

Getting Down To Business • Nehemiah 9:1-3

I. INTRODUCTION – READ THE TEXT

A. *The Desire For Revival*

1. There is a great call going forth today for Churches & individual Christians to ask the Lord to send revival
2. Each week we get several pieces of mail from national ministries and organizations asking for us to pray for a move of God
3. Many of the local churches have banded together for concerts of prayer, asking God to send times of refreshing to the Church
4. One large area church has called it's people to 40 days of fasting and prayer for revival
5. One hopes that this call for revival will not go unanswered but that God will indeed hear and respond

B. *The Nature of Revival*

1. I think it's critical to remember in the midst of all the calls for prayer for revival that genuine revival is not man made.
2. I have always found it interesting to drive down the street and see a banner in front of a church that says "*Revival Wednesday Night – 7 PM.*"
3. Down the street a few blocks is another church with another better; "*Revival Every Night Except Wednesday.*"
4. J. Edwin Orr, who made it his life's work to study revivals, once said he talked with a pastor who said "Brother Orr, we had a revival here last summer and nobody got revived!"
5. Well- that's not revival.
6. Genuine revival is the result of a *sovereign* move of God's Spirit bringing new spiritual life to His people.
7. And there's no mistaking that it's revival because people are revived!
8. In true revival, there is a fundamental movement toward holiness combined with a radical reordering of priorities
9. These combine to result in a marked change, not only in the lifestyle of the church, but of the community *around* the church.
10. The end result of a revived church is the salvation of the lost!

C. *Our Part*

1. While Revival is a sovereign move of God's Spirit which cannot be manufactured by man
2. Still, God's people can set the stage for revival by earnestly seeking the Lord for it
3. History tells us that this is the case.
4. Orr concluded after decades of research, that revival is always linked to earnest, fervent prayer.
5. That is precisely what we see in our passage today.

6. These verses show us five things the people did to set the stage for revival.

II. TEXT

A. V. 1

1. The first is found in V. 1 = *Genuine Conviction*

{1} Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, in sackcloth, and with dust on their heads.

1. Nehemiah not only wanted to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, but also the *people* of Jerusalem.
2. As we saw last Sunday, the material he used to do the work of *spiritual* rebuilding was the Word of God
3. Three weeks have passed since the people had attended that first great Bible conference
4. They have celebrated 3 different holidays celebrating the goodness of God and they are on a spiritual high
5. But there was a deep inner urge to mourn over the grief and regret of having failed God as individuals and as a nation
6. Isn't it true- when we see God's love and his manifold blessings, we sometimes look at ourselves and wonder why He loves us so much!
 - a. we know we don't deserve what He gives
 - b. and the more He gives - the keener we feel that sense of unworthiness
7. John and Mary had been married for ten years
 - a. John was a hopeless romantic while Mary was more “matter of fact”
 - b. they loved each other a lot – but John *delighted* in showing Mary his love in constant displays of affection.
8. One Valentine’s Day he decided to go all out.
 - a. while Mary bought him a card and a tie,
 - b. he made reservations at the finest restaurant in town.
 - c. then he bought her a very expensive dress she had been looking at for some time at her favorite store and it delivered to the house along with a dozen roses.
 - d. he rented a limousine, and had another ten dozen roses put in the back seat.
 - e. then, he arranged it so while they were enjoying dessert at the restaurant, Neil Diamond came to their table and introduced himself.
 - f. after introductions, Neil told Mary that he would like to sing her favorite song.

9. On the way home in the limo, surrounded by the scent of roses –
 - a. flushed with the satisfaction of a great meal,
 - b. dressed in an elegant gown,
 - c. and having just met and been personally sung to by her favorite celebrity
 - d. what do you think is going through Mary's mind?
10. She knows John loves her very much –

- a. why, look at all the time and expense he went to to show her.
 - b. She thinks, “And what did I get him? A card and a tie!”
11. While Mary is certainly enjoying all her husband's love,
 - a. its demonstration reveals something of the *lack* of demonstration of hers
 - b. and there is a sense of *regret* that she hadn't done more.
 12. I think this is what we see going on here in Nehemiah.
 13. When the Law was read to them on the first day of the month, their first inclination was to weep and mourn under conviction and grief.
 14. But Nehemiah and Ezra had told them not to mourn because it was the Feast of Trumpets, a holy and special day that they should celebrate their forgiveness and restoration.
 15. But now that three weeks have passed, and the three great feast are behind them - the sense of grief and regret returns.
 16. So they fasted and replaced their normal clothes with sackcloth
 - a. people of the ancient Middle East would show deep grief by taking off their normal clothes and putting on the sacks that usually held grain.
 - b. they would let their hair go with out grooming it.
 - c. they would even stop anointing themselves with the perfumed oil which was their equivalent of taking a shower
 - d. and instead, they would take the cold ashes from their fireplace or the dust of the ground, and wipe it on their faces and hair so that they appeared sickly.
 - e. all of this was to give an outward expression to what they felt on the inside.
 - f. inwardly they felt *disheveled* and out of place;
 - g. they were emotionally disturbed and their spirit felt sick with grief
 - h. the ancient Hebrew did not recognize the distinction between the inner and outer person that we do today,
 - i. they felt it appropriate to have their outward appearance be an accurate reflection of the inner disposition – so the sackcloth and ashes
 17. They also fasted
 18. Fasting is almost always associated with grief and mourning in the Old Testament.
 - a. it's an expression of one's conviction that things are not right,
 - b. and out of a desire to make them right,
 - c. one abstains even from the normal priorities of life to set them right.
 19. So they fasted – they abstained from food so they could give themselves to prayer and confession.
 20. They dressed themselves in burlap sacks and let their outward appearance go so that they could devote their time and energy normally spent in personal grooming to nurturing the roots of their spiritual lives.
 21. With everyone wearing sackcloth and no one grooming themselves, there could be no comparison of clothes and showcasing of styles and all that superficial and vain silliness that can distract us from our business of seeking God.
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22. How does this speak to us as we seek to see God do a work of revival in our day?
23. Well, we first have to ask, how *earnest and sincere* are we in our desire for revival?
24. The best place for us to begin is where they began!
- a. do we really see and understand the awesome greatness of God's lavish love toward us?
 - b. do we care about His desire to revive us - to bring us to that place where His Spirit moves so freely and easily among us that it is like heaven on earth?
 - c. or are we happy with life as it is?
 - d. do we, like they, ache in our bones with the knowledge that things are not as they should be?
 - e. that the church, which has weathered the hammering blows of her enemies for years, is now crumbling from within because of the apathy and disloyalty of her own?
 - f. do we, like they, have a sense of urgency, so urgent in fact that we would set aside food and the time we spend showering and shaving and primping and combing and moussing and manicuring and coloring and styling and applying and electrolyzing and pressing and cleaning and ironing- to seek God?
 - g. or can we not make it to prayer on Tuesday and Thursday because our beds are so warm and comfortable and the shower is so nice and hot and the bagel and coffee are calling?
 - h. friends, while we cannot manufacture revival, God will not send it if we do not prepare for it.
 - i. a man once asked the famed evangelist Gipsy Smith how to have a revival.
 - 1) Smith asked him, "Do you have a place where you can pray?"
 - 2) The man answered that he did.
 - 3) Smith said, "Tell you what you do - You go to that place, and take a piece of chalk along. Kneel down there, and with the chalk, draw a complete circle all around you. Then pray for God to send a revival to everything inside of the circle. Stay there until He answers... and you will have revival."
 - 4) the point Gipsy Smith was making was that revival is something that we must be serious enough about that we are willing to be the one who gets revived first
 - 5) and that we set ourselves to seek God till it comes
25. Dwight Moody was a man who lived what Gipsy Smith taught
- a. when he became a Christian, Moody developed such a hunger for God's Word, spent so much time reading it, and was so quick to obey it that he became a "menace" to many of the other believers in his church.
 - b. his rapid spiritual growth was an embarrassment to certain people who, though they had been saved for years, never grew up in Christ.
 - c. week after week Moody would share a new experience he had with the Lord.

- d. finally, some of the older saints who just couldn't stand feeling humiliated by his exemplary life, went to Moody's uncle and urged him to quiet down his nephew.
 - e. chances are, these older but less mature saints were praying for revival – but Moody was living it
 - f. Moody wrote these words, "I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And that which I can do, by the grace of God, I will do."
26. If we are to see genuine revival, then we must move past easy prayers toward a Genuine conviction that God must move in our time and in our lives
27. And that conviction must shape our priorities and our values
28. Join us for prayer on T & Th,
- a. sign up for a ½ hour of prayer,
 - b. join us on April 21st for our day of prayer –
 - c. afterglow – March 25th
 - d. men's retreat
 - e. Wed. night before study

B. V. 2a

1. The 2nd thing that marked their preparation for revival was a *Desire for Holiness*

{2} Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners;

2. Israel was called to be holy – to be separate from all other nations in their devotion to God
3. Their separation here was not some act of elitism or a smug superiority.
4. In fact, God had told the Jews to *welcome* the stranger and be kind to him.
5. The separation spoken of here wasn't so much a *physical segregation* as it was *moral differentiation*
6. Any practice or lifestyle that marked the world but was forbidden by God was put away.
7. The people examined their lives and anything which was foreign to the way of God was forsaken
8. The people knew that if God were to send revival, He would only send it to those who had demonstrated they *wanted* to be revived, who wanted to be holy and so had separated themselves from obvious sin.
9. Will God revive those who care nothing for holiness? Not likely!
10. Will He send the refreshing of the Holy Spirit to those whose spiritual thirst is being quenched at the muddy water holes of this world? Hardly!
11. Will God send the Bread of Life to those whose hunger is satisfied by the Twinkies of worldly wisdom? I dare say not!
12. If we would know revival we must set ourselves in a place where we can be revived.
13. We too, as they, must separate from those things that hinder the effective work of God's Spirit in our lives and you know what they are because The Spirit has already been talking to you about them.

C. V. 2b

1. 3rd, we see they prepared for revival by *Sincere Confession*

{2b} and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

2. They did this because they were convicted of their sins.
3. As the law was read, they saw their sin against the backdrop of God's holy and righteous standard.

(Rom 3:20) By the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

4. But law was not given *just* to *condemn*.
5. If that was the only thing the law had accomplished, then they wouldn't have confessed.
6. There is nothing in condemnation that encourages us to go to God – on the contrary, if we feel condemned, we will run from God
7. So first the law condemns our sin, but then it takes us past that condemnation to make the offer of forgiveness
8. The condition of that forgiveness is confession and faith
9. Galatians 3:24 puts it this way . . .

The law was our tutor to *bring us to Christ*, that we might be justified by faith.

10. The law shows us that all our goodness falls short of the standard God demands
11. The only way to be saved is through faith in what He has done
12. They came in the hope and promise of forgiveness as they confessed their sins.
13. You see, they knew that sin blocks the flow of fellowship and blessing with God.

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14. If we are to know revival, we must clear the path to God by confession and forgiveness.
 15. The essence of revival is the profound experience of the *presence* of God.
 - a. revival is not something God *sends*
 - b. it is something He *brings* by bringing Himself.
 - c. where God is, there is revival.
 16. But our fellowship and experience of God is thwarted and hindered by sin.
 17. Confession removes that obstacle.
 18. They confessed and so must we.
 - a. not the flipped general kind of confession were we casually say, "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. "
 - b. but sincere confession!
 19. They confessed their sins and their fathers' sins.
 - a. in other words, they got specific
 - b. as the Holy Spirit used the Scripture to point out specific failures - they confessed it.
 - c. they heard the command "You shall make no idols."
 - d. "Don't take the Lord's named in vain."
 - e. "Keep the seventh day holy."

- f. “Honor your father and mother.”
 - g. “Don't covet.”
20. When was the last time the Holy Spirit quickened your heart to something you read or heard from the Scriptures and you *promptly* confessed it to God?

D. Vs. 3a

1. 4th – They gave themselves to *Serious Study*
- {3} And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for one-fourth of the day;**
2. ¼ of a day is 3 hours – for three hours they stood and listened to the reading of the Word of God - AMAZING!!!!
 3. They gave great place to the role of the Scriptures in preparing for revival.
 4. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones has said that genuine revival is always marked by a return to biblical teaching and preaching.
 5. But periods of decline are always attended by a turning from the Bible to other means.
 6. Today our churches are filled with plans, programs, and gimmicks.
 7. In an attempt to be seeker-sensitive, many churches have turned from the Bible to psychology and mass marketing theory.
 8. In their attempt to be user-friendly, many churches have put the Bible on the shelf and turned instead to all kinds of entertainments.
 9. Many congregations hear more quotes from Leo Buscaligia or Minirith & Meier than Jesus or Paul.
 10. But the Jews of Nehemiah's day had heard enough of the words of man, they wanted to hear the good Word of God.
 11. They knew that God's Spirit uses God's Word to revive God's people.

E. V. 3b

1. 5th – they gave themselves to *Focused Worship*
- {3b} and for another fourth they confessed and worshiped the LORD their God.**
2. For another 3 hours they confessed and worshiped.
 3. As God's Word was read it confronted new areas of failure so they responded with confession
 4. Confession then lead naturally to worship as they realized they had been forgiven.
 5. As I said earlier, the essence of revival is the profound experience of the presence of God.
 6. Worship is the *medium* for encountering God.
 7. So, once they had taken each of the steps necessary to lay the groundwork for revival, they took the last step and laid down the final plank of preparing a stage for revival - Worship.
 8. Notice what it says - they worshiped the Lord THEIR God. Not just “the Lord God.”
 9. They worshiped a person they knew, not just a title they had learned!
 10. Their worship was genuine and sincere

- a. not staged, not merely a show.
- b. it wasn't a song service
- c. nor a time aimed at getting a spiritual thrill.
- d. it was a time whose sole focus was God; exalting, honoring, adoring Him.

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- 11. We are roughly divided into two groups here today: those who enjoy worship, and those who endure it
 - 12. To those who endure it, let me just say that you are missing out on the best part of the Christian life
 - a. worship is the ultimate expression of our relationship and the most intimate we can be with Jesus this side of heaven
 - b. we were created and saved for fellowship with God
 - c. and worship is the supreme place of that fellowship
 - d. in fact, the book of Revelations shows us that even in heaven the majority of our time is going to be spent worshipping God
 - e. if you don't enjoy worship now, and if you don't really have a heart to learn to enjoy it, I wonder if your joy in heaven will be as full as it can be?
 - 13. We've all come from different backgrounds
 - a. some of us came to faith here at Calvary and the only worship we've ever known is what we learned here - so worship time is just a great time of fellowship with God
 - b. others of us have come from a high church background where the only instruments played were a piano, an organ, and the songs were all hymns
 - 1) the freedom expressed here at Calvary is a bit much, a tad bit intimidating
 - 2) let me give you a gentle word of encouragement –
 - 3) instead of sitting in the back, try sitting up front where you can actually hear others singing
 - 4) then go ahead and just start telling God you love Him and thank Him for how good He is to you
 - 5) try it, you'll like it!
 - c. then there are those who grew up in a Pentecostal church
 - 1) where every song was in double time and people brought their own tambourines
 - 2) Jericho marches were a regular event,
 - 3) and the service wasn't complete until Mrs. Janeway gave an utterance in tongues with an interpretation
 - 4) you look at the style of worship here & say, “woe – where's the life?”
 - 5) well, I'll tell you where – look at the faces of those who are worshipping!
 - 6) they are loving their God
 - 7) they are more interested in bringing themselves before Him, focusing on Him, making him the object of their adoration, than getting some

- kind of spiritual thrill or having an exciting time
- 8) they evaluate the worship time by asking if God was blessed, not if they were
14. Now, please don't get me wrong – I am NOT saying that the way we worship is the only way – it isn't – but it is OUR way
 15. When I travel to Russia or Mexico, or Ireland and worship with churches there, the style is different, much different, but I do my best to worship with them
 16. And I learn to enjoy the diversity of worship environments
 17. Each of these experiences enriches my worship as I learn from others.
 18. Really, it isn't so much the style or environment as it is the posture of our hearts!

III. CONCLUSION

A. 6 Hours!

1. Did you notice in verse 3, they studied and worshiped for 6 hours!
2. Once again we see the priority they placed on seeking God and the revival they wanted Him to bring
3. Many people today will only begrudgingly give an hour to church
4. If the service goes long, they get angry
 - a. after all, they have more important things to do and places to go
 - b. the car needs to be washed
 - c. the sun is out and good tanning weather is a waste
 - d. the lines at Fresh Choice and Home Town Buffet begins to form right at 11:45, and it is now 11:40 – hurry up!
5. If God is to bring revival, it will not be according to our schedules
6. it will not come in a time-segment we set aside for it <Revival, Wed. Night 7-8:45>
7. No – if we would have revival, if we would have God move in our lives, it means we are going to have to open ourselves to Him – totally and completely
8. He is not interested in renting a room from us – He wants to own the house – No less!

B. 5 Things

1. These Jews did 5 things to prepare for revival
2. And revival came
3. They were
 - 1) Genuine Conviction
 - 2) Desire for Holiness
 - 3) Sincere Confession
 - 4) Serious Study of the Word of God
 - 5) Focused Worship
5. The great revivalist RA Torrey wrote . . .
 “I can give a prescription that will bring revival -- revival to any church, or

community, or any city on earth.

First: Let few Christians get thoroughly right with God. If this is not done, the rest will come to nothing.

Second: Let them bind themselves together to pray for revival until God opens the windows of heaven and comes down.

Third: Let them put themselves at the disposal of God for His use as He sees fit in winning others to Christ. That is all. I have given this prescription around the world... and in no instance has it failed. It cannot fail.”

6. I am excited about some of the things we are doing that provide the time and place to do what we are talking about this morning
7. Join us