

## Sermon: Repentance – Lessons from Nehemiah

### Review: Stand Out Series

1. Abraham and Sarah – Faith
2. Joseph – Integrity
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4. Deborah – Leadership
5. Elisha – Spiritual Ambition
6. Josiah – Righteousness & True Worship

### Introduction:

The story of Nehemiah offers us a profound example of leadership, prayer, and especially repentance. Nehemiah stood out in a generation that had drifted from God's commandments because of his humility, willingness to confess sins—both his own and those of his people—and his commitment to seek God's mercy. As we explore Nehemiah's repentance, we'll also see how Jesus perfectly embodied the heart of repentance, though He was sinless, and how these truths apply to our lives today as followers of Christ.

**KEY THOUGHT:** Repentance is foundational to restoration!

**Background:** (Nehemiah 1:1-3) The city of Jerusalem is in ruin, and the Jews who live there are being harassed and threatened by the Gentiles in the region. Nehemiah, who lives in Babylon and serves as cupbearer to the King, learns of the state of his home and is grieved for Jerusalem and the untenable living conditions of his people.

### Nehemiah's Prayer: (Nehemiah 1:4-11)

*<sup>4</sup> As soon as I heard these words I sat down and wept and mourned for days, and I continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And I said, "O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, <sup>6</sup> let your ear be attentive and your eyes open, to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. <sup>7</sup> We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses.*

*<sup>8</sup> Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples, <sup>9</sup> but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there I will gather them and bring them to the place that I have chosen, to make my name dwell there.' <sup>10</sup> They are your servants and your people, whom you have redeemed by your great power and by your strong hand. <sup>11</sup> O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight to fear your name, and give success to your servant today, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man."*

*Now I was cupbearer to the king.*

## I. **Nehemiah's Heart of Repentance (Nehemiah 1:4-11)**

When Nehemiah heard of Jerusalem's ruined walls and the people's great distress, his immediate response was grief and fasting. But more importantly, he entered into deep repentance before God.

**Nehemiah's repentance was unique in several ways:**

- a. **Personal Identification with Corporate Sin:** Nehemiah did not merely point fingers at the people who had sinned. Instead, he prayed, "I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you" (Nehemiah 1:6).
- b. **Prayer Rooted in Scripture:** Nehemiah's prayer of repentance was deeply rooted in God's promises (Nehemiah 1:8-11). Nehemiah's repentance was not just emotional—it was grounded in God's Word.
- c. **Action-Oriented Repentance:** After confessing his people's sins, Nehemiah did not remain passive. His repentance led to action as he sought God's favor to rebuild Jerusalem's walls.
  - i. **Quote:** "True repentance, as Nehemiah demonstrated, is not only about sorrow over sin but about a commitment to restore what was broken." JMA
  - ii. **Head, Heart, Hands (illustration)**
    1. Think right – The right reason
    2. Feel right – The right emotion
    3. Do right – The right actions (note without restorative actions, the effort of correct thinking and feeling are without impact)

### **Application:**

- Nehemiah stood out among his generation because he didn't try to excuse or minimize sin.
- He took ownership of the sins of his people, acknowledged their consequences, and sought God's mercy.
- He was more than sorry – He asked God to help him do something about it and then acted in faith.

In our generation, we are called to do the same—to not distance ourselves from the sin around us but to come before God with humility, confessing both our personal and communal failures. Then, by faith, we do something to restore our brokenness and that of others!

## 2. Jesus: The Perfect Embodiment of Repentance

While Nehemiah's repentance was exemplary, it was still repentance for his and his people's sins. Jesus, on the other hand, is the sinless Son of God, yet He perfectly embodies the principles of repentance. He didn't repent for His own sins because He had none, but He took on our sins and identified with our brokenness. Ultimately, He gave his life to restore our relationship with God. He became broken so we could become whole.

- a. **Jesus Took Our Sins Upon Himself:** On the cross, Jesus bore the weight of humanity's sin. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us, *"God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."* In this, Jesus followed the example of Nehemiah, identifying with our sins and pleading for our forgiveness.
- b. **Jesus Prayed for Us:** Just as Nehemiah interceded for the people, Jesus is our great intercessor. In John 17, He prayed for His disciples and all who would believe in Him, asking the Father to protect them, sanctify them, and unify them. Jesus stands before the Father as our advocate, much like Nehemiah stood before the king to plead for his people.
- c. **Jesus Initiated Restoration:** Nehemiah's repentance led to the restoration of Jerusalem's walls. Jesus' sacrifice led to the restoration of our relationship with God. Through His death and resurrection, He made a way for humanity to be reconciled with the Father, giving us new life and hope.

**Application:** Jesus not only modeled the heart of repentance but made it possible for us to be forgiven. While we follow Nehemiah's example of owning our sins, we can look to Jesus as the one who provides ultimate redemption. We confess our sins, knowing that Jesus has already taken the punishment for them and stands ready to forgive.

## 3. Applications for Today's Followers of Jesus

In light of Nehemiah's example and Jesus' fulfillment of repentance, how should we live as followers of Christ today?

- a. **Take Ownership of Sin:** Like Nehemiah, we need to take ownership of both our personal sins and the brokenness we see around us. Too often, we are quick to distance ourselves from the sins of our society, our communities, or even our families. Nehemiah teaches us to come humbly before God and confess not only our individual sins but also the sins of our generation.
  - i. **Application:** Spend time in prayer, asking God to reveal areas where you've become indifferent to sin. Is there a particular sin in your family, community, or church that you've ignored? Take responsibility for it, bring it before God, and seek His guidance on how to be part of the solution.

- b. **Align Your Prayers with God's Promises:** Nehemiah's prayer was filled with references to God's promises. He didn't pray vague, unfocused prayers but anchored his requests in what God had already spoken. We, too, must learn to pray according to God's Word.
  - i. **Application:** Study Scripture to discover God's promises in your prayer life. Let His Word shape your prayers, reminding yourself of God's covenant love and mercy. When we pray according to His promises, we can have confidence that He hears us.
- c. **Repentance Leads to Action:** Nehemiah didn't stop with confession—he acted. He sought permission from the king, organized a plan, and led the people to rebuild the walls. In the same way, our repentance should move us to action. When we confess our sins, we must also ask God how we can begin to restore what has been broken.
  - i. **Application:** As you repent of personal or communal sin, ask God to show you the next steps. It could be reconciling a broken relationship, addressing injustice in your community, or serving someone in need. True repentance leads to transformation.

### **Conclusion:**

Nehemiah's life offers a model of repentance that is deeply needed in every generation. His humility, prayer, and willingness to act stand out in a time when his people had drifted far from God. Yet, his story points us to Jesus, who embodied repentance and secured our forgiveness and restoration through His sacrifice.

As followers of Christ, let's not shy away from owning the sins of our generation. Let's be a people who repent boldly, pray according to God's Word, and take action to bring about the restoration God desires. In doing so, we'll reflect both Nehemiah's heart and the heart of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

### **Reflections:**

1. What needs restoration in your life? Your family's life? Your nations?
2. What "brokenness" are you grieving? As Christians, we know the Holy Spirit will place a "burden—sense of awareness" in us so that we can help resolve and restore a particular situation. He does so because God desires to heal the brokenness in and through you. Use Nehemiah's prayer as a guide and present your "burden" to God.
3. Repentance involves understanding what is broken, confessing the sins that produced the brokenness (whether yours or another's), and taking faith actions that bring restoration. What is God speaking to you to do to bring resolutions and restoration to the brokenness around you?