

God's Rebuilding Process Repent, Return and Rebuild

REVIVAL

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It's been only nine months since Nehemiah first heard the word while in Shushan about the total state of disrepair of the wall around Jerusalem. He spent the first four of those nine months praying and fasting about what to do about it. So, in five months he has gathered supplies, crossed 800 miles of desert, rallied the people and built the wall. Now wouldn't you think after that it would be time to take a little bit of a break? At least a three- or fourmonth sabbatical? But no, Nehemiah now begins to focus on the greatest task of all. He focuses on the transition of leadership. Nehemiah didn't come to Jerusalem to become a little monarch. He didn't come to be king for 30 years. He came to build a wall. King Artaxerxes even asked him, "When are you coming home after you finish?" So now he's got to move the people from the construction phase to the consolidation phase.

Therefore it is time to appoint leaders. He appointed a fellow by the name of Hanani to be responsible for the daily governing of Jerusalem. Then he appoints a man named Hananiah as the military commander to be in charge of the defense of the nation. The Bible specifically points out that he chose these two men because they had integrity and because they had a fear of God. He has gone from construction to consolidation, and now he looks for leadership for consecration.

Nehemiah had come to build a wall and then to build a people. The wall was important only in terms of what it meant to the lives of the people. Many people today assume that construction and structure will guarantee a vibrant life. We tend to think if we just get everything built, get everything organized, and get everything set up we will have a revival. That's wrong! Nehemiah realized that the wall only created the needed environment for his objective. His real objective was the reconstruction of the hearts and minds of the people. He wanted what Peter would call hundreds of years later "the living stones" to be in place so that God could truly bless the nation. So how would he do that?

Just as Nehemiah appointed leaders over civic matters and leaders over military matters, he needed to appoint a leader over the spiritual life of Israel. Nehemiah knew that he wasn't that man. So Nehemiah steps back and lets another come to the forefront to lead the people spiritually. That man was Ezra. "When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people assembled as one man in the square before the water gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the book of the Law of Moses which the Lord had commanded to Israel. On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand." (Nehemiah 8:1-2)

A church can easily make the mistake in thinking that its life is in its structure and organization. If we are not careful, we will make the mistake of thinking that that's where our power comes from; that it comes from our organization, our building, or from our numbers instead of remembering our empowerment comes from God and His word. That's the only place it comes from. How did Nehemiah go from building limestone to building living stones?

1. A hunger for the word of God.

There will be no revival until one craves the word of God. He got them all together and they all had this great hunger to hear the word of God. The reason they were so hungry was because they had been in the midst of spiritual famine. Back in the days of the kings God through prophets said that if they disobeyed Him, He would send them into captivity. In captivity, they were going to have a spiritual famine. In fact, the prophet Amos prophesied "The days are coming, declares the sovereign Lord, when I will send a famine through the land, not a famine of food or of thirst of water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord." (Amos 8:11) Sure enough they went into Babylonian captivity followed by Persian dominion. The people had gone through decades of not being able to hear the word of God like they had when they lived in their native country. Can you imagine living in an environment where you and I did not have access to the word of God?

For a Christian with a heart on fire for God, he doesn't have his arm twisted to feed on the word of God. It's just not an option. In our present culture, we are in the midst of spiritual famine because we're convinced that God doesn't speak anymore, so we don't come to listen.

2. Honored the word.

"He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the water gate in the presence of the men, women, and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the book of the law. Ezra, the scribe, stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood a lot of other men ". (v. 3): "Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them, and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the Lord, the great God, and all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen, Amen'. Then they bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground." (v. 5) Isn't that incredible? Revival occurs when the people treat the word of God as a treasure.

All across America, there are churches that devalue the word of God. It would amaze you how many churches in this city are meeting that do not believe or teach that the Bible is inspired. You would be shocked at the number of places where preachers either totally ridicule or trivialize the miracles and say, "Aw, those fictitious stories are to just teach us the good morals." Let me tell you when that attitude is prevalent there is no life—there is no revival.

Look at how the Jews honored the word of God. The first thing I see that really impresses me was their lack of time consciousness. For six hours, Ezra read the law and they stood and they listened. I can't even begin to imagine that. I realize they developed better listening skills than we have as a people, but they stood and they listened because they were eager to have God speak to them. Even the teenagers were soaking it in. They didn't have a time consciousness.

They honored the word of God by their respect and by their expressiveness. Nobody had to ask them to stand. Ezra didn't say, "Will you all stand for the reading of the law?" Nobody had to ask them to raise their hands. Nobody had to ask them to say, "Amen, Amen." Nobody had to ask them to bow their faces to the ground.

We are not like that because our culture has taught us to control our emotions. There are times when God's word is burning a hole in your heart and you are about to explode, but you are not going to because you are more worried about what someone will think than about what God's word is doing in your heart. Now, lest you misunderstand, I'm not encouraging disruption or chaos or personal shows that are bizarre. I also know that some people show their greatest reverence by their stillness and silence.

"The Levites instructed the people in the law while the people were standing there. They read from the book of the law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read." (v. 7-8) **2. A proper handling of the word.**

First, they read it from the original language, Hebrew. Second, they translated it into the tongue (language) of the listeners which would have been Aramaic. Then it says, "They made it clear what the point was." All the way through the chapter, you see an emphasis on the word "understanding." All too often, preaching is not generated by scripture but generated by the preacher or by some agenda of the church. You must not decide what to say and then see if the Bible agrees with it. Instead, teach the Bible and then decide whether you are going to agree with it. That's the way it works. That's the proper handling of scripture.

That's exactly what I think Paul was trying to tell Timothy. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15) That doesn't mean to handle your agenda or to manipulate it for what you want to get across, but just helping the people clearly understand what God wants them to understand. You don't get revival by a pre-conceived agenda and manipulation. You get revival by accurately releasing the power of the word of God. Revival occurs when people have a hunger for the word when they honor the word, and when they properly handle the word.

4. Humbled by God's word.

"Nehemiah, the governor, Ezra, the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, 'This day is sacred to the Lord, your God. Do not mourn or weep, for all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the law.'" Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food, and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve for the joy of the Lord is your strength. The Levites calmed all the people, saying be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve. Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy because they now understood the words that had been made known to them." (Nehemiah 8:9-12)

There it is. Revival broke out.

1. The people heard the word and they recognized their own brokenness and sinfulness. "They had been weeping as they heard the law read to them." (v. 9) Why? Because as they heard the law read, they realized they'd not done what was required. We had not obeyed God. No wonder we were in captivity. No wonder we were just in squalor down here. We were broken. But their weeping turned to joy as they realized that even though they had left God, God had not left them. Their sorrow turned to celebration.

There are so many people who are scared to death of the word of God because they know it will show them their brokenness. They know it will convict their hearts and make them hurt. I don't want to see it; I don't want to look at it. I don't want to know, let me do my own thing. What they don't understand is that when they face their brokenness, there is celebration just on the other side because the Word and the power of God take them there. They'll never know any real-life happiness or celebration until they go through that brokenness by the word of God to the other side. That's how you are humbled by the word of God.

2. Let God's word speak to you. If you will let Him speak to you. His word will convict. God's word cuts through the facades that we tend to put up and it forces us to look at who we really are. "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12) Everyday, we need to be examined by the word of God.

Mark Twain once said "Some people get upset about parts of the Bible they can't understand. It's parts that I do understand that give me difficulty." God's word is a mirror that reflects us so we see what we actually are, sinful people. It convicts.

3. It consecrates. "For everything God created is good, and nothing is rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer." (1 Timothy 4:4-5) We don't use the word "consecrated" everyday, but it just means to pull aside and prepare for a special purpose. That's what God's word does. Once it convicts us of our own weakness, then God's word pulls us aside and begins to prepare us for a special purpose. It prepares us for great things that we couldn't and wouldn't do otherwise. It is that living sword cutting to the core of our being that cuts us away from that which is evil and pulls us to the light.

4. The word of God completes. It completes our life. We get so concerned with the tangible and material that we neglect the spiritual. In reality, we are spiritual beings wrapped temporarily in a material tent of flesh. You are made in the image of God. That means you cannot be fulfilled without the word of God. You need soul food. No way around it. "For you have been born not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and enduring word of God." (1 Peter 1:23) You exist because of the word of God. God spoke all things into existence, and you have a saving relationship with Jesus today because of the word of God. The word of God didn't just create you, it will re-create you. The only way that you will feel whole is with a genuine relationship with that Word.

Revival is necessary. It always is. We don't need it once a decade, or once a year, we need it continually. The key to revival is the word-the very breath of God that we need to hunger for, honor, and handle correctly so that it will humble us and make our lives a celebration to Him.

I don't know what your individual need is today but turn, repent and build or repent, return and rebuild your relationship to God. Lesson #1332 September 21, 1997