemiah responded with this kind of emotion not simply because of the condition of the walls. He wept because he understood that the broken walls pointed to his people’s broken relationship with God. Their spiritual condition was in ruins, and their greatest need was to turn away from their sin and back to God. They needed *spiritual renewal*.
2. It’s not easy to be honest about ourselves and our history. We tend to rewrite history to look like the hero who deserves recognition or the victim who wonders why bad things happen to good people. But when the Holy Spirit opens our eyes to see ourselves in the light of God’s glory, we stop the revisionist history and acknowledge honestly who God is and who we are. In Nehemiah chapter 9, we see a whole nation doing this.

They Remember Who God Is

1. Sin is insignificant to a people who view God as insignificant. The confession and humiliation in Chapter 9 only makes sense when we understand the greatness of the one who has been wronged. God’s people begin by remembering and recounting the character of God.
 - a. In verse 6, they remember that he alone is LORD, the one who rules with all authority and power. He is the creator who made heaven and earth, and who therefore owns everything. And every minute of every day, every living thing is sustained by his power.
 - b. In verse 7, they remember that it was God who graciously initiated a relationship with them. They didn’t discover God. He called Abraham and initiated a covenant with his people.
 - c. In verses 9-15, they recount God as redeemer and provider. He rescued them from Egypt when they were slaves. He guided them. He gave them the Law for their good, and he provided for all their needs.
2. The reformation the church needs in every generation is to see God for who he is.

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They Remember the Wickedness of Sin

1. The people don't justify their sin, sugar coat it, make excuses or blame it on others or circumstances. Instead, they own their guilt and take responsibility. This ownership is reflected in the words they used when they talked about their rebellion:
 - a. Verse 16: they "stiffened their neck."
 - b. Verse 26: they "cast their law behind their back."
 - c. Verse 29: they "turned a stubborn shoulder."
 - d. Verse 30: they "would not give you ear."
2. Sin is refusing to bow before God as Lord. It is casting his law behind us. It is turning away from him and refusing to listen. When we place this rejection of God's rule against the backdrop of his care, his goodness, his love, and his provision, we see the wickedness of our sin.
3. We must resist the lie that God's grace means sin is no big deal. The truth is that grace *is* a big deal because sin is so serious. Grace is amazing because God is holy and must punish all sin. If we've truly known God's grace, we will be people who turn from sin and obey God's commands. As Paul writes in Titus 2:11-12, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live ... godly lives in the present age ..."

They Remember That God Is Merciful

1. This chapter resounds with reminders of God's mercy:
 - a. Verse 17: "You are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them."
 - b. Verse 19: "... you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness."
 - c. Verse 28: "Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies."
 - d. Verse 31: "In your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God."
2. The reason the people retell their national history is not just to recount and confess their sin. It's to remember God's mercy. This is also what gives Christians the confidence to

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confess. We confess honestly and freely because our God, in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, is full of mercy toward sinners.

3. Our own history is similar to God's people in Nehemiah's day. Our life story is a confession of all the times we turned away from God, forgot his goodness, stiffened our neck and rejected his law. But that is only part of our story. Each of our histories is also the story of God's mercy meeting us time after time. His grace is greater than all our sin!

Fellowship Starters

1. Take time as a small group to read Nehemiah, Chapter 9.
2. Josh shared that "sin is insignificant to a people who view God as insignificant." In what ways has the holiness, greatness and glory of God diminished in your mind and heart?
3. In what practical ways can you grow in your knowledge and experience of God's character?
4. How did the Israelites talk about their sin (see Nehemiah 9:16, 26, 29 and 30)? Do you refer to your sin similarly? In what ways have you justified your sin or taken it lightly?
5. Paul writes in 2 Cor. 7:10 that "godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation..." (NIV). When is the last time you prayed that the Lord would break your heart over your sin?
6. Like the Israelites, our history is a testimony to God's grace and mercy, despite our rebellion and sin. What is your story of God's amazing grace and mercy?

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