

Pursuing Spiritual Vibrancy and Renewal

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Nehemiah 9-10
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Sermon Theme: After many decades in exile, God had brought the people back to the land. They had now successfully rebuilt both the temple and the walls. Even so, as our text bears out, many of people were not fully committed to Yahweh. Sadly, many had made sinful compromises with the pagan peoples of the land. A kind of religious formalism devoid of power characterized them and thus they needed to once again be confronted with the Word of God, the law of God and repent. Because of remaining sin (and our battle with the flesh, and the devil) lukewarmness, compromise and religious formalism is not something any one of us is immune to. In light of this, there is no believer in Jesus Christ that is not in need of daily spiritual renewal. The passage before us gives us powerful insight into things we can do that will tend to both protect us from lukewarm indifference in our relationships with the Lord AND to promote ongoing spiritual renewal and vibrancy as well.

Three things we can do that will tend to promote spiritual renewal in our own lives individually, in our families and in our life together corporately:

I. Treasure Corporate Worship

- The people in our story, many of who were stuck in cold religious formalism, heard the word of the Lord, the law of God read and in response, together -- they worshipped Yahweh (9:6-15).
- They exclaimed- "Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise (Nehemiah 9:5)." The people then went on to exalt Yahweh and worship Him, in prayer, for how he had been good, gracious and faithful to them as a people throughout their history.
- We see what a key role corporate worship played in this revival, this "Great Awakening" that was taking place.
- Applied to us -- this helps us to see that corporate worship (in prayer, or song of prayer) can play a key role in our own *ongoing* spiritual vitality and renewal.

"Worship is transformative: we become like what we worship (Ps. 115:8)." -- Mark Jones

- When we worship the God who is holy – with our lives and with our mouths -- we increasingly become holy. When we worship the God who is righteous – we become more righteous. When we worship the one who is loving – we become increasingly more loving.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. -- 2 Corinthians 3:18

- In our story, that the people were specific and detailed in their worship. Their prayer did not just make general statements about God such as "God you are good" or "God you are faithful" and that was it.

- Instead, in their prayer, the people focused precisely how God had been good and faithful.
- They reviewed the mighty acts of God in history on their behalf ...moving from Creation to the call of Abraham, to their deliverance from slavery in Egypt and so on and so forth.
- As a church, this is why in corporate worship (our songs are prayers of worship to God) we value doctrinally rich, gospel-saturated lyrics set to singable melodies. It's because what we see in the Psalms and passages like this is ---When we consider the glory of who God as He has revealed Himself in His Word, by God's Spirit, our hearts are changed. They are revived and renewed.
- As an application of our passage, may God help us to continue to treasure corporate worship and may he help us to even treasure it more in the days ahead. The more we see corporate worship as a means of grace and spiritual renewal—as “I need this” --the more we will come to church eager and ready to be transformed and renewed by the glorious God whom we worship.

II. Regularly Consider God's Law

- In response to the Word of God preached, the people worshipped. Led by seven Levites, they also confessed their sins and the sins of their forefathers (9:16-31).
- What led the people to confess their sins was the reading and preaching of God's law that took place in chapters 8 and 9. God's law was the instrumental cause of this powerful revival.
- This points to the fact that spiritual renewal and ongoing spiritual vibrancy and growth as well-- hinges in part on exposing ourselves regularly to God's law.
- "God's law" = God's commands in scripture, including but not limited to the Ten Commandments.

Psalm 119:97 Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day.

Psalm 119:131 I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments.

Psalm 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;

- We are not saved/justified by our obedience to the law. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone. Even so, we need God's Law to daily convict us of sin, lead us to the Cross and thereby revive and renew our souls. We also need God's law to guide us, to show us the way of righteousness.

We are living in an era in which the law of God is not given much attention either by secularists or by Christians. The law, we assume, is a relic of the past, part of the history of Judaeo-Christianity to be sure, but of no abiding relevance to the Christian life....A recent survey by George Gallup Jr. revealed a startling trend in our culture. According to Gallup the evidence seems to indicate that there are not clear behavioral patterns that distinguish Christians from non- Christians in our society. We all seem to be marching to the same drummer, looking to the shifting standards of contemporary culture for the basis of what is acceptable conduct. What everybody else is doing seems to be our only ethical norm.....The law drives us to the Gospel. The Gospel saves us from the curse of the law but in turn directs us back to the law to search its spirit, its goodness and its beauty. The law of God is still a lamp unto our feet. Without it we stumble and trip and grope in darkness. -- RC Sproul

- Application: may we greatly esteem and regularly consider God's law. Even as our souls rest secure in the gospel of grace, may we regularly meditate on God's law in order that we might not stumble and trip and grope in darkness—but instead glorify God in our own lives, in our families and in our church.
- Note: Questions 7-12 in the New City Catechism are a tremendous aid to meditating on God's Law specifically as revealed in the 10 Commandments.

III. When We Sin, Repent

- In response to the preaching of the Word, the people confessed their sins to the Lord, they worshipped, and end of c.9 they also signed a covenant. In that covenant, they committed, in writing, to repent; they solemnly vowed, in writing, to turn from and no longer walking in the sins they just confessed—namely the sin of allowing their children to marry unbelievers and failing to financially support the temple worship of God (chapter 10).
- This reminds us that when we sin, when we violate God's law, it is not sufficient to merely confess our sins to God, we must also repent.
- Sin produces cold religious formalism and death. Repentance on the other hand brings renewal and vibrancy.

"When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'repent' He intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance." -- Martin Luther

- For the believer, this is to be our way of life, every day. Every day, when we sin, we flee to the Cross, receive God's forgiveness, and seek to repent. Knowing there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, In the power of the Spirit, we seek to turn from our sin. And we never stop doing that.

Questions for Discussion/Application:

- Consider taking time to read the entirety of chapter 9 out loud. What do these verses show us/teach us about God -- who He is and what He is like?
 - Note to Care Group Leaders: Consider taking your time through this. There are many aspects of God's character in these verses.
- The prayer of chapter 9 was a prayer of worship (and confession as well). How does corporate worship, God's people worshipping and praising God together (either through prayer or songs that are prayers), promote ongoing spiritual renewal and vibrancy? Describe a time when you really met with the Lord and encountered Him reviving or renewing your soul during a time of corporate worship.
- What things can we do prior to the Sunday meeting in order to facilitate ourselves and our families encountering God at the Sunday meeting? To what degree does timeliness, coming to church on time, matter? How do you want to grow in preparing your own heart for the Sunday meeting?
- What role did the reading of God's law play in this revival of chapters 9 and 10?
- Consider re-reading the RC Sproul quote under point #2 above. What stands out to you about that quote? Do you think we should regularly consider God's law as Christians? Why or why not?

- Psalm 19:7 says "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul." How does God's law revive the soul?
- In chapter 10 shows the people really repented. In Chapter 11, the effect of the revival was that the city was called a "holy city (11:1)." Martin Luther said -- "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'repent' He intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance." What is Luther saying there? What role should repentance play in the life of the believer? What role does repentance play in your own Christian life? Do you find yourself repenting regularly? Explain.
- In what ways do you feel your need for spiritual renewal in your own life?
 - In what ways do you want to grow in faith, hope, love, worship, gratitude etc....?
- Consider taking time to pray, asking God to help us (1) Treasure Corporate Worship, (2) Regularly Consider God's Law and (3) When We Sin, Repent. Pray also that the Lord would help us to experience ongoing spiritual renewal and vibrancy as we pursue these things.