
Sermon Notes

April 15, 2018

First Congregational Church of Pomfret

To Tell the Truth Nehemiah 9:1-37

Meanwhile... Back in Jerusalem

- ❖ Nehemiah 9 gives us a full-blown picture of the nature of confession
 - tell the truth about God, His nature, character and being
 - tell the truth about ourselves and our sin
- ❖ Recap
 - the great scene of national revival in Nehemiah 8
 - hearing God's Word stirs deep emotion and causes people to weep and mourn because of their sin
 - no, no, no.... *the joy of the LORD is your strength*
 - people resolve to get back on track with doing things God's way

The Setting

- ❖ Three signs that people are ready to "do business" with God
 - fasting

- sackcloth
- dirt on their heads
- ❖ The people listen once again to an extended reading of God's Word (3 hours)
 - once again, the Word pricks their hearts
 - the Word leaves the people with two lasting impressions
 - the greatness of God
 - their own failure to live for God's glory
- ❖ A prolonged period of confession (another 3 hours)

Confession

- ❖ Our limited understanding of "confession"
- ❖ Confession is a wonderful and awesome thing
 - it is not browbeating ourselves or self-flagellation
 - it is acknowledging what is true about God and what is true about ourselves
- ❖ Hebrew word for confession used in Nehemiah 9 = "to give praise, thanks, or glory"
 - to confess is to worship
 - many of the great worship experiences portrayed in Scripture are accompanied by times of deep, heartfelt, worshipful confession
- ❖ To confess means "to tell the truth"

- ❖ Nehemiah 9:6-37 is an extended prayer
 - directs the people's thoughts to the goodness and power of God
 - prepares them to appeal to God for His mercy in the midst of their own condition of distress
- ❖ The prayer
 - adores God for His great mercy and forgiveness
 - acknowledges the repeated failure and multiplied iniquities of Israel
 - celebrates God's ongoing ministry of reconciliation
- ❖ The prayer is extremely well-crafted
 - who did all that hard work of preparation, shaping, and writing this out in advance?
 - possibly Ezra?
 - the value of written prayers
- ❖ The prayer is stunning in its scope and vision
 - a rich summary of Biblical history from Creation right up through the time of Nehemiah
 - Abraham, the Exodus, giving of the Law at Sinai, the wilderness wanderings, the Conquest, the period of the Judges, the Assyrian deportation and the Babylonian exile
 - the interweaving of the twin themes of God's promise and God's judgment throughout Israel's history
 - alternation between admission of sin & the acknowledgment of God's gracious character & actions

Confession Today

- ❖ We live in a society that minimizes and ignores sin
 - nationally
 - personally
- ❖ Playing the blame game (my genes, upbringing, "It's just the way I am")
 - is it the way God **wants** you to be?
 - we measure our sin against the nature and character of God, not against each other
- ❖ 2 Chronicles 7:14, humble yourself, pray, seek God's face, turn from your wicked ways
 - God WILL hear from heaven
 - God WILL forgive your sin

Personal Application

1. What is the great benefit Israel receives as a result of the history review lesson her leaders provide for her in Nehemiah 9?
2. In what ways is God's love different than human love?
3. When it comes to confession and forgiveness, what are some common misconceptions people hold about the ways in which God relates to us?
4. What lessons from your past do you need to remember in order to keep you from making foolish choices in the future that have devastating consequences?