

The Joy of the Lord is My Strength
A Study in the Book of Nehemiah
#10 Getting Serious with God

Introduction

A couple of days after the Feast of the Tabernacle (Booths), the Israelites gathered to get serious about their worship of Yahweh. A revival was about to begin:

- 1st step: Broken Hearts
- 2nd step: Reflection on the Goodness of God
- 3rd step: Reflection on Their Own Sinfulness
- 4th step: A Renewal of Obedience

Preparing their Hearts (9:1-5)

1. Read scripture for ¼ of a day
61 of the 66 books of the Bible could be read in one night of TV consumption (assuming you watch the average of 3 hours a night).
2. Fasted
Fasting is one of the three “secret”, or private “habits of grace” outlined in the Sermon on the Mount (along with giving and prayer). In this passage, we clearly see that fasting was expected. In Matt. 6:16, He remarks, “when you fast,” not “if you fast,” and in Matt. 9:15 He doesn’t say His disciples “might” fast, He affirms they will.

Fasting is mentioned 70 times in our Bibles and might be defined this way:

“Biblical fasting should not be considered a method for dieting, but a method for growing into deeper communion with God and being more in tune with His Spirit. The primary Biblical reason to fast is to take our eyes off the things of the flesh and to open our eyes to the things of God.” (Nadia Thomas)

“Christian fasting at its root is the hunger of a homesickness for God. Christian fasting is not only the spontaneous effect of superior satisfaction in God, but also a chosen weapon against every force in the world that would take that satisfaction away.” (John Piper)

3. Wore sack cloth
This is a garment made of very coarse hair (likely a goat). It was worn to demonstrate mourning, submission (I Kings 20:31-32), or self-humiliation (II Kings 19:1). Prophets occasionally wore them as well.

4. Put dust on their head
This is another sign of grief and mourning. See Job 2:12 and Jonah 3:5-9
“We are so troubled by our sin that normal comforts of life are unimportant.”
5. Separated themselves from all foreigners
(These are not immigrants, but rather those who oppose Yahweh.)
See Josh. 23:7, Eph. 5:11 and II Cor. 6:17-18
6. Made confessions-See James 5:16
-Confession breaks the power of secret sin (see Ps. 32:3-5)
-Confession cultivates honesty and purity in a relationship
-Remember, there is only one mediator (I Tim. 2:5)
7. Worshipped
There are many Hebrew and Greek words that are translated “worship.” Eight examples from the Old Testament include Hallal (to praise, boast, rave), Yada (to show), Towdah (to give a sacrifice of praise), Shabach (to soothe or boast, to pronounce happy with a loud voice), Barach (to kneel), Taqa (to strike, to drive a nail, clap hands), Makal (to leap, dance), Tehillah (to sing a new song) and Zamar (to play an instrument). (Taken from a podcast by Dean Hackett.)

In this passage it is Shachah, meaning to bow down. From a position of humility, it's a group effort to boast about God's faithfulness.

** The Levites were standing on the stairs

Their Prayer (9:6-37) This is the longest prayer recorded in the Bible. Other key prayers are found in Ezra 9 and Daniel 9.

- Vs. 6 Adoration: acknowledgement of God as Creator
- Vs. 7-8 God chose Abraham
- Vs. 9-12 God saw the suffering of the Israelites in Egypt
- Vs. 13-15 God used Moses
- Vs. 16-18 The rebellious, disobedient ancestors
- Vs. 19-21 God sustained them in the wilderness
- Vs. 22-25 God sustained them as they entered the Promised Land
- Vs. 26-31 More about the rebellious, disobedient ancestors

Consider the cycle in the book of Judges:

There is the goodness of God displayed, but the people rise in rebellion, God sends some corrective disciplining the people cry out for deliverance, God responds with His goodness, then REPEAT.

Vs. 32-37 Still more about the rebellious, disobedient ancestors

The Point of Decision (9:38-10:29)

They made a binding agreement- a solemn pledge to remain faithful. They do so with a curse and an oath. That kind of covenant is called “karath beriyth. “Karath means to “cut into two.” Beriyth is a serious agreement.” (See Gen.15.)

They put it in writing and sealed it.

Their Commitments (10:30-38)

Vs. 30 “We will not intermarry”

Vs. 31 “We will not buy and sell on the Sabbath”

Vs. 32 “We assume responsibility for caring for the house of God”

Vs. 35 “We assume responsibility for the tithe”

Their Resolve (10:39)- We will Not Neglect the House of God

Vs. 39 “We will not neglect the house of our God.” (See Haggai 1:3)

So What?

The children of Israel got serious about serving the Lord. They prepared their hearts (with actions not just words), they reviewed the faithfulness of God in prayer and then they made serious commitments.

Consider James 4:4-10

Sherry Worel: *Follow my podcasts at: Bible Study with Sherry Worel
sworel@stonebrooke.com

*Contact me at:

Discussion Questions:

1. What did you think about the revival at Asbury University in Kentucky (2/8-2/24)? How do modern “outbreaks” of the Spirit compare to what was going on for Israel?
2. How did Israel prepare themselves before they made their serious covenant with God? Do we usually prepare ourselves to worship the Lord?
3. Is Fasting part of your spiritual disciplines? Why or Why Not?
4. Is Confession part of your spiritual discipline? Why or why not?
5. How serious is it to make an agreement/commitment to God?

Personal Reflections

1. If we want to get serious with God about something in our lives, what might the spiritual equivalent to wearing sack cloth and putting ashes on our head? What might we deprive ourselves of in order to be completely focused on Him?
2. If Fasting and Confession are not a regular part of your spiritual disciplines, what might you do to start including them?
3. Are there any “strangers’ or “foreigners” (Remember, these are not immigrants, but people who oppose the principles of living for the Lord) who you ought to separate yourself from? How would that improve your walk with God?
4. How much time do you spend in the Word of God every day? More than TV? More than social media?
5. Are you at the point of resolve (decision/commitment) on any spiritual issue? What is holding you back. Can you stop right now and make a binding covenant?