

Confession is Good for the Soul
Nehemiah 9 & 10

What will it take, this morning, for each of you to commit every aspect of yourself to a life of faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ? I don't mean lip service. I don't mean follow Jesus just as far as you want to go or as long as it is convenient, comfortable, or self-serving. I mean what will it take for you to commit your lives even to death, just as Jesus committed Himself to the glory of God in His death on the cross? What will it take for you to see how amazing, wonderful, majestic, glorious, holy, righteous, just and worthy God is of your wholehearted, selfless devotion? What will it take for you to so love God's glory that you rearrange your life, your loves, your relationships, your business practices, your buying and selling habits, everything about you into conformity with God's word and will so that God's glory may be revealed through you?

This is what Jesus calls His disciples to: the death of self and the life of faith, the end of selfishness and the dawn of sacrificial, selfless love for God and for others. Jesus said, ***"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? Matthew 16:24-26 (ESV).***

In another place Jesus clarifies for His disciples that their relationship with Him must take priority over all other relationships and everything else of value in their lives. He said, ***"Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" Matthew 10:37-39 (ESV).***

And to the young rich man who came asking where he might find eternal life Jesus said, ***"If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" Matthew 19:21 (ESV).***

Repeatedly Jesus calls those who would follow Him, those who would name Him as Savior and Lord to leave love for the world behind and give themselves to Him without reservation in love and in wholehearted faith and devotion, holding nothing back, retaining nothing for themselves, gaining everything from Him. And so I ask you again this morning, what will it take for each of you to commit every aspect of yourself to a life of faith and obedience in to Jesus Christ?

For Israel it took punishment for a broken covenant, a season of humiliation and exile, a torturous return to Jerusalem to rebuild, and a month to confess sin, receive forgiveness, and rejoice in God's mercy.

Nehemiah chapter nine opens on the 24th day of the seventh month of the calendar year. It is the month of Tishri. It is the holiest month of the year. There more holy days and more worship days and more sacrifices and ceremonies regulated for Israel in the seventh month than in any other

month of the year. The first day of the month is the Feast of Trumpets. It is a day when trumpets call the people together to hear and respond to the word of God. The 10th day is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the High Holy Day, when Israel gathers before God to seek national and personal forgiveness of sin through confession, worship, and sacrifice.

The 15th day of the month is the first day of a seven day festival called the Feast of Booths, or the Feast of Tabernacles, or Sukkoth. More sacrifices are offered in this week than on any other occasion in the Israelite worship year. It is a week of remembering God's goodness to Israel during the 40 years of wilderness wandering. Coming at the end of the autumn harvest season, God gives Israel seven festival days to set aside worldly cares and thank and praise Him Who has provided in abundance. It is a week of praise and thanksgiving and worship and feasting and rejoicing. And it is followed by an eighth day of solemn worship.

Chapter nine opens two days following the close of the Feast of Booths on the 24th day of the seventh month. This season of reflection had just been celebrated by the wall-builders and it was the first time the celebration had been held since Joshua crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land generations earlier. They had spent the week reflecting on God's covenant mercy, His faithfulness to His word, His power in deliverance, His worthiness in person and performance for the worship of His particular people, and having just found God again, it appears they just can't get enough of Him. They are assembled once again in an attitude of mourning and grief, dressed in sackcloth and wearing ashes on their heads.

They are in the spirit and practice of confession. They have just celebrated the goodness of God to them. They have just reminded themselves of the mercy He has offered, of the grace He has bestowed, of the love He has measured to them and they are moved of heart to pour out their heart to Him. They see themselves in contrast to Him. They see His holiness and are deeply aware of their sinfulness. They see His mercy and they are deeply aware of their selfishness. They see His love and they are deeply aware of their pride. And they are moved of heart and spirit to stand before the Lord and confess their sins and iniquities and to include in their confession all those who are their heritage and their legacy.

Their prayer of confession follows the pattern of their experience. They see God for who He is and they confess the contrasting condition of their own hearts. God is God alone. He is the maker of heaven and earth. He is the preserver of life and provider of all that is good and necessary. He is the One who called them into being as a nation in fulfillment of a promise and He is the One who makes and keeps covenant.

He is the One who delivers from slavery and conquers the gods of the nations proving they are no gods at all. He is the law giver, the Sabbath giver, and the bread giver. He is good in all His heart and in all His ways.

But they are not. They confess themselves. They acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey the commandments. ***They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt Nehemiah 9:17 (ESV).*** They did not act toward God as God

acted toward them for He is *a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.*

This pattern of professing the character and activities of God against the faithlessness and disobedience of Israel continues through all of chapter nine until these last words in verse 38: ***“Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests”*** Nehemiah 9:38 (ESV). As a result of seeing God for Who He is and remembering all He has done for them, they recommit themselves and their lives to Him.

Chapter 10 lists the signers of this renewed commitment and then lays out the obligations to which the people are committing themselves. I want us to consider briefly the extent of this renewed commitment. Here are the commitments the people make in light of their renewed appreciation for God’s glory.

They separated themselves from the world to God.	10:28
They commit to know and live out the Law.	10:29
They define the limits of their political and personal relationships.	10:30
They devote themselves to honoring a Sabbath devoted to God.	10:31
They dedicate themselves to grace and generosity.	10:31
They commit themselves to obedient and generous support of the temple.	10:32-39

The real point here, though each is important, is not the action they commit to take. It is the condition of the heart that enters into such commitment. They are committing to living selfless lives that put God first, that put God above self-interest, above self-indulgence, above self-serving, above self-preservation, above self in every way. They are committing to lives devoted to God’s glory at any cost and at all costs. They are holding nothing back. They are committing themselves to living all in and all out for God, not just with words or Sunday morning church attendance, but with their life practices, with their families, with their resources, with their very own well-being.

This covenant, this renewed commitment, is not required by Law. The Feast of Booths is the last religious festival of the year. The covenant regulations have all been met for the year. These people are not acting in obedience to a rule or regulation. They have seen the goodness of God and are acting in faith out of changed hearts. Being fully reminded of the extent of God’s mercy they recommitted themselves to God’s covenant with them.

What love and mercy has God extended to us in our lives that deserves renewed commitment to His covenant with us? God’s covenant with believers is a covenant of love. It is first of all a covenant of love for His glory as God reveals the height and depth and breadth and width of His glory in love for us in Christ. It is also a covenant of love for His Son, Jesus, for whom He not only declares His love for him by saying, ***“This is my beloved Son, hear him,”*** but by raising Him from the dead. And it is a covenant of love for His children, offering access to forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

God has seen us in our despair and rescued us from the slavery to fear of death. God has seen us imprisoned in pride and lust and anger and jealousy and discontent and has delivered us through the life and death and resurrection of His beloved and only begotten Son. God has not left us to die and then face judgment but has taken upon Himself in the body of Christ our sins and has punished our sins by putting Christ to death on our behalf. God has seen us wandering lost in the wilderness of a broken, sinful world and has shown us the way to the land of Promise. God has transferred us, through faith in Christ, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of His dear Son. He has rescued us from death and granted us eternal life. He has gone to prepare a place for us and will come again to take us to be with Him where He is and we will dwell in eternal light and glory forever free from the burden of sin and guilt and shame.

And I ask you, what will it take, what will it take this morning, for each of you to commit every aspect of yourself to a life of faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ? Do God's children love Him and all that He has done for them enough to commit their affections, their devotion, and their lives to Him? Do His children love Him enough that like Paul their wholehearted declaration is, ***"For me, to live is Christ?"***

I fear this morning there are many in the church of Jesus Christ who are not living for Christ but for themselves and are attempting to whitewash their hypocrisy with the name of Jesus. People who never read or study the word of God for themselves can hardly claim to love God's word, God's own self-revelation. People who never spend time in prayer, who are too busy to speak with God and listen as God speaks with them can hardly claim to love God's presence. People who regularly decline to act in faith on Christ's teachings about personal holiness and public service, who remain disobedient to the command to love and remain silent in regards to the disciple-making commission can hardly claim to love God's will.

Do you see the pattern here? If God is nothing more, if Christ is nothing more than a Sunday morning social or entertainment option that can be relatively ignored throughout the rest of our weekday lives, it may be time for you, it may be time for us, to review God's goodness and recommit our lives to covenant keeping love.

Jesus said, ***"Take up your cross and follow me."*** He meant for us to carry that cross all the way home. He means for us to die to self every day and live for Him. He means for us to live as He lived and love as He loves. Loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Loving others as we love ourselves. Loving one another. What will it take this morning, for each of you to commit every aspect of yourself to a life of faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ?

He has given His life. He has given His love. Now it is your turn.

Let us pray.