

Hurst Green
21st Jul 19
Neh 9:1-37
Spiritual Amnesia

At the end of last week's sermon what did I get you all to say?

“The joy of the Lord is my strength”

Have you made that a reality this last week – if not why not, who did you let steal the joy in your life – the deep down eternal joy that gives you the Peace of God even in troubles times.

Now continuing in Ezra's journey we come to Nehemiah 9. We have just had that amazing passage – reading the law.

The people stood for six hours listening to the law that **they** had told Ezra to go and get. The Levites made sure all who could understand understood it and it had driven the people to weeping. Then they had gone and obeyed the law by turning their weeping into rejoicing because that is what the law said they must do.

That's obedience!

Today we have this excellent chapter – a complete summary of the Old Testament. If you only know one chapter from the Old Testament this should be it.

If you have ever read through the bible, and that is an excellent discipline, this chapter should have struck you when you got here.

Take a look at it:

Verse 6

Nehemiah 9:6 (ANIV)

⁶ You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you.

Creation – the basic fact that too many people miss out on. God created the world – this whole thing was his idea.

Abram – the Father of Israel and our spiritual father.

The promised land and promises kept in verse 8

Egypt – the exodus, the law the miracles and possession of the land.

The rebellion in Exodus 34 with the golden calf and the amazing forgiving God.

Taking the promised land.

That endless cycle we find in Judges and throughout the time of the Kings of forgetting God, descending into chaos and despair, crying out to God and He, in his mercy, rescuing us and restoring us.

The acknowledgement that it was sin that drove this cycle and that they are in that position today.

I will leave it to you to decide where in that cycle we are today for that is not the lesson I want you to learn.

The first lesson is spiritual amnesia!

Of course that is not us – we wouldn't do that - but we would.

It is not a question of not wanting to – that is easy and anyone in their right mind having seen the might of God would not want to walk away.

The Israelites have seen the miracles of their release from Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the Manna and the quail, water from the rock that they all may drink, overcoming great armies.

It took only a few days before they committed that great sin of the Golden Calf and they had to have Moses pleading for them before God.

Even Aaron who had personally seen everything led them in their great sin.

Remember you cannot rely on leaders to keep you from sin – that is something you must do yourself.

Spiritual Amnesia!

It's a terrible thing but a reality in all our lives.

Do not think you are immune – you are guilty too.

Oh no not I is your immediate response – you did not say it but it was in your hearts so let me ask you something.

What was the last thing you remember God doing for you in answer to your prayers?

You should have an instant answer if you are looking for God at work.

So two things to remember already and I have not even started on the meat of today's sermon!!

Do you remember what they both were? Or is Sunday lunch getting in the way?

So let's get on to today before I overload you with the many lessons we could get from this passage rather than the ones I think God has for you today.

So these people had come to the seventh month of the year and had required the law to be read to them. No one here has ever come to me and required a reading let alone six hours of reading but of course you all have your own bibles and are capable of reading them and understanding them yourself because you can teach one another – you do not rely on me.

Do you?

But the first lesson from the reading (that's the third lesson for today!).

The people prepared themselves.

Did you notice that?

We are on the 24th day of the month. The people had spent six hours reading the law on day one and a further eight days having the law read to them.

They had wept and obeyed and now on the 24th day they had prepared themselves.

Nehemiah 9:1 (ANIV)

¹ On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads.

They did not just turn up for this event that has so much to teach you, they had prepared themselves.

They had fasted in preparation – have you ever done that?

They ditched their finery and even their everyday clothes and turned up in sackcloth. That would cause many churches to wonder – we are happy with finery but do not mention sackcloth!

And they had dust on their heads – no hats or well-groomed hair here.

They had prepared themselves for this event because they had read the law and knew where they stood.

They had separated themselves from foreigners because this was about the people of God. Today this is about us – not the world out there but us who acknowledge God as God.

And what did they do?

Nehemiah 9:3 (ANIV)

³ They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshipping the LORD their God.

How about that? Not an hour and a quarter for which most of us are late but three hours of reading the law again.

And then three hours of spontaneous worship and I bet there were no awkward silences waiting for someone to speak out.

We are back to an even better version of 1 Corinthians 14 – everyone taking part in the worship. Despite you all having looked at that Chapter there are still far too many of you who do not contribute to our worship. If you have forgotten through spiritual amnesia go back and read it again.

Now lesson four for today – **they had intentionally made time to remember what God has done** and so should you.

They had started on the first day with the feasts of the Trumpets – Lev 23:23-25

A sacred day of rest with offerings to the Lord. It is a day of repentance as a nation, as a people of God.

Appropriate for the start of this revival.

They had had the day of atonement on the 10th. (lev 23:27)

Yom Kippur – now known as a day when God gave Israel a might victory over their neighbours in 1973.

But to Israelis this is the national day not because of that victory but because of its origins. The day that they atone for their sins.

This is the day the scapegoat had the sins of the people laid on its head and it was sent out into the wilderness taking away the sins of the people.

And then the feast of the Tabernacles – the most joyous feast for Israel.

The Harvest is in and we have a seven day holiday living in booths in the garden.

They acknowledged Gods past provision for them and Gods present provision for them. The start was the day that Solomon dedicated the first temple at Jerusalem and the Shekinah glory of God descended to live among his people.

Now of course that glory rests in you and your job is to let it shine into the world that all may see it and know that the Lord our God is indeed God.

This feast is Philippians 4:8

Philippians 4:8 (NRSV)

⁸ Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Now having come through all that this spiritual revival causes the people to come in repentance on the 24th day of the month.

It all seems out of order doesn't it?

This should be where we start – with repentance but no; here it is at the end.

This is God's problem – he is dealing with a messy world with messy people living messed up lives.

The people had to be brought to a point where they knew they had sinned and of course it all started with them wanting to know the law. Not with someone wanting to preach the law to them but with them wanting someone, Ezra, to preach the law, Read the bible – that is why we expound scripture here on a Sunday.

It has to be bible based.

But the Holy Spirit has to convince people that they want to know God. We only tell people about him and what he means to us; God convicts them.

So we have their response to God's law – they knew they needed to repent and **they intentionally made time to remember.**

And they come up with this amazing summary of the Old Testament.

There is so much in here I could keep you here for hours which would be appropriate given our reading of three hours of the bible and three hours in confession and worship but I won't do that to you today because that would be me imposing on you rather than you wanting to hear it!

But keep your bibles open while I show you the main themes of this prayer and ask you to remember them for your prayers both here and in your personal prayer times.

It is all about the Character of God – reminding us of who and what God is not because he needs to be told but because we need to remind ourselves – we need to overcome that spiritual amnesia.

But look at this.

Verses 5 and 6 are all about the greatness of God. That is always a good place to start in prayer.

You know our God is **great** – you sing “how great is our God” but we always need to remind ourselves – it stops that spiritual amnesia.

In prayer it reminds you that God can do all things – even turn the hearts of great heathen dictators to announce that our God is the God of heaven and move him to finance the rebuilding of the temple.

7 and 8 reminds them of the **promises** of God.

In this case the main one of creating his people the Israelites – that mantle that we now wear with confidence for our God is great and is greater than all the gods of the world.

9 to 12 reminds us of the love of God for his people and how he moves in his mighty power to protect and provide for them.

Which brings us on to one of the main themes of this series – the **providence** of God.

13 to 15 speak of God making his ways known and providing for his people. Do you see knowing the ways of God as part of his remarkable providence for you personally? You should!

And 19 to 25 continue the theme reminding them of the miracles God gave them to take them into the promised land – of course even there they had spiritual amnesia and forgot to take the whole land. Comfort can generate this amnesia.

And then the **patience** of God in 16-18 and 26-31. The number of times he turns to his people when they have turned away from him. When they ignore him in the land that he has provided and things go downhill until they call out to him once again.

His continued **faithfulness** despite our repeated faithlessness. And that continues to this day.

Now that concludes this short look at a fabulous prayer that we could have spent at least six hours over but you do not get away that easily!

I don't have home work for you but I do have a task for you to complete while we take up the offering and as usual if you give electronically hold the bag for a few seconds and commit your gift to God.

Now while that is happening take a piece of paper of the windowsill and write down 10 things that God has done for you and, at the bottom, write down the promises of God to you.

As tempting as it would be I will not collect these and mark them but I do ask you to hold onto them and use them in your prayer time this week.