

The Hand of Our God Is Good - Week 8

Nehemiah 9

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Context - After the Israelites heard the law read by Ezra, feeling the weight of their own guilt and rebellion against God, they were to keep of feast of remembering God's faithfulness and provision for them – this feast was designed for them to remember who God is and what He has done for them. Specifically we read, that during this feast, Ezra was reading from the Book of the Law of God... And then we read, after this feast there was an assembly...

The People of Israel Confess Their Sin

9 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. ² And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. ³ And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the Lord their God. ⁴ On the stairs of the Levites stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani; and they cried with a loud voice to the Lord their God. ⁵ Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, “Stand up and bless the Lord your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.

⁶ “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. ⁷ You are the Lord, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. ⁸ You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite. And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous.

⁹ “And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea, ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, ¹⁴ and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant. ¹⁵ 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.

¹⁶ “But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. ¹⁷ They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. ¹⁸ Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, ‘This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,’ and had committed great blasphemies, ¹⁹ you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. ²⁰ You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. ²¹ Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.

²² “And you gave them kingdoms and peoples and allotted to them every corner. So they took possession of the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land of Og king of Bashan. ²³ You multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, and you brought them into the land that you had told their fathers to enter and possess. ²⁴ So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they would. ²⁵ And they captured fortified cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns already hewn, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness.

²⁶ “Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies. ²⁷ Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. **And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies.** ²⁸ But after they had rest they did evil again before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. **Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies.** ²⁹ **And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law.** Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. ³⁰ **Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.** ³¹ **Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.**

³² “Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of

Assyria until this day. ³³**Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully** and we have acted wickedly. ³⁴Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them. ³⁵Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works. ³⁶Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. ³⁷And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress. 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. (Ne 9:1–38)**

What follows in Chapter 10 (next week) is what their repentance looks like – and what their new commitment to God looks like for them...

But for us today — I want to show you something clear in the Bible – and that is how confession is more than simply acknowledging our wrongdoing, our sin – but confession is also a profession and remembrance of what God has done and how faithful He has been — and that happens first.

Remember this pattern —

- People forget God. They go their own way.
- For Israel – the reading of the Law brought about restoration for God’s people – by way of remembering and conviction. Remembering who God is – and acknowledging their own sin before Him.
- They recall – in specifics all the ways they can see God’s faithfulness and mercy on display
- They also recall - in specifics - all the ways they have dishonored him and disobeyed.
- And then... as you will see – repentance follows.

So for us – as followers of Jesus – on the other side of the Cross and empty grave – where our sin was paid for in full – what does the role of confession have in our lives. You could ask the question, if God knows everything and Jesus took our punishment for sin – what do we need to do? I want to show you today, why confession matters — and how we can best do that in light of grace, in light of the Gospel.

I see this in Paul’s writing to the Church – in Romans (much like Nehemiah) there is a grand confession and remembrance of what God has done throughout history, and then a very clear explanation of sin and human rebellion, with this proclamation of what God has done in sending Jesus Christ, how by grace through faith we are justified and have peace with God – and then I see Paul ask and answer a question as he confesses his own sinfulness.

He says why do I do what I don't want to do.. But do the very thing I hate – I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out because though sin is not me, sin is still living in me.. who will rescue me? Who will deliver me? His answer?

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. He will answer me. He will deliver me.

In light of the gospel – let's begin with our identity

- ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, **so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.** ⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰**For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.** ¹¹**So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**
- ¹²Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³**Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.** ¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. (Ro 6:5-14)

The NIV translation says it this way...

- Romans 6:11-14 (NIV): **11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. 14 For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.**

In other words – as followers of Christ – as new creations in Christ – we consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus...

Which means – we are not to offer any part of ourselves to sin... but rather offer ourselves to God.

We are to offer every part of who we are to Him.

What part of you are you offering to sin ?

What part of you are you offering to God ?

In light of our new identity in Christ, let's look at our new way of life and what it means to walk in the light

Walking in the Light

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.** ¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. **2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.**
(1 Jn 1:5–2:1)

It is true that Jesus has paid for it all – but we experience that fully paid for forgiveness when we confess our sins — in other words – when we bring our brokenness before Him – we indeed actually know our need and can fully trust His grace is enough. And when you sin – look what John says – go to Jesus – your advocate with the Father. Don't go to more sin and more evil, instead, go to Him. In light of our new identity, and in light of new way to walk in the light – there is one more thing we need to see – and that is our new identity is that we are a new people in Christ, a new community in Christ, we are living stones being built, we are a city on a hill, we are one new humanity in Christ – which means we were saved from our sins and from ourselves and saved to a new community shaped by Jesus Christ – and He is our Great Shepherd. The Church belongs to Jesus. We belong to Jesus. We belong with one another because of Jesus.

James says it this way –

¹⁶**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.**
(Jas 5:15–16)

What happens when we confess to God and one another? We experience forgiveness, cleansing, and healing. Remembering God's faithfulness helps us trust in the work of Christ to save and keep us. Remembering God – and walking with God in the full freedom and confidence of His love for you will change the way you see sin. As your love for Christ grows, your hatred for sin and desire for obedience will grow too. Recall, remember, and agree with God.