

Declaration of Dependence

Nehemiah . . . Memoirs of an Ordinary Man – Part XV

Nehemiah 10-12

Introduction

On July 4, 1776, in the city of Philadelphia, one of America's historic documents was signed. It was a declaration of independence, and it marked the birth of this nation under God. The closing words of that document solemnly declared these words,

With a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other, our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

The fifty six courageous men who signed that document understood it was more than rhetoric. If the struggle for independence was successful, the best they could expect would be years of hardship and struggle in this new nation.

The Declaration of Independence was actually a declaration of dependence upon each other and the providence of God.

In our studies of Nehemiah, chapters 8 and 9, we have watched the nation Israel in revival. It began with a hunger for the Word of God and a willingness to obey it. They were a people who were literally "re-bibled" – for any revival is nothing short of people living out the principles and truths of the Bible. Their revival also involved true confession and a mourning over their sin.

I have defined revival, for our study today, by simply taking the events of Nehemiah's revival and articulating what happened in their lives, and what will happen in our lives, when true revival comes.

Let me read the definition.

Revival

Revival:

A movement of God's Spirit in the believer's life that produces both private confession of sin and public obedience to the scriptures; the outward behavior of a revived believer will be marked with God's pleasure as their highest priority; that priority will undeniably impact personal relationships, financial decisions, and lifestyle choices.

In other words, revival is hard work. It takes persistence, humility, obedience, and Bible study.

Revival is like remodeling your kitchen. It takes longer than you planned, makes a bigger mess than you ever thought possible, and costs more than you hoped. Revival is inconvenient, upsetting, and life changing.

You cannot plan for revival, you only pray for it. You cannot orchestrate it or announce that it is going to happen in a series of meetings in the third week of June. All you can do is ask God for it to happen in your life – for Him to awaken your eyes to your sin and to the authority and wonder of His Word; to blow on the smoldering embers of your heart so that they burst into flaming affection for Him once again.

And, you pray as David prayed, in Psalm, chapter 85, verse 6,

Wilt Thou not Thyself revive us again . . .

By the way, revival is not so much about emotion as it is about action. In fact, the emotion of revival is soon followed by the action of revival.

Nehemiah, chapter 10, reveals the action of the Jewish people – action that proved true revival had indeed come.

Four Evidences of True Revival

I want to point out for you four evidences of true revival. They were evidences in the days of Nehemiah, and they are still evidences today, in the life of the believer.

Rededicating your . . . (10:1-29)

1. Revival is experienced when you rededicate your feet to follow after God's precepts!

Look at chapter 10, verse 1.

Now on the sealed document were the names of: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah . . .

Skip to verses 28 and 29.

Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, all those who had knowledge and understanding, are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of God our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes;

They had only recently blown the dust off the book of the Law and heard it read to them for the first time in their entire lives. But after the first hearing, they knew that, if it was indeed God's book, it was binding and authoritative over their lives. It was not an optional guide, it was the will of God.

Is there a New Testament counterpoint for this attitude and passion? Yes. In Colossians, chapter 3, verse 16, Paul challenged the believers to,

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom . . .

The word "dwell" can be translated, "take residence in you." In other words, "Let the Word of God make its home in you."

A revival occurs in the believer's life when he puts out the welcome mat for the Word.

The word translated "richly," involves a word that could be rendered "extravagantly." In other words, it knows no boundaries; you have not fenced

it in. You do not say to the Word, "Come into my life, but stay over there in the corner. Don't go into the family room. Don't go into the bedroom. Don't go anywhere, except to church with me on Sunday. And, whatever you do, don't go to work with me. Stay there in the corner."

No. Paul said,

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you . . .

Let it loose. Let it have full reign in every compartment and every department of your life.

The people in Nehemiah's day were saying nothing short of this, "We will allow the scriptures to determine our lifestyle!"

Notice again, verse 29b,

. . . [We will] walk in God's law . . . [we will] keep and observe all the commandments of God our Lord and His ordinances and His statutes;

Recently, a reporter for our local newspaper called and wanted to do an interview and then, take my picture in front of the church buildings. I thought that someone would probably see my picture and mistake it for a picture they had seen on the wall of the post office, so I said, "No," and to interview John, our church member in charge of the buildings, and take his picture. He can go to jail. I will visit him!

The reporter sat down with John and remarked about the size and scope of our building project. As he learned the short history of our church, he asked John, "To what do you attribute this huge growth at your church?"

John said, "Well, it's our good looking Pastor of Worship, what else?"

Actually John told me on the phone about this, and then said, "Stephen, what would you have answered?"

He and I gave the same answer. At our church, the Word of God is not optional, it is essential – and people are hungry, not for what man says, but for what God has said.

Revival is rededicating the path of your feet to follow after God's precepts!

Rededicating your . . . (10:30)

2. Secondly, revival occurs in the life of a believer who rededicates his family to a lifestyle of biblical purity!

Notice verse 30.

and that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.

While our culture is different than this culture – obviously our parents do not pick out their children’s spouses, although the older my children become, the more attractive that idea becomes to me, the timeless principle that transcends cultures and generations is this statement, “We will accept the importance of godly relationships!”

The New Testament counter-passage is II Corinthians, chapter 6, verse 14.

Do not be bound together with unbelievers . .

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In the King James Version, this is translated,

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers . . .

In Paul’s day the concept of an unequal yoke was used in relation to marriage. Do not be yoked together with unbelievers would mean, simply, do not marry an unbeliever.

Some of you are already married to unbelievers. Paul makes it very clear in I Corinthians, chapter 7, that the believing spouse is not to send away the unbeliever, in hopes of starting over and marrying a believer. In that case, you stay and become a testimony to the saving grace of God, which Paul called a sanctifying presence in the home for the sake of the children and, hopefully, for their salvation.

You might ask, “Why should a believer not marry an unbeliever?”

Paul goes on in that passage, in verses 15b through 17a, to turn the question back to the one who would argue such a separatist view of marriage by saying,

. . . what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. . . .

You could apply that principle of separation to the business world as well. Do not become bound in business with unbelievers.

Now, obviously, each situation calls for wisdom and biblical application. We live in a world with unbelievers and we do business with unbelievers every day. In fact, even in the world of relationships,

if you do not have them with unbelievers, how will you ever reach them for Christ? God intends for us to be salt and light. The point is that you need to ask God how and where to draw the line in personal and business relationships.

Like the financial planner who called me, a few months ago, asking advice about handling the investments of a religious cult. He was troubled in knowing that, by helping them financially, he would indirectly be aiding them in spreading their propaganda. So, he turned them down. And, by turning them down, he turned down what could have been, to him, great financial gain. I admired him for his courage and conviction.

I wonder how many business owners sell alcoholic beverages and then teach Sunday school. I wonder how many business owners would have the courage to place Bibles in their waiting rooms and play Christian music on their speaker system.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe that one of the reasons revival has been hindered in our generation is because we, as believers, no longer wrestle and agonize over the issues of godly distinction. We have thrown out, as legalism, any convictions of holiness or piety.

If pressed, could you name at least five things you and your family do, or do not do, that nearly everyone else around you does not do, or does, and, if asked for the reason, the only answer you could give is, “Because I am a Christian.”

Talk about sounding strange! You have got to be kidding. What do you want us to be, fanatics? Yes!

God’s Word, in verse 17a, says,

. . . come out from their midst and be separate . . .

Do you know what that means? Do you know how your life is different from an unbeliever? Do you know how to apply godly separation in your walk? My friend, if you do not know at least five ways that your life is different than your unbelieving neighbor, you are probably in need of revival!

Chuck Swindoll quoted Keith Miller in his commentary on Nehemiah, *Hand Me Another Brick*,

It has never ceased to amaze me that we Christians have developed a kind of selective vision which allows us to be deeply and sincerely involved in worship and church activities and yet, almost totally pagan in the day in, day out guts of our business lives, and never even realize it.

Swindoll goes on to add,

We won't care if anyone else in the world lives by this. We will live by it. It will be our guide. We won't shrug our shoulders, yawn, and say, "It doesn't matter," when our kids want to mix and mingle with the crowd. Our homes will be distinct. Our philosophy of life will not be like that of those who live outside the walls. This is our promise to You, O God.

Recently, a military pilot told me about learning how to fly. At one point, while he was in the cockpit of his fighter plane, flying at night in order to learn to depend on his instrument panel, the instructor told him to close his eyes and fly by his instincts. So, he closed his eyes and began to pilot that plane by how he felt. After several minutes, the instructor asked him, "How do you think you are doing?"

He responded, "We're doing great!"

The instructor said, "Open your eyes."

When he opened his eyes, he discovered that they were flying upside-down and were heading straight toward the ground.

It is possible for the believer to become infected with societal vertigo, "I'm doing great!"

But, in reality, be heading for a collision.

Revival is when a believer pulls out of his collision course by, once again, focusing on the instrument panel of God's Word.

Revival affects your feet and it affects your family.

Rededicating your . . . (10:31)

3. Third, revival is when you rededicate your faith to trust in God's providence!

Now look at Nehemiah, chapter 10, verse 31.

As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day; and we will forego the crops the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.

They just signed their names to this declaration and stated that they would not do three things that the rest of the world did.

- Number one – we will not do business on the Sabbath.
- Number two – we will not plant crops on the seventh year.

- Number three – we will forgive any debt against us by a fellow Jew.

These were unique to the nation Israel. Paul made it clear in Galatians, chapter 4, that believers are not bound to special days or festivals. Every day of the week is holy to the New Testament Christian. But, the principle is timeless.

Jews were to trust God to provide for them. Can you imagine not planting crops every seventh year? Can you imagine wiping every loan off your books that others owed you? Can you imagine even loaning anybody anything on the sixth year? On December of the sixth year?

This was God's built-in curriculum on faith! And, every Israelite had to enroll. This course, on trust in God's provision, could not be audited or skipped. Trusting God for provision has a way of reminding you that He is, ultimately, the provider.

Rededicating your . . . (10:32-39; 12:1-47)

4. Along that same line is this last evidence of true revival, revival is when you rededicate your finances to acknowledge God's priorities!

In chapter 10 and in chapter 12, as the walls are dedicated and the choirs sing with great joy, the people sign a declaration that they will devote whatever is necessary to maintain the house of worship!

Look at chapter 10, verses 32 through 34.

We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: for the showbread, for the continual grain offering, for the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moon, for the appointed times, for the holy things and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God. Likewise we cast lots for the supply of wood among the priests, the Levites, and the people in order that they might bring it to the house of our God, according to our fathers' households, at fixed times annually, to burn on the altar of the Lord our God as it is written in the law;

Skip to verse 39. The last phrase sums up their actions and attitude.

. . . Thus we will not neglect the house of our God.

I agree with Warren Wiersbe, who wrote on this passage,

Where there is true spiritual revival, it will reveal itself in the way we support God's work, beginning in our own local church.

I am convinced that the most sensitive nerve in a person's body is the nerve that runs from his heart to his back pocket.

I also believe what Winston Churchill said years ago,

We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is something profoundly revealing about my soul in what I do with my money.

Jesus Christ said it all when He put it this way in Matthew, chapter 6, verse 21,

. . . where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

In other words, where your money is, that's really where your heart is.

Recently, I read, with interest and sadness, an article, by Larry Burkette, in the *Christianity Today* magazine. I confirmed it, a few days later, when I was at an event that included one of his staff members. Burkette's ministry receives tens of thousands of calls per year. In this article, Burkette said that the profile of the average caller, for financial advice, is of someone in their early forties, with two children, and an annual household income of forty thousand. They have a mortgage on their homes of 125,000; they owe 20,000 in automobile loans, 6,000 on educational loans, and carry 7,000 to 10,000 on their credit cards.

The average believer is in desperate need of plastic surgery.

Revival is a surrender of your soul, a surrender of your wallet, a surrender of your family, a surrender of your will, a surrender of your all, to your great and wonderful, holy and gracious God, Who has lavished upon us His wonderful grace.

Application:

Some Things Revived Believers Cannot Do!

There are some things revived believers just cannot do!

- A revived believer cannot stay selfish.

- A revived believer cannot keep silent.
- A revived believer cannot remain sorrowful.

If you would turn over to chapter 12. The choirs are proceeding along the wall. The declaration has been signed, and the people have vowed to keep their God, and worship of Him, their highest priority.

I love verse 43, tucked inside all the pomp and circumstance of this great occasion.

and on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, even the women and children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar.

The joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar. The people had returned to joy. They returned to joy. Revival is the restoration of joy.

I have wondered what to call our series on the book of Nehemiah and I discovered it here. The people of Jerusalem have been restored, but it was more than walls and gates and bricks and choirs being restored. It was the restoration of joy.

David prayed, in Psalm, chapter 51, verse 12,
[Oh God,] Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation . . .

That is revival. And a revived believer cannot stay sorrowful, or silent, or selfish, because their heart is filled with affection for God and His people. His cause and His will are center stage. His Word is no longer optional, it is essential!

How can we experience revival?

A man once came to Gipsy Smith, the well-known English evangelist a generation ago, and asked him how to have a personal revival. Gipsy asked him, "Do you have a place where you can go to pray?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Then here's what you are to do. 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 revival on everything inside that circle."

But, I warn you, revival may just cost you everything. Of the fifty six men who signed the Declaration of Independence, that hot day in Philadelphia, in pursuit of national freedom:

- twelve had their homes sacked and burned by the enemy,
- nine died as soldiers in the war,

- two lost their sons in the war,
- one had two sons captured and never heard from them again, and
- five were captured and tortured until they died.

They did indeed pledge their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor. Can we, as soldiers and ambassadors of the cross, do any less?

Oh that God would revive us again to do nothing less than pledge our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor to the cause of our eternal Lord and our sovereign King.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/18/2000 by Stephen Davey.

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