

## **The Rebuild that Matters Most**

Nehemiah 8-10

SERIES “Next”

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We have just a few more weeks left in our Nehemiah series and then we are onto Easter! I want to encourage you to begin thinking right now about who you can invite to Easter services...it's going to be great. Every year we see people come to know Christ through our Easter services, so we want to begin praying right now for who it is we want to extend an invitation to.

We ended last week (Neh. 7) giving honor to all of those who participated in the rebuilding of the wall that surrounded Jerusalem.

What had been in disrepair for a century because of the people's faith and work ethic and commitment...it was rebuilt in just 52 days, and what's really amazing is what happens AFTER the people rebuild the wall.

This is Nehemiah 8-10, and this is what we are covering today. I'm titling the message: **The Rebuild that Matters Most**

Now that the physical rebuilding of the wall is done – and that had to happen! Remember, without the physical walls being rebuilt there was no safety and security...Jerusalem would have always been open to attack.

You had the physical danger that existed, and then you had what motivated Nehemiah the most, and that was he felt with the physical walls down, the reputation and honor of God was at stake and so he moved to do something about it and led the way in rebuilding the wall.

Now, up to this point Nehemiah has been leading the way...we're going to see though - starting in (Neh. 8) that Nehemiah almost fades into the background, and the people begin to take ownership and responsibility to follow the Lord.

It really is beautiful.

They know they could NOT have accomplished what they did on their own. EVERYONE (including their enemies) knew (Neh. 6:16) – that “this work had been accomplished with the help of our God”.

And so, AFTER the physical rebuilding of the wall, the people know they need to rebuild their lives from a spiritual standpoint. And in (Ch. 8-10) we read what they do to start this rebuilding process!

And again, THIS is the rebuild that matters most!

**Illus. NEXT** – Listen, this is true for us. We can renovate this worship center and build onto our NK campus, and get aggressive in our digital and broadcast ministry and start a third location in

Magnolia – but if we do ALL of this to grow and expand our church – BUT spiritually, we aren't growing and expanding in our love for God and the person who doesn't know God...if we're not building walls around our marriages and building a godly community of faith where we care for and love another, we're missing the mark.

We don't want to build physically and neglect/forsake the spiritual – instead, like Israel here in the book of Nehemiah, we want to do both!

Now, what does this rebuild look like? We're going to see three “actions” Israel takes – one for each chapter (8, 9, 10) that will help them rebuild their lives from a spiritual standpoint.

First, we see: **A Renewed Commitment to the Word of God**

**Neh. 8:1-4a, 5-8** – “**And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel.** (Now, that's interesting...again, we are seeing the people take ownership and responsibility. They take the initiative and gather as “one man” – this is an exercise and demonstration of corporate unity...and THEY tell Ezra to bring the Book of Law – the Pentateuch – the first five books of the Bible. This is Genesis through Deuteronomy) <sup>2</sup> **So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month.** <sup>3</sup> **And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate** (on eastern side of Jerusalem – some people draw a line to verses like Eph. 5:26 – “washing of water by the word” don't know about that...it was a large area though where the whole assembly could gather in one spot) **from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand** (Six hours they read and listened to the book. From the light of day to midday – we've all “binged-watch” a show that we've gotten into...well, these people are “binge-listening” to the Word of God.). **And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.** <sup>4</sup> **And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose** (this is where the idea of a “pulpit” comes from – it's a lofted position declaring forth the word...and then we have the names of 13 name men listed that were standing by Ezra's side. Scholar's debate who they were...could have been priests, Levites, lay leaders – a combination of all three...we just don't know. They are representative though of all of Israel. They are standing at attention giving attention to the reading of the Word.) <sup>5</sup> **And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood.** (They are giving honor and respect to the Word of God) <sup>6</sup> **And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.** <sup>7</sup> **Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places.** (Very important...not to just read the word, but to understand it. I'll say more about this in a moment) <sup>8</sup> **They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”**

If we want to rebuild spiritually, it begins with returning to and having a renewed commitment to the Word of God. It's giving the Word of God it's proper place in our life.

The people of Israel had grown so distant from God. They were in exile for years. Many of them no longer spoke the Hebrew language...it's not like today where they readily had a scroll (a copy of their own Bible) they could pick up and read – and even if they could, most of them were illiterate and couldn't read the Hebrew language!

It's why they needed someone to help them understand the Law...to give sense to what they were hearing.

Listen: when we live in rebellion...when we choose like Israel to go our own way...do our own thing what happens is there is a natural drift away from God and trace it all the way back to its root, what we will find is a drift away from the Lord starts with a drifting away from his word.

This is what the Enemy wants! He'll do ANYTHING to get you...to get me to drift from God's word.

Busyness is the Enemy's best friend. He doesn't have to make you bad to get you distant from God, he just needs to make you busy where you neglect the Word of God and spending time with God in his Word – this is where the drift begins and as I've told you before, it's like floating a river!

**Illus. Floating the river** – We did NOTHING to float down the river...we just drifted and when we looked up, we were a long way from where we put in.

This is what the Enemy wants to do. He wants to distract you from the Word of God because he knows the Word of God is what sparks revival. Hearing God's word...understanding it...taking it in...

- It's the Word of God that is like a hammer (Jer. 23:29) that breaks a rock into pieces...
- It's the Word of God that is alive and active (Heb. 4:12) pierces to the division of soul and spirit...
- It's the Word of God that is perfect and sure and right (Ps. 19) that revives the soul, makes wise the simple and enlightens the eyes...

Take an inventory right now...what is it that is keeping you from the Word of God? Whatever it is, you can know with certainty the Enemy is behind it!

And here is the warning: you stay away from God's Word too long, and I've seen it through the years...your life will crumble!

Oh, you can appear like you have it all together...from an outside, worldly perspective you may not be suffering at all- but your spiritual life – if you are void of time with the Lord in his word, you are spiritually impotent and whatever it is you are building is not on a solid foundation.

And if that's you today, listen to me...take a page from the nation of Israel. If you need to rebuild your life spiritually, this is where it starts: It starts with hearing the word of God, understanding the word of God and DOING the word of God!

When these people heard and understood the Word of God, it broke them! When they realized how good and gracious and mighty and powerful God was...and how far they have drifted from what God required of them, they wept!

They were acutely aware of how AWESOME God was and at the same time how AWFUL they were...and they weep. So much so that Nehemiah had to tell them, "Look...don't weep! This brokenness you are feeling is a good thing. It means your heart is soft again.

The Word has done its job and Nehemiah reminds the people, "This is a good thing. Don't weep but instead rejoice!

**Neh. 8:10 – “Then he said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. (You’ve returned to him. You haven’t just decided to rebuild physically. You are rebuilding spiritually SO...) And do not be grieved (this is an occasion to celebrate!), for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”**

Then look at what happens! They come back the next day (v. 13) for more of the Word...and for more explanation of the Word. I've told you before, God's Word is so filling – it's the craziest thing though...it feels you up but leaves you wanting more!

And notice...this is so important! What follows hearing and understanding the word? DOING the Word! Obeying what it says!

**Illus. Experiencing God study** – we've been talking about this for the last two weeks! Obedience is the outward expression of my love for God. "If I have an obedience problem, I have a love problem."

These people hear something in God's Word and they immediately ACT on it.

The Feast of Tabernacles/Feast of Booths (v. 14) was given to the Israelites way back in Leviticus 23. They were to make temporary shelters...think tents made with specified branches of trees and the point of the feast (which lasted for seven days) was to remember and celebrate God's deliverance out of Egypt.

Now, this feast had been kept sporadically throughout Israel's history, but Nehemiah notes there was something different about the way the people kept it this time! It was the manner and fullness of the observance that was different about this!

- The people of Israel got the exact tree branches that Moses called for...

- They gathered as one in a solemn assembly just as Moses instructed...
- They didn't cut any corners...they did EXACTLY what the Word of God said to do by spirit and by letter...

**Neh. 8:17-18 – “And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing. <sup>18</sup> And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the rule.”**

This text tells us that the Feast hadn't been kept and celebrated like this since the days of Joshua! That's roughly 1,000 years! THIS is a renewed commitment to the Word of God, and this is where spiritually rebuilding our lives begins.

What an example Israel is for us in this. It doesn't stop there though. Look at the second action.

We see: **A Renewed Commitment to Prayer** (specifically to confession of sin)

This is all of (Ch. 9). It's actually the longest prayer we have in the Bible. To read it would take around seven minutes to read it all. Think about that! Seven minutes for the longest prayer in the Bible.

It's a good reminder that prayer doesn't have to be long...it just has to be sincere and from the heart. And this prayer is definitely that!

Interestingly, this takes place one-two days AFTER they finish celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles...and that went for a week. One to two days goes by and these people are right back at it. Talk about a renewed commitment.

And this prayer, it's remarkable. It's a corporate confession of sin against God. They assemble themselves with “fasting” and “wearing sackcloth” and putting the dust of the “earth on their heads” (v. 1) tells us.

They are not just saying they are sorry; they are SHOWING they are sorry. Can I give you a word here to describe what Israel is feeling in this moment?

Desperate.

That's the word. You don't seek the Lord like they are seeking the Lord...you don't give up meals and cloth yourself in sackcloth – can you imagine how itchy and uncomfortable that is...they don't care though. You know why? Because they are desperate for God.

You hear it in their prayer, and you see it in the action they are taking. Only desperate people seek the Lord like this.

Can I ask you a question? When was the last time you were desperate for God? So desperate that you gave up a meal to pray and fast and seek his direction?

**Illus. Fasting** – we fast not to get answers, but to get more of God!

Let's make this corporate because that's what Israel was doing – when was the last time we were so broken over our sin we called a solemn assembly just to gather and confess our sin to the Lord?

If we did call one, would anyone show up?

These people stand and they begin praying. Look at: **Neh. 9:5b-6** – “...**Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.**”

Then comes a recollection of how God called them and set them apart...how he moved on their behalf...but quickly they move to confession of sin.

In their worship of hearing the Word of God and it being explained in a way they could understand it, they have become VERY aware of God's holiness and their rebellion from a historical standpoint.

Just think about it: They've been listening to the Law of God for hours on end...they had just listened to it (9:3) for a “quarter of the day”! They KNOW they've broken God's commands.

So, they confess it...they let God know they've messed up – that's essentially what confession is. They call it like it is...no excuses...no yeah, buts!

They call it like it is, and you see this repetition of recounting the faithfulness and goodness of God toward them juxtaposed against their continual rebellion and spitting in the face of God with their actions.

We can't read the whole chapter, but just look at...I'll show you an example.

**Neh. 9:9-15** – “**And you saw (underline every time you see the words “you” action of God – you saw) the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea,<sup>10</sup> and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself, as it is to this day.<sup>11</sup> And you divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land, and you cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into mighty waters.<sup>12</sup> By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go.<sup>13</sup> You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws,**

good statutes and commandments, <sup>14</sup> and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant. <sup>15</sup> You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them.”

God has been good and faithful to them. And what is the people of Israel’s response to his grace toward them as he saw, led, made a way, came down and spoke to them, gave them bread?

**Neh. 9:16-17a – “But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. <sup>17</sup> They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck...”**

And this rhythm REPEATS throughout (Ch. 9). God shows his love to them and bestows on them his mercy, and they are disobedient, hard-hearted, rebellious, acting presumptuously, stubborn – these are just some of the words used throughout Neh. 9 to describe the people’s heart and attitude toward God.

You better believe they needed to confess and repent. And we do too! Listen: The Christian life is one of confession and repentance because we are much like Israel.

God is good to us but in our flesh, we rebel...we stiff-arm God...we forget his mercies and his acts in our life AND this is EXACTLY why if we want to rebuild spiritually, it starts with prayer and even more specifically with confession of sin in our prayer.

We admit we’re wrong and we receive God’s amazing grace into our lives.

**Illus. First Sat. Prayer** - confession does it clears the drain.

I’ve got four girls so our drains are often clogged...and I go in there with Drano or a “drain snake” and after working it a little bit, the water drains again...this is what confession is. It unclogs the drain.

Confession clears the way to uninterrupted fellowship with the Lord. It restores the joy of our relationship with God.

**Illus. David c/o Psalm 32, 51** – His confession led to a restoration of joy. He was spiritually rebuilding his life and confession was a HUGE part of it.

**Adrian Rogers** – “The most miserable man on Earth is not an unsaved man. The most miserable man on Earth is a saved man out of fellowship with Jesus Christ.”

I’ve found that to be true! We’ve got to get good at confession and repentance. There is a one-time repentance that leads to salvation but there is a life-time...a daily repentance of sin that leads to us being rightly related to God.

You can't live in sin and be happy...you can't live in sin and be satisfied...NOT if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit of God will make you miserable. A true believer in Christ will get NO joy out of a habitual, sinful life.

**Illus. Preacher Golf story** – It reminds me of the preacher who called in sick on Sunday morning. He wasn't sick, he just didn't want to go to church that day – you know we have those days sometimes!

This preacher though...he wasn't sick, but he told his staff he was. Instead, he went golfing. And as he was golfing the Lord told a couple of angels, "I'm about to make him miserable."

About that time, the preacher teed up his ball and on a par three sunk a hole in one...it was his first one ever!

The angel said, "Lord, I thought you were going to make him miserable? You just allowed him to hit his first ever hole in one!"

The Lord replied, "Who can he tell?"

You can't sin and get away with it as a believer...the Lord will make you miserable. Confession combined with repentance is good for the soul and this kind of prayer – honest confession will help rebuild a life spiritually.

This is what it takes! Israel renewed their commitment to the Word of God. They renewed their commitment to prayer (specifically to confession of sin). And then look at what they do next. It's exactly what we must do to rebuild spiritually.

It's going to take: **A Renewed Commitment to Practical Holiness**

The people are broken of their sin and after confession, they resolve to covenant with God. Look at the end of Neh. 9.

**Neh. 9:38 – "Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests."**

This covenant is outlined in (Neh. 10). You've got religious leaders and civic leaders signing and participating in the sealing of this covenant. Awesome when the political and spiritual leaders are coming together in agreement to follow the Lord – that's when you KNOW revival is happening.

And look at what they covenant to do...it's a renewed commitment to practical holiness in THREE distinct areas:

### 1. Home

**Neh. 10:30 – "We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons."**

This is all about living distinctly holy lives...this wasn't racially motivated or about ethnic cleansing, but it was about corporate purity. The intermarriage of the nations caused some of Israel's idolatry and spiritual adultery...it's some of what brought the judgment of God.

This was a decision made by Israel that we will commit to holiness in our most intimate relationships, specifically the relationship between the husband and wife.

## 2. Business

**Neh. 10:31 – “And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. And we will forgo the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.”**

Here, Israel was enacting the Chick-fil-a rule...they don't work on the Sabbath! Only here in Old Testament, it's Saturday, not Sunday.

Did you ever hear what Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-a said about not working on Sundays when all his competitors remained open? He said, he liked to give his competitors the opportunity to catch up! He was outselling in six days what they were doing in seven!

Well, here the Israelites were committing to NOT do business the way the world did it...they would observe the Sabbath. They were committed to holiness in their business dealings whether it hurt their bottom line or not...they wanted to obey the Lord more.

## 3. Church

It was the temple for them, but just read (v. 32-39) – they covenanted...to give their best FIRST to the Lord!

**Neh. 10:35-37 – “We obligate ourselves to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord; also to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God, the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, as it is written in the Law, and the firstborn of our herds and of our flocks; <sup>37</sup> and to bring the first of our dough, and our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the wine and the oil, to the priests, to the chambers of the house of our God; and to bring to the Levites the tithes from our ground, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all our towns where we labor...”** (principle of the tithe)

And then read the last part of **Neh. 10:39b – “...We will not neglect the house of our God.”**

They are saying as a corporate body what happened here previously and got us in this whole mess...it's not happening again. We are going to bring God our first and best and take care of the spiritual needs of this nation.

Spiritual rebuilding meant a renewed commitment to practical holiness in the way they lived at home in their personal relationships (specifically their marriage), in their workplaces in the way

they did business, and in how they approached the center of their spiritual life which was the “temple”. They would give to God what was his.

Now, just a word here before we get into our Next steps. I want to make sure we have the principle here, NOT the command. Because of Jesus and according to the New Testament, we are not tied to the command to not marry from other nations or that we must observe holy days and continue tithing our firstborn.

We’re not under law now...we’re under grace.

The principle though...it remains the same. We are to be practically holy. God does command (1 Peter 1:16), “Be holy, for I am holy.”

Yes, we are holy if we are “in Christ” – but that’s a positional holiness. We are called due to the Holy Spirit living in us to be practically holy and this means we are to be holy in the home...in our business and as it relates to the Church.

We are to honor Christ in all our actions as it relates to these three entities, and no one can argue that he deserves our very best.

So, let’s get into the **Next steps**.

Like each week of this series, these are tied specifically to the NEXT Initiative but certainly the application is not limited to it. We’ll breeze through these and I’m going to put this week’s NEXT steps in the form of a question:

### **1. How’s my commitment to the Word of God?**

You will only be as strong spiritually as your time in God’s Word. Do you know it? Are you able to understand it? Are you doing it?

Is there a drift? Listen, let’s NOT rebuild physically, and not rebuild spiritually. If you find yourself away from the Lord, I want to encourage you to renew your commitment to the Word of God.

Get on a reading plan. Grab an accountability partner. Download an app that will help you. Listen to a sermon. Do whatever you can to get the Word of God in your life.

I’ll say it again. What good is a renovated worship center...expanded life group space...an increase in digital and broadcast ministry...a third campus IF it’s NOT aiding people to know and grow in the Word of God?!

So, pray for your life and for our church to ALWAYS be a Word-centered church.

### **2. How’s my commitment to prayer (specifically confession of sin)?**

**Illus. “With purity there is power”** – The power of a confessed and clean life. This is where joy is found...life is found...peace is found.

Next week, we are going to have a prayer and praise service. It our “Feast of Tabernacles” where we recount the faithfulness of God and will worship him through song and praying together.

We will have a time of confession, and it will be a powerful time together. Come prepared and ready to meet with the Lord.

### **3. How’s my commitment to practical holiness?**

I’d just ask it like this – is God getting your best? At home...in your marriage? What about the workplace? Even if you are miserable, you’re not working for man, but for God. Is he getting your best? What about here at church? The NEXT offering was one “on ramp” to give God our best, but what about in your serving? In your showing up and being accounted for?

God wants our best...and he is worthy of our best.

There is so much power when our positional holiness (WHO we are IN Christ) lines up with our practical holiness (WHAT we do FOR Christ).

Listen: I love that we are restoring and building in this NEXT Initiative, but the rebuild that matters most is our spiritual lives.

Let’s not choose to do one and forsake or neglect the other...let’s by God’s grace, do both.

Will you pray with me?

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