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We are in a series journeying through the peoples' return from exile to the land of promise, led by Ezra the priest and now Nehemiah to not simply to return physically and rebuild the walls and temple, but to **return to the Lord in spirit and in truth.**

In Nehemiah 9 – the people do two things: 1) **profess** the faithfulness of God across all generations and 2) **Confess** that they are not like him. They have sinned, and they confess their sins before a Holy God.

The Fruit of this confession is plain – they realize how far they have wandered away from God and how good and gracious He is to forgive. **The Mercy of God** removed the penalty of sin (exile), and the **Grace of God** was lavished on them in bringing them back to the land (to experience the presence/rest of God).

And they deserved neither.

And they knew it.

Confession of their sins brought about the healing promised to the people of God:

*For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel,  
"In returning (repentance) and rest you shall be saved;  
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength." (Isaiah 30:15)*

And as Matt landed last week...

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:16)*

They experience the grace of God and kindness of God in their confession. Again, not making God aware of their sins but bringing them before him that **He might heal them. Make things as they should be.**

### So, what do healed people do?

They respond to God in worship – we will get to what I mean by that, but let us read together, **beginning in Nehemiah 9:38**

*(read 9:38-10:39)*

#### **Nehemiah 9:38-10:22**

A "firm covenant is made in writing (9:39) → literally the covenant is "cut" – covenant in all ancient covenants involved the sacrifice of an animal.

The leaders of people Nehemiah and Zedekiah, 21 priests, 17 Levites, and 44 "chiefs of the people" –

84 in all ...

People representing their families all sign the document with their names on the seals of the covenant they have not made with God.

*10:28-29 – “the rest of the people .... Join with their families and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God’s law that was given by Moses the servant of God and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his rules and statutes.”*

- This is not a casual commitment.
- They were not rededicating their lives to God on some emotional high.
- The “oaths and curses” bit was not just frilly Jewish language around a worship service.
- **Their commitment had incredibly high costs – if we do not do these things, we deserve death.**

### What were their commitments?

#### 1. *We will only marry as God commands (only marry within their people).*

- This was not a racial or ethnic purging primarily but a spiritual one.
- (We do not have to look far in the Old Testament – Ruth converted and believed in God and wound up in the genealogy of Jesus.)
  - With marriage of other peoples came the gods of those peoples – this was the primary reason for exile – they had **forgotten** God and worshiped the idols of the peoples around them (Because they married them).
  - Who You marry, it matters tremendously
- “We will not give our daughters in marriage to the peoples of the land” – an old command of God when the people first moved into the land.
- The covenant of marriage is not only between two people but two people and God.

#### 2. *We will faithfully honor God with our work and rest.*

- They commit to keep the Sabbath (weekly)
- They commit to keep the Feasts
- They will observe the 7<sup>th</sup> year of rest (no sowing/reaping – but a year of trust/rest) when debts were canceled, and the people trust the Lord entirely.
- Business would dwindle – if the people around them cannot trade on sabbath, they would get ahead or go elsewhere.
- The sabbath was the marker given by God to Moses – the very sign of the covenant made with the people of God.

#### 3. *We will faithfully commit to the work of God.*

- V.32-39 – a long list of requirements for the temple
  - Tithes, offerings, the grain, the firewood, the animals, for all the daily work and the festival work.
  - Both in their regular tithes and their freewill offerings – generosity was expected of the people of God.
  - Not because God was in need of their resources, but because He **was and is worthy of their resources.**

Summarized well by v.39: *“We will not neglect the house of our God.”*

- Another way of saying, **“God, I will not forget you. You matter to me. You are my greatest treasure.”** But of course, they do. We all do.

## These commitments were costly

1. **We will only marry other believers** – we have seen what this cost the people at the end of Ezra.
  - There is a high price in carrying out our romantic relationships in ways that honor God.
  - What you do and do not do while dating. Who you date.
  - How you move toward marriage (or just simply moving into marriage at all in 2024)
  - The way we go about choosing a spouse – are they following Jesus or would this be unwise to enter marriage *“unequally yoked with an unbeliever” (2 Cor. 6:14).*
    - Remember this is not a racial unequally yoked (*Galatians 3:28 – no longer Jew nor Gentile because of the gospel*)
2. **Keeping the Sabbath came with sacrifice.**
  - Profitable business opportunities have always been there on days when rest is needed.
  - But the people have committed to remembering the One who saved them and gave them the promised land...*and now has given it back to them again.*
  - Other than a strong desire to obey the Lord does the idea of Sabbath make any sense.
  - Tim Keller – Redeemer in NYC on work and rest preaching to thousands of professionals in Manhattan. - (yes, it is possible that someone else is going to get ahead)
3. **Not owners but stewards**
  - The people’s property was not their own.
  - Even the people’s children were not their own (the firstborn male would be dedicated to the Lord and committed to service in the temple).
  - God’s way of ensuring that they understand that they are **not owners but stewards** of the resources He had entrusted to them.
  - My money, my property, my children – they are the Lord’s, and he has entrusted them to my care.

Again, these promises made, oaths sworn, and curses invoked should they walk away (again) –

**their devotion is of the most serious nature.**

- **This is not Sunday morning only religion. This is life and death. 7 days a week.**
- Why would God demand this of them? Why would they agree?
- **Because God is worthy of this kind of response.**

God’s Lordship of their lives was not partial, it was not in the convenient areas. It was not just when they showed up at the temple.

This chapter is comprehensive – total in its scope of their lives – all-consuming was their devotion to the Lord supposed to be.

As Derek Thomas puts it: ***Their children, their children's marriages, their personal time, their working time, their possessions – everything was held in stewardship of the Lord, to be used for him and his kingdom.***<sup>1</sup>

***How do we follow their example? Should we? Does the Lord require the same of us?***

**Short answer – YES.**

But how we follow, and the **enabling power within us** is life-alteringly different than it was then. Our hope is in the one who has secured our place before the Father: Jesus our King.

We do not live in obedience to the Word of God trying to earn his pleasure but because he is already pleased with us.

When the list of people's names is read, it is easy to gloss over them (especially if you do not speak Hebrew). But the names tell us something incredibly important for us to consider as we reflect on what this means for us today.

- There is BOTH a collective responsibility in their confession and repentance.
- And a personal responsibility.
  - i.* It is easy to say we have all sinned and quite different to say, Father I have sinned in \_\_\_\_\_ and I am terribly sorry, and I repent – I turn from that lie and turn to your outstretched arms. Help me remember when I wander.
- ***With a high view of God (appropriately so) you will always have a gross view of sin.***

**How might we commit to “not neglect the house of God?”**

1. *“You are not your own; you were bought at a price.” (1 Cor 6:19-20)*
  - o Your body, your dating, your engagement, your marriage – your whole being is no longer your own.
  - o Your finances, possessions, family, children, free time, and work are no longer your own.
  
2. *Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? (1 Cor 6:19).*
  - o Your marriages, your work, your rest (Sabbath is still a very good idea), are to be set apart as holy.

God certifies covenants through signs – Abraham (circumcision), Israel at Sinai (sabbath), with Jesus Christ and the New Israel, the cup of the new covenant. Let us not neglect the house of God and remember.

3. *Worship is the believer's whole life response to God.*

***Where have you neglected this kind of response? May we be a people who also confess our sin, experience the healing of Christ, and respond with our entire lives surrendered in worship to our King, Jesus.***

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Thomas – Ezra and Nehemiah, Reformed Expository Commentary. 2016. p.372.