

Revival under Nehemiah

Part 1

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[00:00:00] There was a revival under Hezekiah, there was a revival under Josiah, and here, under Nehemiah, there was another revival. God was good to them. God brought them back in the power of His Spirit, under the sound of His Word, and there was a revival among the people of God. Now, isn't that just what we long for today? But are we in a position to expect a revival? Such is the departure of the Church of God today, such is the ruin of the corporate testimony that I think it's too late in the day to expect revival. What we're looking for is the coming of the Lord Jesus, as we've been reminded, and things will be under His [00:01:07] control in that day. Well, just briefly about these first two revivals, I had thought at one time of speaking on all three of them, but I realised that would be keeping you rather a long time tonight. But just briefly, Hezekiah lived in a day of idolatry and his first task was to get rid of the idolatry, to get the people back to the true worship of God. So he cleared away all traces of idolatry, he cleansed the priesthood, and one thing that characterised him was that he invited all Israelites, those in Israel, those in [00:02:03] Judah, to come to Jerusalem, the place where the Lord had placed His name, and to keep the Passover. And they came, they rallied round to His invitation, and they came, and they kept the Passover. And it's a remarkable time of blessing. I'll just read one little verse and what does it say? It says, first of all, He offered burnt offerings that were in abundance. I think that's a beautiful thought because it shows that Hezekiah, young man as he was, he was determined to begin with God. He put God's things first. And so there was the burnt offering. And it says that Hezekiah rejoiced in all the people, that God had prepared the people. Yes, it was God's work. God loves to bless. He loves [00:03:02] to gather His people together. Gather my people together was the command in Exodus and I will give them water. How God loves to refresh His people. When we come to Josiah in 2 Chronicles chapters 34 and 35, there again, idolatry had reared its head and Josiah followed Hezekiah's example and destroyed all trace of idolatry in the land. And he cleansed the house of his God. Do you know what characterized the time of Josiah? What did they discover in the temple? They discovered a book of the law of God. They hadn't known it was there. They were ignorant of the fact that it was discovered and brought to light. [00:04:05] And Josiah read it in front of all the people and he was exercised about it. He realized how far short he and the people had come in the light of the law of God. Well, what is beautiful about Josiah, a young man, as I say, he was like Hezekiah. He was only 8 when he came to the throne. We read about him 8 years later, only the age of 16. When he was yet young, he began to seek after the Lord, the God of David, his father. In the twelfth year, that would have made him twenty, he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places and the groves and the carved images and the molten images. He made a clear [00:05:05] sweep of all that was antagonistic to the service of God and he got the people back to the simple privilege, responsibility of drawing near to God in worship, in thanksgiving.

And this is what rather strikes me. We read at the end of that, he too was anxious to get the people to

keep the Feast of the Passover. See, both Josiah and Hezekiah in this time of revival, their thoughts went back to the deliverance that God had wrought when he brought his people out of Egypt. There was a desire, a real desire to keep that feast. I wonder [00:06:05] whether we have the same desire of heart to meet together, Lord's Day after Lord's Day, to remember the one who has delivered us out of the darkness of this world and has brought us to himself at such a cost. It should be our greatest desire, I can say, as one getting on in years, that it's sweeter to me now than ever it has been, the privilege, the great privilege of remembering our Lord in his death. There's not much that he asks us to do. That is something that brings joy to his heart and I'm sure it brings joy to our hearts too. But just read this, there was no Passover like to that kept in Israel [00:07:08] from the days of Samuel the prophet. Neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a Passover as Josiah kept, and the priests and the Levites, nor Judah and Israel that were present. In the time of Hezekiah, they had to go back about 250 years. Now, to find a parallel, they have to go back 500 years. See, the darker the day, the deeper the apostasy, the further back one has to go to find a parallel to what God expected and laid down for his people. But each revival marked a greater apprehension of what was due to God.

[00:08:06] And another thing I'll mention, notice in these revivals, particularly when we come to Nehemiah in a moment, you'll realize what a great part the Word of God played in these revivals.

It was the Word of God throwing its light upon their moral condition and urging them to get back to what was pleasing to God. Now, the Word of God, just briefly, I'll break off in a moment, just briefly, I'm thinking how the Word of God has played its part in every great movement among the people of God. It was so at the Reformation in the 16th century when Martin Luther discovered [00:09:07] the great fundamental truth of justification by faith. There it was on the very surface of Scripture and yet it wasn't until the Spirit of God was working at that great movement of the Reformation that Martin Luther laid hold of it. The truth of it shone into his heart and it opened up that wonderful fundamental truth that we are justified not by works but by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then again, in the 19th century, the beginning of the 19th century, you find little companies of God's people getting together to read the Word, to find a way amid the ecclesiastical failure and the [00:10:09] ruin of things around, they wanted to see a clear path for their feet. Were they disappointed? We know how the Spirit of God directed their thoughts to the only centre of gathering for God's people. They learnt the blessing of being gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus, the risen, glorified, exalted one. Have we in any way drifted away from these fundamental truths?

What characterised the early Christians? We read that they, you know the verse I'm trying to think of, it's very simple, very clear. Yeah, that's what, thank you. Yeah, one's memory plays one up [00:11:05] sometimes. No, they continue steadfastly in the Apostle doctrine, the fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers. That characterised them in that day and those things should characterise us in this day because God has not changed. And I can pledge, my Lord, that if we are ready to acknowledge him as supreme in our lives, his blessing will follow. Now, without going further, I'd like to look at Ezra, Nehemiah, chapter 8. And what do we find in this chapter?

We find the establishment of the authority of the Word of God. Look at the first verse. [00:12:04] A united people waiting on God and all the people gather themselves together as one man into the street that was before the Watergate. Now, any student of Scripture will tell you that the Watergate speaks of the Word of God, of the refreshing, reviving power of the Word of God, how we need it. And how beautiful to see they were all of one mind. They were not the waverers and those who were holding back. They all came together, eager to learn what God had to say to them. And so the second thing is, they spake unto Ezra, the scribe, to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the

Lord had commanded to Israel. A very important principle, bring the book. [00:13:02] You remember what Sir Walter Scott said when he was dying? He called his servant and he said, bring the book. The reply was, which book do you mean, master? He said, there's only one book, the Word of God. And so, you see, we want to see that all our lives, all our conduct, our behavior generally, our corporate worship, that all is regulated by the Word of God. It was so here. And you notice in the second verse, they were all there, the congregation, men, women, and I suppose they were children, were they not? All that could hear with understanding. No separate gatherings, no young people's meetings in those days. But they were all together because they were all eager, [00:14:06] you see, to learn what the Lord had to say to them. And it says, all the people, that's the men, women, boys and girls, were attentive unto the book of the law. I suppose Ezra perhaps was the only person in that whole assembly that had a copy of the scriptures. And so he was there to read it to them. They were there to receive what God had to say to them. How thankful we ought to be that we have the precious Word of God so available to us in this day. I give thanks daily, pretty well, for the fact that so many [00:15:02] doors have been opened in Eastern Europe so that the hunger of the people that have been deprived of the privilege of reading the scriptures for so long, now the way is open. And they're just hungering and thirsting for a copy of the precious Word of God. And we should pray that those doors will be kept open and that the great hunger for the Word on the part of so many people, especially in countries like Romania and Albania, that that should be met, that they should have their desire, that they might avail themselves of the privilege of feeding, feasting upon the Word of God. And we find here, you see, in verses four and five, I won't read all those hard names [00:16:11] again, it says that Ezra opened the book in sight of all the people. And we notice that they responded when he blessed the Lord, the great God. All the people answered, Amen, Amen, lifting up their hands and they bowed their heads, worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Don't forget the privilege of saying Amen at times of prayer. It's not very encouraging, some of us have felt sometimes when we sit down and it seems as if there's a stony silence. Now if you appreciate what the brother is saying in prayer, if he's praying on your behalf and you realise [00:17:03] that you're one with him anyway in what he's saying, well then don't hesitate, don't refrain from saying Amen. It encourages the brother and it shows you're one with him. Well, it says in verse eight, they read in the book distinctly and gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading. I think it's important, I throw out the gentle exhortation to brothers that take part in the readings, reading meetings, that if they take part, let them speak out clearly and distinctly so that everybody should hear what was said. Some of us that are getting a little bit hard of hearing these days don't want to miss anything. [00:18:05] We like to hear all that is said, so that's only just by way. I throw that out, that's a little hint. Now then it says that they read in the book of the law distinctly. You see it was necessary because they'd been so long in Babylon that they'd lost sight of the Hebrew tongue. They didn't understand many of the Hebrew words, so Ezra had patiently to explain the meaning as he read the scriptures. Another thing I mention in the last chapter, it says that some of them had married, the Jews had married wives of Ashdod and Ammon and of Moab [00:19:08] and their children spoke half in the speech of Ashdod and could not speak in the Jews language but according to the language of each people. What a confusion that was. You see there's a lesson to be learned there. Let me just say this, that assimilation to the world can get us away from communion with the Lord.

If we allow ourselves to gravitate to the world and get immersed in the current of things around [00:20:01] us too much, well you'll find your spiritual appetite decreasing. We need to walk a clean separate path from this world. As the Lord reminded us, he said you're not of the world even as I am not of the world and so we don't want to copy perhaps unconsciously the language of the world. We are a heavenly people and let us bear that in mind and let us have our eyes fixed upon the Lord Jesus because if we are to be witnesses for him, if we are to show forth his virtues, after all we are

called upon for that very purpose to show forth the excellences of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light. So if we are to do that [00:21:01] we need to be occupied with him. We need to have our eyes fixed upon him where he is. Good to contemplate him on the cross and realise what he's done for us to give thanks for his sufferings for us but the strength for walk, the power for a godly life lies in the fact that the one who was here in humiliation is now glorified at God's right hand. All power is given unto him and his power and his grace are available to us in all our weakness. Now in our local gathering we are reading the little book of Hachiai, how careless they got, how they turned to their own things, building their own houses and neglecting the house of the Lord. But Hachiai comes along [00:22:05] and stirs them up and he encourages them. He doesn't just reprove them for their laziness and carelessness and indifference but he says, be strong. Why? Because I am with you, saith the Lord, according to the word which I covenanted with you and my spirit remaineth among you, fear ye not. Be strong. A threefold resource. The Lord's presence was there with them in all their weakness. His word was there available to them. His spirit remained among them. What more do they need? What more do you and I need dear friends? [00:23:06] We don't need what the world can offer us. We have this threefold resource in this day of weakness, the Lord's presence. We gather to his name. We have his word. May we treasure it. His spirit is among us. Indwelling us, each one of us, our very bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit and he's residing in the assembly. What more do we need? Is there anything? Yes there is. What do you mean? Well, what we need is more devotedness to the Lord. We need a clearer apprehension of who he is in all his power and glory, in his might. He is the creator of all things, the upholder of all things. By the word of his power and he is the one that is prepared [00:24:01] to be with us. He'll not forsake us. I will never leave you nor forsake you, he says. He'll always be with us. You say we're so weak. Yes, we are. If we look around us, there's not much to encourage us. We need to look up where the Lord is and remember that we belong to him and that one day, praise God, he's coming, coming to receive us as we were reminded this afternoon. All our weakness then will give way to the joy and the bliss of his eternal presence. We should be with him forever. So we find in our next little paragraph, verses 9 to 12 I suppose it is, we find that the word of God becomes a source of joy and refreshment. Actually, it was a time of the [00:25:03] Feast of Trumpets and that was a time of mourning. But they had much to mourn about, it's true. There was a need for self-judgment and contrition. They had dishonoured the Lord in so many ways in departing from him. So, but there's a time to mourn and there's a time to rejoice. And Nehemiah encouraged them here, he said, now this is not the time to mourn, it's a time to rejoice because the joy of the Lord is your strength. And if we have communion with the Lord's joy, our joy too will be full. The joy of, I like this expression, the joy of the Lord is your strength. And he says, go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared. [00:26:06] Are we following this out? Are we feeding? Are we eating the fat, drinking the sweet?

You say, what does it mean? Well, are we feeding upon the choice portions of the word?

The fat speaks of that which is choice and special. And you'll find it in the word of God. You may say, well, I don't understand it all. Well, perhaps you're looking at it to find something about yourself. What you'll find about yourself, maybe you'll realise how far short you come of God's standard. That's all very good as well, but if you're looking in the word of God to find something more about the saviour, because the scriptures speak of him. The Lord Jesus said, search the [00:27:06] scriptures for they testify of me. And if we wish to grow more like him, as we should, if we realise our privilege of reflecting a little bit of his glory and his person, of his ways and grace here below, then we must indeed feast upon the choice portions of the word that bring before us the blessed person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, you see, this is our privilege as believers today, to feed upon Christ and to

drink the sweet, to taste the sweetness that Christ alone can give. If you've ever passed through sorrow, suffering, bereavement, [00:28:08] well, you'll know that only Christ can satisfy. But how precious it is, and many of us can thank God for the trials that have driven us closer to the Lord. We've learnt more of him than we ever should have done had we not passed through the trial. So, we find here the Levites stilled all the people saying, hold your peace for the day is holy, neither be ye grieved. And the people went their way to eat and to drink and to send portions. What do you know about the privilege of sending portions? It says, doesn't it, not only to eat [00:29:02] the fat and drink the sweet, but to send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared. Are you ready to take some thought, some message that you've enjoyed for yourself? Are you prepared to take it to that lonely, isolated brother in home or a sister? She's probably crying out for fellowship. She gets so little, she's there alone or surrounded by those that have no regard for the Saviour. Why not take a portion for her? You'll be fulfilling this scripture that says, send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared. And I can tell you this, dear brother and sister, if you follow this out and do a little visiting. You know, I've heard people say, well, I'm not [00:30:07] cut out for a visitor, house visitor. It's not my line, you know. I could have said that years ago, but I found the more I got accustomed to it, the more at home I seemed to be in the little work of visiting. And there was one dear elderly brother that I used to visit constantly. And I said to him one day, you know, I come here with a desire to have fellowship with you and cheer you up. But I said, all I can say is that you've cheered me up. So I went on my way rejoicing. And it often happens like that, doesn't it? The more we share in the things of the Lord, [00:31:04] the more we seem to receive. The Lord is no man's debtor. He loves to give richly and abundantly. Well, we find these people not only interested in the scriptures, in the word of God, but they were prepared to obey it. And it's a remarkable thing. It's verse 14. They found written in the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses and the children of Israel. Oh, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month. Well, there it was. It hadn't been noticed. It hadn't been observed. It was there. In the word of God. But they'd overlooked it. And it says that they hadn't kept this scripture [00:32:09] since the days of Joshua, the son of Nun. A thousand years. It was there in the book.

You say they kept the Feast of the Tabernacles. Yes, they kept it, but not in accordance with all the instructions given in the word of God. They hadn't fulfilled what God has said they should do. Live to live in booths. So they set to work. Probably to great inconvenience on their part, but they set about it. And they went up the mount and they fetched olive and pine and myrtle and palm branches, and they made booths as it is written. You see, they might have argued, [00:33:05] well, the people haven't kept this all down the ages. A thousand years. They haven't bothered. And what was, what David and Solomon and others had failed to notice, surely it can't be very important. Beloved friends, it was essential because God had decreed it. And we must see to it that we obey every precept of the word of God. What God looks for is obedience to his word.

We're sanctified unto obedience and the blood of Christ. Yes, a great privilege to be an obedient people. These people were here, you see. And it says very clearly here that since [00:34:03] the days of Joshua, the son of Nun, unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was great gladness. I said earlier that the darker the day, the deeper the apostasy, the further back they had to go to find that which was pleasing to the Lord, that which satisfied his requirements. Hezekiah had to go back or look back 250 years.

Josiah 500 years. You see how it increases. And then here a thousand years I'll make it to find a parallel in the days of Joshua. You and I are living in the last days of the church's history. How far back do we have to go? [00:35:04] A thousand years? We need to go back 2,000, don't we, to the days

of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the people or when the church first began.

To come back to it, when they persevered in the Apostles' doctrine, breaking of bread, fellowship, prayers. What was the Apostles' doctrine? Well, as I see it, at that particular time in the second chapter of the Acts, what had they got? They hadn't got the teaching of the Apostle Paul. All they had was the sermon of Peter, really, on the day of Pentecost.

What was the substance of Peter's sermon? It was this, that there was a glorified man [00:36:07] in the presence of God. The Lord Jesus, once humbled and exalted, was now raised and glorified. Secondly, God has sent down this Holy Spirit as the source of power, as the director of all things that were done in his name. Those two things, two wonderful truths, have characterized the Christian dispensation all down the ages. Of course, we have the teaching of the Apostle Paul today, but we need sometimes to get back to what I call the basics. Now, these people keeping the Feast of the Passover in this way, dwelling in booths, coming out of [00:37:01] their houses, living in tents or booths, it was a reminder to them, perhaps, of their deliverance, the deliverance of their fathers out of Egypt, when God delivered them with a mighty hand. And when they passed through the wilderness, they had no settled houses then. They would dwell in booths. But I think, more particularly, it looked on to the glorious time that was coming, to the millennial reign of Christ, when he will come in all his glory and establish his kingdom and bring in a time of righteousness and peace for all the people. What a wonderful time that will be. And now, you and I, we don't look for the millennial kingdom exactly, do we? Well, in a sense, we do. We know that in that day we should be with the Lord and we shall, if we [00:38:06] suffer with him now, we shall reign with him then. But we don't look for him to come in his glory because before that, he comes to receive his church to himself. Some years ago, he said, we remember the day when there first dawned on our souls the truth of a coming saviour. It was then so real that every night we prayed that before we awoke, we might see him as he is. And in the morning, we thought of one thing, that before evening, the day of glory might arise for our souls. You see, they lived in the expectation of his coming. They knew the Lord had promised to come. If I go away, I will come again. They believed that. They acted upon [00:39:04] it. They looked for the fulfilment of it. The hope was real to them. I wonder if it's as real to us today. Are we looking for the Lord to come? Are we expecting him? Do we realise that before we leave this room, he may call us up to be with himself? There's nothing to hinder on our part or on his. He's just waiting the moment when he receives the word from the Father and he will come. He's waiting, longing for that time when all believers will be gathered together, gathered up to him, our blessed saviour and Lord. He will come. We should be looking with expectancy, waiting for him to come as saviour of the body, to conform our bodies of humiliation and [00:40:04] change them, fashion them, like unto his own body of glory. What a hope that is. You say, the church is so divided, it's so weak and it has so dishonoured the Lord. That's true.

The Lord says, there is one flock and one shepherd. You say, the church, the sheep are so divided, the one flock, who can see it? The Lord can see it. He looks down, he knows every true believer that is among his sheep. He knows everyone. And what is there left for you and I to do? To be occupied with the one shepherd. That's it, the one shepherd. He will come and he will call us home. May we be ready to rise to meet him when he comes to receive us. [00:41:04] May the God bless his word to us this evening. There's one thing I forgot to say and I'll give it to you now by way of postscript. Remember it says that they came together from the morning until midday. Six hours. A bible reading of six hours. Such was the enthusiasm of that day.

I'm not suggesting that the conveners of the conference should arrange six hours. No refreshment

breaks either. They began at the morning light and they continued. Such was their interest and enthusiasm that they didn't leave off till midday and then they still continued on the next day.