

**Spiritual Renewal: Step Three**  
**Getting Serious about Sin**  
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church  
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.  
July 23, 2023

Text: Nehemiah 9:1-37

Purpose: Every Christian sins but not everyone reflects upon how faithful God has been even when we fail. The Bible is filled with stories of God's faithfulness and man's failures. During the time of Nehemiah and Ezra, the people of Israel were so moved by their encounter with God's word they put into practice what God commanded. Out of obedience came the confession of their sins.

Little Jennie, age six, proudly told her mother that Billy Brown had kissed her after class.



Her mother was quite surprised that her six-year-old little precious girl had been kissed by some selfish boy at such a young age. She asks, "How did that happen?"

"It wasn't easy," admitted the young lady, "but three girls helped me catch him."



A preacher was making his rounds to his parishioners on a bicycle, when he came upon a little boy trying to sell a lawn mower. "How much do you want for the mower?" asked the preacher.



"I just want enough money to go out and buy me a bicycle," said the little boy.

After a moment of consideration, the preacher asked, "Will you take my bike in trade for it?"

The little boy asked if he could try it out first, and, after riding the bike around a little while, said, "Mister, you've got yourself a deal."

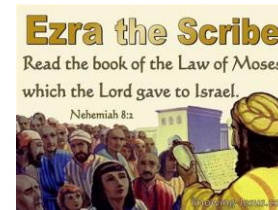
The preacher took the mower and began to try to crank it. He pulled on the rope a few times with no response from the mower. The preacher called the little boy over and said, "I can't get this mower to start."

The little boy said, "That's because you have to cuss at it to get it started."

The preacher said, "I'm a minister, and I can't cuss. It's been so long since I've been saved that I don't even remember how to cuss."

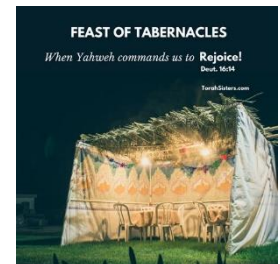
The little boy looked at him happily and said, "Just keep pulling on that string. It'll come back to ya."

Over the last two weeks, we have begun examining a critical time in the history of the nation of Israel. The Book of Nehemiah opens with one man so broken hearted for his homeland that it caught the attention of the most powerful man in the world. You see, Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the King Artaxerxes, the King of Persia. When the King heard about the plight of Nehemiah's homeland, he gave him permission to return to Jerusalem, obtain supplies and materials for its rebuilding, and almost 50,000 other people joined Nehemiah in the rebuilding of the Temple, walls, and streets.

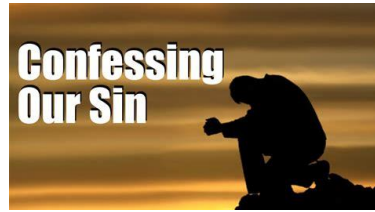


Another person that joined Nehemiah was a spiritual leader called Ezra. Once Nehemiah led the people to rebuild the city, and organized people in and around the city, Ezra led the people in restoring their spiritual heritage. For a whole day, the people gathered to hear Ezra read from the book of the Law. As they heard, they became convicted that they had not been obedient to what they heard there in the Book of the Law.

So, in obedience to God's word, they reinstated the Feast of Tabernacles for the first time in over 1000 years. They had a holy campout. Everyday they listened to the reading of the word, and began to understand more and more what God was saying for them to do.



Nehemiah 9:1-37 is a passage of scripture that is actually a long prayer recounting the goodness of God towards the people of Israel and them confessing their sinfulness and rebellion against God. This passage of scripture is not alone in Israel's confession and retelling of God's story of redemption. You can find similar passages in Ezra 9:6-15, Daniel 9:4-10, Psalm 78 – 72 verses, Psalm 106 – 48 verses, and even in Acts 7 – 53 verses.



We need to hear God's creation and redemption story over and over. We need to realize that our lives are simply a mirror of other people's lives found in the pages of scripture. God was faithful to the people of Israel – even after they sinned, God willingly forgave them and restored the broken relationships. God is also extending His faithfulness to us today, if we are willing to get serious about our present broken situation with God and take steps to acknowledge it.

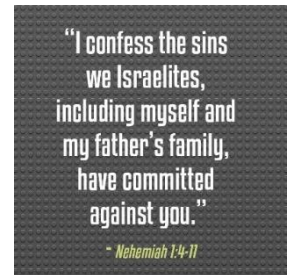


This time in Israel's history was a serious time – a time where the people set aside everything else and concentrated on God. The people had just finished a time of obedience by observing the Feast of Tabernacles. They may have even gone through the Day of Atonement. If you read the Book of Ezra along with Nehemiah you will realize both were happening at the same time. Many of the people that had returned had allowed their children to intermarry with neighboring pagans. In Ezra they were instructed to break off their unions with foreigners. They were to be a separate people, wholly dedicated unto God.

In verses 1 and 2 of chapter nine, we see the people of Israel gathered for a time of fasting, wearing sackcloth, and having their head covered with ashes. Can you picture that? Can you see us calling our church together for a prayer meeting and everyone comes wearing burlap sacks, sunken eyes due to fasting, and a head full of dirt? We don't even walk out of our house if our shirts and pants don't match. And we surely don't want to show up in church with our hair all in a wreck!



But these people were serious about their sinful condition. They didn't care about what the neighbor said. They didn't care about what the other person at the temple said. They only cared about their relationship with God. For 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the day, they read from the Book of the Law, for 1/4<sup>th</sup> of the day they confessed and worshipped God. They were so adamant about their confession of sins, that some even stood on the steps in the tabernacle and cried out with a loud voice to the Lord their God. This was their response to listening to God's word.



### **They Repented in a Spirit of Brokenness<sup>1</sup>**

Have you ever experienced anything close to what is described here in Nehemiah 9? I have seen a few people come forward and pray for their personal relationship with God. I have seen youth groups that I was involved with come forward and pray together. I





have seen outpourings of people coming forward to pray at large revival services. But nothing on the scale we see in this section of God's word.

Those people came with a Spirit of Brokenness. David Jeremiah in his book on Nehemiah said, "True revival and renewal spring from ground that is watered by tears of brokenness, confession, and repentance." **True revival comes from brokenness, confession, and repentance.**

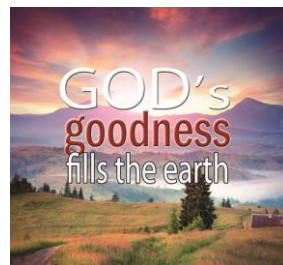


Sadly today, even in the Christian community, when we hear someone confessing to doing something wrong, it appears to be they are more upset they got caught than they are for the original sin they were caught for.

But as far as the people of Israel go, they realized that they needed to go all the way back and confess as a nation for the sinfulness of their forefathers and their sinfulness for allowing their own people to intermarry with their neighbors.

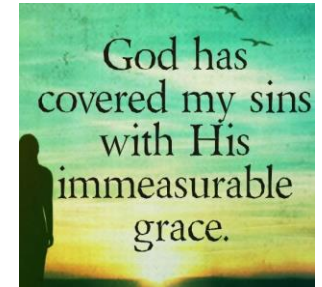
### They Reflected Upon Their Blessings

As they were confessing their sinfulness back to God, they were actually recounting the goodness God had demonstrated towards them. It may seem to be a strange thing for them to do, but they counted their blessings.



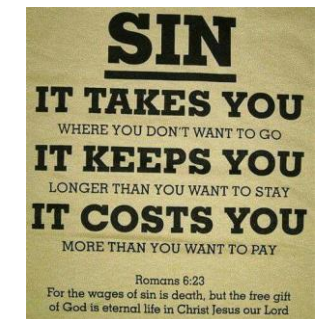
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| Verses 6-8   | Creation to Abraham                |
| Verses 9-15  | Egypt to the Promised Land         |
| Verses 26-31 | Judges to the Babylonian captivity |

Mixed in the middle of this passage of blessings were acknowledgements of the sinfulness of their forefathers. The theme of the prayer focuses upon the faithfulness of God and the failure of man. Over and over, we see God extending grace, mercy, and forgiveness towards Israel. The people of Israel responded with rejection of God and continuing in their sin. We may ask ourselves, "How could Israel do that when God had been so good to them?"



Maybe we need to ask ourselves that same question. "Why do we continue to sin when God has been so good to us?"

When you look deep in your heart, you know there is a place only reserved for you to indulge your own selfishness. We are called to forgo all of those places in our life and turn them over to God. Our pride, our selfishness, our greediness, our pettiness, our habits, our willfulness. These are the areas of our life that we want to keep and not turn over to God. Why do we continue to sin, when God has been so good to us?



In verse six we see God is praised as Creator. He is praised for His grace in verse 7. He is our answered prayer in verse 9, our deliverance in verses 10-12, our revelation in verse 13, and our supply in verse 15.



God is described as merciful, mighty, just, and good. But we are described as proud, rebellious, disobedient, evil, sinful, and wicked.

This prayer switches back and forth between God's goodness to man's sinfulness. Every time man sinned, God was faithful to step in and rescue, forgive, and reestablish that relationship.

This is the story God has been dealing with for all eternity. Maybe you have heard that God is the God of second chances. He is actually the God of the third, fourth, fifth, tenth, and hundredth chance! God will hear our confession and restore us back into fellowship with Him.



### **They Recognized Their Sinfulness**

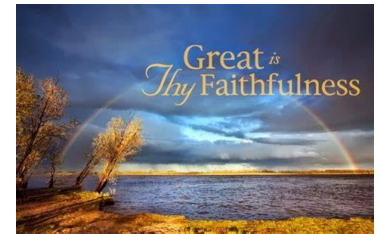
As the people of Israel confessed the sins of their forefathers, they came to the realization that they were just as guilty as them.

Verses 32 and 33 reflect their great confession:  
*“Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God,  
Who keeps covenant and mercy: Do not let all the trouble seem small before You  
That has come upon us, our kings, our princes, our priests and our prophets,  
Our fathers and on all Your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until this day.  
However, You are just in all that has befallen us;  
For You have dealt faithfully, but we have done wickedly.”*

That is exactly what Biblical confession is. It is acknowledging our actions as sinful. The word confession in the Greek is *homologeō*, which means to “speak” the “same as.” When we confess our sins, we agree with God about our sin and call it sin. We want to call our sin – mistakes, errors, tendencies, foolishness, lapse in judgement, or even indiscretions. But if we are to be honest with God, we need to call our actions what they are – sin.

ὁμολογέω  
homologeō / admit; confess

True brokenness is to come before God, agreeing our actions or thoughts are sin, and asking God to forgive us. We will not be broken until we see our sin from God's view. We will not grasp the faithfulness of God until we know the darkness of our sin.



A revivalist by the name of Alan Redpath once developed a list he would use when he was examining his own heart before God. (You will find that list in your bulletin) Sometimes when we pray, we do not know where to begin. These questions can help uncover some hidden area of sin or a stronghold we may have never considered. Listen, and follow along, as I ask these questions out loud.

## What about my relationship with other people?

- Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am a better man than I really am?
- Is there the least suspicion of hypocrisy in my life?
- Am I honest in all my words and actions?
- Do I exaggerate?
- Am I reliable?
- Can I be trusted?
- Do I confidentially pass on what was told to me in confidence?
- Do I grumble and complain in the church?



- When I am involved in a problem in life, do I use my tongue or my knees to solve it?
- Am I disobeying God in anything or insisting upon doing something about which my conscience is very uneasy?
- When did I last speak to someone else with the object of trying to win them to Christ?
- Am I a slave to ... books, dress, friends, work, internet, computer, Facebook or convention?
- How do I spend my spare time?

Alan Redpath would use this list to drive him deeper into a life of prayer with God. In praying, he would examine God's word and his heart. We should do that same activity to draw us closer to God.

## What characteristics do I have that need to be examined?

- Am I jealous?
- Am I impure?
- Am I irritable and touchy and distrustful?
- Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, and self-justifying?
- Am I proud?
- Do I thank God I am not as other people?
- Is there anyone I fear or dislike or criticize or resent? If so, what am I doing about it?

Psalm 139:23-24 says, *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”*



What a great prayer! Our heart has so many layers of self love and selfishness that actually understanding it takes God's help. Coming away renewed and refreshed from an encounter with God takes an open heart and a praying spirit.

## What about your devotion to God?

- Does the Bible live in me?
- Do I give it time to speak to me?
- Am I enjoying my prayer life today?
- Did I enjoy it this morning?

The world in which we live is so fast paced and so demanding that we may miss our great opportunity to meet with the Master in prayer.

To some people the retelling of the story of Israel may seem boring and long. But if you listen carefully, you will find the connection between God's faithfulness and man's failure. Israel took the necessary steps to renewal and restoration.

The steps to spiritual renewal involve **(1) getting back to the Bible**, **(2) becoming obedient** to what it teaches, and becoming **(3) serious about our sin**. Prayer is an important station on that journey to renewal. Don't rush past it – if you do, you may miss the renewal you are longing and searching for.

## **LET US PRAY**

**(Transition into the Responsive Reading of the General Confession insert)**

### **Notes:**

<sup>1</sup>Outline from David Jeremiah's Book on Nehemiah