

Nehemiah 9:1-4

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[0:00] Nehemiah chapter 8. We have the great reading of the law. Ezra stands before the people. They ask Ezra to read the law. He reads the law to them.

The law begins to have an effect upon them. They're weeping and mourning. They say this is not a day of weeping and mourning. This is a day of rejoicing. If you remember in Nehemiah chapter 8. If you weren't with us. I'll remind you of this. The first verse says that it was the first day of the seventh month. Of that year. The seventh month is a very important month.

In the nation of Israel. In their calendar. And it was the first day of the seventh month. Which we would call. If you go back to the book of Leviticus. And you read all those occurrences. Where it starts speaking of all the festivals.

And the annual celebrations. And the things they were supposed to be doing. The first day of the seventh month. Was the festival of trumpets. In which they blew the trumpets. The trumpets that would remind the people.

[0:52] Of the soon coming day of atonement. That would take place. On the tenth day of the seventh month. And it would remind them. To prepare their hearts. And to prepare their minds. For the day of atonement.

Which by the way. Was the only day. According to the law. That everyone in Israel could say. That they were absolutely clean and clear of all sin. And they were undoubtedly forgiven.

Was on that one day of atonement. And that was a day of rejoicing. And a day of celebration. And that was followed by. On the fifteenth day. Of the seventh month. The festival of booths.

We see them observing that. In the eighth chapter. Where they hear in the law. They're supposed to. Go out into the hillside. And the countryside. And to cut. These limbs. Off of these trees.

And each is to build a booth. And they're living that booth. And it seems strange to us. But the reason they had the festival of booths. Was to remind them. That they were a sojourning people. That God led them through the wilderness.

[1:47] For forty years. And the sandals on their feet. Did not wear out. And the clothes on their backs. Did not grow thin. And God provided for them. And he sustained them. Even when they were a nomadic people. Getting.

Set free from Egypt. Being brought into. The promised land. And the festival was to remind them. That they were a people. Longing for a home. That only God could provide.

And that God is a sustaining God. And a providing God. And all of these things. Had happened in the seventh month. There was the reading of the word. There was the observance.

Of the three festivals. Or the three annual celebrations. And God is using all of these. To do something. When we look at Nehemiah. We are reminded. That Nehemiah. Is not just God's instrument.

To rebuild the wall. Around Jerusalem. The rebuilding of the wall. Was a part of what Nehemiah. Was called to do. We find the calling of Nehemiah. In the first chapter. Where it says.

[2:43] Nehemiah asked. Concerning the people. Of Jerusalem. The calling of Nehemiah. Was to rebuild the people. Not rebuild the walls. The first thing he did.

Much like Christ. He met a physical need. So that he would be able. To impart a spiritual truth. The physical need. At that time. Was the walls were in shambles. And the gates were burned.

And they were an. Insecure people. Because they had no. Mean or mode of protection. Around them. And they were living. Among the people of the land. So they rebuilt the wall. And they did it.

In a record number of days. And God showed them favor. But the word. Didn't stop there. Now we have to rebuild the people. So that's what I want you to see tonight. Repairing a broken people. Found in Nehemiah. Chapter 9. Verses 1 through 4. It says. Now on the 24th day of this month. That would be the 7th month. Now on the 24th day of this month. The sons of Israel assembled with fasting.

[3:41] And in sackcloth. And with dirt upon them. And the descendants of Israel. Separated themselves from all foreigners. And stood and confessed their sins. And the iniquities of their fathers.

While they stood in their place. They read from the book of the law. Of the Lord their God. For a fourth of the day. And for another fourth. They confessed. And worshiped the Lord their God. Now on the Levites platform.

Stood Joshua. Bonnie. Cadmiel. Shabaniah. Bunai. Sherabiah. Bonnie. And Chenana. And they cried with a loud voice. To the Lord their God.

And we're going to stop right there. Because once we get into verse 5. Where it says. They declare to arise. And bless the Lord your God forever. And the blessing. On who the Lord God is. And they kind of go through.

The history of God's interactions. With his people. And it is an amazing testimony. Of this. By the way. Just complete side note. We'll get to this. If the Lord allows us to.

[4:35] On Sunday night. If not. It will be Wednesday night. Or if the Lord tarries. Whenever we gather back together. Around Nehemiah. There's some wonderful truths. Here found in this ninth chapter.

As God's people. Recount who he is to them. And how he has interacted with his people. And some really great applications there. One of them.

I'll just go ahead and tell you this. On the side. I was asked Sunday. Yes. There was just a few people here. But I was asked Sunday. As one of the last few. Walked out the door. Asked me. I understand that God allows.

Or there are bad things in the Old Testament. And there's all these. These evil things that seem to happen. That judgments of God seem to fall. And he said. I can reconcile that in my mind. And I just accept it by faith. That the God of the Old Testament.

Is the God of the New Testament. Who seems to be a God of love. And peace. And patience. But how do I answer. People who question me. On that. How do I answer. The people that say. Why does the God of the Old Testament mean.

[5:31] And the God of the New Testament loving. Hey. The answer to that. By the way. Is found in this ninth chapter. And it's in this word. And I'd missed it. Maybe it's because it was fresh on my mind. God allowed me to see that.

I think it was Monday. Or Tuesday. As I was reading through this. I think it was Monday night. In that ninth chapter. What it says. Is God gave them over. To the enemies. And God gave them over. To their ways. Do you know what the greatest judgment. That God ever. Renders to an individual. Is when God gives them over. And he takes himself out of the picture.

By the way. That's a consistent theme. Because it says in the book of Romans. Was God gave them over. To the desires of their flesh. And God gave them over. To the lust of their hearts. And God gave them over. It says. In the book of 2 Thessalonians.

That God gave them over. To a deprived mind. A deprived mind. So that they would believe the truth. God's judgments. Are nothing other. And I'm. This is a complete side note. It's not in the sermon tonight. Nothing other than him saying.

[6:27] You want to act like I don't exist. Okay. Here's what life is like. If I don't exist. If I give you up. To what you want. That's.

When wickedness falls. And it's. It's telling. Because. It is not that there's a big mean God. In the Old Testament. A big loving God. In the New Testament.

Is that. Without God's presence. In any one of our lives. Then we all. Look like that. And so. The answer to the question. That I was asked. By the young man. Is the answer that I usually give.

Is we like to focus so much. On the judgments that fall. Rather than asking the question. Why hasn't God judged me like that yet. Rather than. Why did God judge those people that way.

Why have I not been judged that way. For I am just as deserving. Of the judgment that they received. So that's a greater way to ask the question. If anyone ever asked you. Why did God issue the death of all this.

[7:21] Well why hasn't God issued the death sentence to me yet. Because when I get through the book of Leviticus. And I said it kind of tongue in cheek. But I mean it literally. I don't get past the fifth chapter. And I'm already stoned. And neither do you.

We had a discussion with our youngest one this week. Honor your father and mother. This is the first commandment with a blessing right. And he said what does that mean. We said well we can tell you what it meant. If you didn't do it.

He said what's that. We said you were stoned. His mom said yeah. In scripture if you did not honor or obey your parents. You were stoned. He said like dead. And she said yeah like dead. He said like people threw rocks.

And you're like yeah that's what happened. He said boy I'm glad that's changed. I said no the standard hasn't changed. It hasn't has it. The law has not been made null and void.

There's just grace and mercy. And the fact that all of us have done it. And none of us have been stoned. That's the reality. The standard hasn't changed. I deserve stoning.

[8:16] We all deserve stoning if we want to be honest. But that's just the way it is. Okay let's get back to our text. So in the first four verses I want you to see what it looks like to repair a broken people. First thing I want you to notice in these first four verses.

Is this is a time of conviction. It says now on the 24th day of this month. Now the timing is essential. From the first day of the seventh month they began to hear the word of the Lord read to them. On that first day upon hearing the word of the Lord read to them. They began to be broken and to weep and to mourn.

And the commandment from the platform from Ezra and the Levites and even Nehemiah. They said do not mourn and weep for this is a day of rejoicing. The sounding of trumpets.

The observance of the festival was intended to be a day of celebration. For the day of atonement is coming. And so they didn't. They did not rejoice because they did not mourn.

[9:14] They did not weep. Because as we looked at to rejoice is a choice. And so they said we will rejoice in the Lord. And each and every day they gathered together and they heard the word read. And the word was explained to them.

And they were given the sense and the translation of the word. The scribes and the Levites were teaching among the people. We'd call that small groups. There was the reading from the platform. Very first mentioning in scripture of expositional preaching. And then somebody was given the sense of what the word has said. And people are receiving it. But they're receiving it being told it is a time of rejoicing.

And then they recognize well there's some matters we need to do. So the day of atonement comes. Their sins are washed clean. They are forgiven. Then the time of booths come. And so they go out and they cut booths.

And all this time. And on the 15th day the festival booth starts. And it starts. And you can do the math real quick in your head if you want to. It starts with a day of solemn rest.

[10:10] And a day of recognition. It is a high Sabbath. This is the beginning of the festival booths. Then they observe it for seven days. They live in their booths for seven days. And then the eighth day is a day of solemn rest.

It is a Sabbath. It is a recognition. Wow. We just lived in booths. Which gets you to by the way the 24th day. And on the 24th day.

They assembled with fasting and sackcloth and dust and ashes. And all we are trying to say is. This was the first time they could actually mourn and grieve over the reality of what they had just heard.

They observed the festivals. They observed the celebration. But now as soon as they had the opportunity. The rejoicing is done. The recognition of the festivals has passed.

They have acknowledged God is holy. They have acknowledged that God preserved them. But now in the first opportunity they have on the 24th day. They didn't wait an extra day. On the 24th day

they come back.

[11:15] But this time they don't come back even in solemn rest. They don't come back and rejoicing. This time they don't come back sounding trumpets. This time they don't come back carrying branches of trees. This time they come back fasting.

Wearing sackcloth. And they have dirt all over themselves. It is a symbol of conviction. It is a symbol of mourning and brokenness over their sin.

Why? Because a proper understanding of the word of God leads the individual to conviction. It just does. If we read the law.

That is the Old Testament. And we do not feel conviction. Then we have not read it accurately. For the purpose of the law is to convict man of their sin.

And they knew that. They understood that. They were given the sense. This is not a false conviction. But rather this is a true conviction. One that is rooted in the reality of what God has declared to them.

[12:21] And it is a natural result. But we notice too that with the conviction they allowed it to remain. But they did not discount that God had said to celebrate these festivals.

Now we don't have those festival times of the year on this side of the cross. But at that time they did. And you will get to why in just a moment. Why it was important that they waited until the 24th day.

But all I want you to notice is that the time came where they came in a manner of genuine conviction. Friend listen. We cannot repair what is broken until we know it's broken.

And the first way to repair a broken people is for them to understand they are broken. When Nehemiah got to Jerusalem people had been living with destroyed walls and burnt gates for 80 plus years.

And they were okay with that. Until a man comes. He waits three days. He rides his animal around the wall in the middle of the night. And he gets everybody together the next day and says hey guys.

[13:20] This isn't right. We're not supposed to be living like this. This is bringing shame to the name of the Lord our God. And it takes 52 days and they rebuild them.

They had lived there for over 80 years with the walls. But nobody told them it was broken. But as soon as God raised up an individual who said this has to change.

This isn't right. The people worked together side by side. Varying people from varying backgrounds. Laboring side by side. Men, women, craftsmen, perfumers, priests, and Levites.

They were all laboring and they all for one. Why? Because something is broken and it needs to be fixed. And they realized that. The purpose of the law is to bring that conviction because you cannot repair what you do not know is broken.

And that's why it's absolutely essential in our lives. We very seldom pay attention to things that we think are okay. And we will very seldom try to fix something in our life as long as we think it's okay.

[14:28] This is why I believe that we ought to have the fullness. Old Testament and New Testament in our reading plans and purposes. I love the New Testament. I love the writings of Paul.

I love grace and mercy and redemption and restoration. I love the book of Romans. For in it I found my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I love the realities that I can find in those pastoral epistles.

And they challenge me at some levels. But it is the conviction of the law that brings me to my longing for a Savior.

The reason I love the New Testament so much is because I know what the Old Testament says about me. I realize the repair that has to take place in my life.

And I realize the brokenness that exists. And so therefore when I open up the pages of the New Testament. And I see that this is my Savior.

[15:31] This is my Redeemer. We will not repair what we do not know is broken. And conviction is the first step to that. Jesus says the Holy Spirit comes.

Why? To bring conviction. Praise God for conviction. Don't ever say, Lord I wish I wasn't convicted. Praise God for conviction. For it shows us the area of our lives in which are broken and they

desperately need repair.

It was a time of conviction. Number two, it was a time of consecration. That is, they set themselves apart. Look at what it says. Now on the 24th day of this month, the sons of Israel assembled with fasting and sackcloth and with dirt upon them.

And the descendants. By the way, there's a change here in terminology. The first verse says they are the sons of Israel. The second verse says they are the descendants of Israel. It seems kind of subtle in the New American Standard.

But if you read in its original language, it would be like this. The sons of Israel and then the seed, singular, of Israel is in the second verse. So we can read it that way. The seed of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and iniquities of their fathers.

[16:37] So I want you to notice what happens now. The seed of Israel separates themselves from all foreigners. We do know from the book of Ezra. We also know from later on in the book of Nehemiah that a number of the people of Israel had intermarried with non-Israelites.

They had intermarried with the people around them. Some of them had even had children with those mixed marriages, if you will. But for this moment, the seed separates itself. It consecrates itself.

Now that's important. It is important because it is the seed of Israel that has the covenantal relationship with the Lord God Almighty. Beginning from the book of Genesis.

That it would be the seed of a woman who crushed the head of Satan. We don't have to trace this again. We did it around Christmas time, right? And we can trace every one of those covenantal promises to a seed.

The seed, the seed, the seed, the seed, the seed. And now all of a sudden we see the people of God setting themselves apart for a season.

[17:40] Why? Because they don't want to be a people among other people. No, they are the people of the Lord God Almighty meeting with the God they are in covenant relationship with.

God has called his people to live among others. He has called them to be of others. He sets them apart.

And again, in case we missed this because we have the tendency to say, oh, that's an Old Testament teaching. Paul would say, what? What fellowship has light with darkness?

And the reality that even today in the church age, the people of God are a consecrated people. It's just literally a word that's set apart for holy service.

You, as a believer in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, are set apart for holy service. You say, ah, well, pastor, I'm not set apart. No, yes, you are.

[18:44] For good works which he prepared before the foundations of the world were laid for you, that you may walk therein. That's your holy service. May not be vocational ministry, but it is a holy service.

I believe it was C.S. Lewis who once said that our very being and even the air that we breathe, everything about ourselves belongs to the Lord God Almighty.

Our whole being, we have been fashioned and formed in our mother's womb. He has ordained the number of our days. He has called us into existence and sustains us.

So whatever our arms do, they do for the Lord. Whatever our legs do, they do for the Lord.

Whatever we do in occupation and recreation ought to be as to the Lord.

For we are entirely his. We have been set apart. And so when they get ready to repair the brokenness of the people, they set themselves apart physically to remind themselves of what they are spiritually.

[19:56] They are called to be a set apart people. Too often what has happened, if you read the history of the church throughout the ages, church gets in trouble when the church is no longer set apart.

When the church becomes just a greater extension of the world rather than being different from the world. Times of awakenings and revivals, genuine revivals.

I don't necessarily mean planned revivals. You know this about me. If you don't know anything, I'll let you know. We cannot plan revivals. We can plan. So I'm not talking about we're going to have a revival meeting.

No, we have revival. Revival happens. You revive something when it is what? It's dead, right? So dead things don't plan when they're going to wake up. Revival happens when the people of God show up and God awakens them. Then there is a revival. That does not mean we cannot plan times, but we cannot say, hey, we're going to have a revival. [21:05] So I know people say that, but I'm trying to get us away from that. So when I say revival, I mean genuine revival and genuine awakening and genuine God breathed moments in history have all happened when God's people were set apart.

And they were set apart unto him to meet with him. Now that is one advantage to plan in that where we say, hey, we're going to set ourselves apart to meet with the Lord our God for X number of days. And if revival happens, praise be to God. That's different. But it is when his people set themselves apart and said, we're going to consecrate ourselves for a season. That's exactly what's happening here.

It is repairing the brokenness of the people. Number three, notice this is a time of confession. Because conviction brought about consecration, which led to confession. It says there in the second verse that they set themselves apart and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. Now to us, it seems kind of strange. They confessed their sins and they confessed the sins of their fathers, the people who went before them. [22:14] And we find this repeated refrain. If we find in the book of Daniel, when Daniel is reading the prophet Jeremiah and he finds out that Jeremiah had ordained 70 years. And Daniel knows the 70 years have come to fruition.

And Daniel begins to pray and Daniel is confessing his sins and the sins of the fathers and the sins of the nation. Nehemiah is praying over his sins and the sins of the nation and the sins of his fathers.

Ezra the same way. And so we find these people that are always praying about the sins of the past and confessing their own sins. And we ask ourselves why. Well, the answer to that, by the way, is always found in Scripture.

In the book of Leviticus, God decried and declared what would be the judgment of his people for disobedience. And he says there near the end, in the last few chapters of Leviticus, that if his people walked in unfaithfulness and if his people walked in disobedience, then the judgment of God would be that he would disperse them among the nations.

Remember that, right? I would send you among the nations. The nations would inhabit your city and they would inhabit your city and your city would become a desolation. And people would wag their head and say, man, God has judged his people.

[23:18] And so the visual impact of the city and its destruction would be a reminder to everybody else that God had judged them and that they would be distributed among the nations around them. Think the Assyrians and the Babylonians and then that becomes the Medo-Persians and then finally the Persians.

And you have all these different cities and we call it the diaspora. They're everywhere there. And God's word had come forward. But to restore them, God said, but if my people, this is what he says, will confess the sins of their fathers and their sins, then I will remember them.

So God had declared that they would confess the sins of the past and the sins of the present. Why? Because we have a habit as mankind, by the way, to sin and retail and confess and wholesale.

I've said that before. That is, our sins are intentional acts of disobedience. But when we confess, we say, Lord God, forgive me for everything I've done wrong. That is, we sin and retail, but we confess and wholesale.

And what God is saying here is, I want you to declare verbally and vocally every way your fathers went wrong and every way you went wrong.

[24:34] Why? Because we do not repair it until we name it. And he begins to say, this is what they did. This is how we've done it.

This is. And so they are going through. And you'll see in the remainder of this chapter, they begin to do that. And they say, this is how we disobeyed you. This is how we ignored you. This is. And they are owning it.

Right. And in that confession is a reminder, a reminder of all the failures, not so that we can focus on the failures, but so that we can realize this is wrong, that I should not walk in that way. And they are being intentional about owning the mistakes. And they stand and they confess the sins and their iniquities of their fathers. And while they stood in their place, they read from the book of the law of the Lord their God.

By the way, that's only the first confession. The first confession was, God, we have sinned in this way and our father sinned in this way. This is what we have done. But there's a second confession. [25:38] Don't miss it. So then they read from the law for a fourth of the day and then for another fourth of the day, they confessed and worshiped the Lord their God. So the second confession is just as important.

They confess who God is. The first confession is we confess this is how we have messed up. This is how our father sinned. This is how we sinned.

This is our iniquities. And the second confession is, and this is who you are. One of the names of God we will find in here is that you are the Lord God who restores.

And they begin to confess who he is. Why? Because if all we do is confess where we mess up, then we are just simply in agreement with everyone around us that we have problems.

But when we confess who God is, we are acknowledging that God, we do not deserve who you are. But your ways are greater than our ways. You are a God who restores.

[26:38] You are a God who redeems. You are a God who forgives. You are a God who provides means for cleansing. You are a God who's in covenant relationship. And when we confess, see, too often if we get hung up on the first confession, then the enemy of our souls is going to use it to bring us down.

Don't forget to confess who God is. Okay, I don't need anyone to tell me who I am, for I know, just as you know who you are, better than anyone else.

You know the testimony of your own heart and the testimony of your own lives. But what we do need is for others to stand beside us and to continue to confess, but who is the Lord God Almighty? And to lead to worship. Don't stop in the mourning and the weeping and the confession of iniquities. Use that as a springboard to go to the confession of who he is, which leads to worship.

It is a time of confession. You don't rebuild people simply by telling them how bad they are. You rebuild people by telling them how bad they are and how good he is.

[27:54] Because that's the only thing that rebuilds each and every one of us. We know we're bad. We do. As much as we try to convince ourselves, we know that.

But we all too often forget exactly who he is. And you begin to confess who the Lord is, who God is. And all of a sudden this becomes a time of worship, which leads us to the fourth thing and the final thing. This is a time of communion. It's a time of communion. As we've been reading through this, it is amazing because in the eighth chapter, the people ask Ezra to read to them from the book.

And Ezra reads the book. And then we find, again, later Ezra is reading the book. We get to the ninth chapter and we're on the 24th day of the seventh month.

And notice the absence of Ezra and Nehemiah. It's not Ezra reading the book. It is the people coming together and weeping and mourning.

[29:05] And the Levites are there. The Levites are the servants of the temple. They are there on the platform. We don't know if Ezra is there or not. He is simply not mentioned as being the one who's reading the book. But it is the people who are already living there.

The people that Ezra and Nehemiah went to. By the time we get to the end of the ninth chapter, there will be this covenant that they enter into in the tenth chapter. It gives us the listing of the names of the individuals who signed the covenant.

Nehemiah's name is there, but Ezra's name is not. I don't know if Ezra went back to Susa about that time.

Or if his work was completed at that time. There is this distinct absence of Ezra the priest. But what we do have is the people are in communion with the Lord, their God.

And the Levites are crying out and the people are crying out. And they are worshiping and praising him in a communion relationship alongside one another.

[30:21] They're not being led by the priest on the platform who's doing it. There are Levites there who are crying out. And all the people are crying out. And all the people are confessing the Lord, their God. But this is just a time of sweet communion with the Lord.

This is not a time of the priest scribe teaching them. This is just a time of God's people being with him. And it's there that he begins to repair them.

Nehemiah and Ezra are the people that God used to lead them there. But when they got there, they themselves meet with the Lord God Almighty.

For they, as a nation, are in covenant relationship with him. And they are in sweet communion with the Lord for a season in which he repairs and restores them. Will they maintain perfection?

No, absolutely not. But we'll get to the end of the chapter and we'll find, I can't wait to get to where Nehemiah's pulling people's beards out. That's kind of cool, right? He gets upset and starts yanking people's beards out and getting separated.

[31:29] But why does he have the right to do that? Because they had met with the Lord, their God. And they knew what was expected of them. They knew the commands.

God had already restored their worship and set them apart. And then they said, ah, forget it. And they went about living however they wanted to live. But it is this repair of brokenness that has to take place.

These matters, again, is just laying the foundation. Laying the foundation. Sunday morning, during the Sunday school hour, we'll look at the Bible. The first thing we'll ask is how we got our Bible.

What about the canon of the Old Testament, the canon of the New Testament? Can we trust these 39 books of the Old Testament, 27 books of the New Testament, how we got it? And really, the Jewish people, until the time of Christ, just to give you just a little precursor information.

By the time Christ shows up on the scene, the Jewish people knew the Old Testament was already complete. And this, this time, is one of the reasons why.

[32:34] What is happening in Nehemiah and Malachi. It is an amazing thing when we can repair broken people. And we start with ourselves.

As we understand that we meet with the Lord God Almighty. He shows us what is broken. But he shows us how he can repair it and restore us for his glory and honor. And we find that in Nehemiah 9, verses 1 through 4.

Thank you, my brothers.