

NEHEMIAH'S INHERITANCE, PART II (Neh. 9:7-38)

“How good is the God we adore, Our faithful, unchangeable Friend” ... That is the central theme of this prayer in chapter nine, “His love is as great as His power, and knows neither measure nor end”. It relates to God’s commitment to His people and, in turn, it also relates to His people’s commitment to Him.

How do we demonstrate our commitment? The evidence you are a Christian is that you are committed to the Lord. That is the purpose of being a believer for you are ‘saved to serve’. It shows itself practically for that which has taken place on the inside becomes evidenced on the outside. That is what Paul meant when he instructed the Philippians to ‘work out’ their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). ... He did not mean good works save us for salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone through God’s grace alone ... it is God which worketh in *[us]* both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13) ... and ‘His good pleasure’ is our salvation. It is of Him we are saved because He loves us, Christ died for us, and the Holy Spirit indwells us. The consequence is we serve Him, - which is our ‘good works’, - with the utmost respect and reverence in the knowledge everything we require, He abundantly provides.

At this very moment, He is interceding for us in Heaven as our High Priest (Rom. 8:34) so that we on earth hold fast our profession (Heb. 4:14). That was also the nation of Israel’s testimony ... *The Greatness of God*.

Our nation can certainly testify to His greatness too. For example, He has privileged the United Kingdom with leading the way in translating the Bible into English, through men like John Wycliffe in the 1300’s and William Tyndale in the 1500’s. Also in the 1500’s, under King Henry VIII, the English Church broke away from the Church of Rome and in

Scotland God also used men like John Knox, George Wishart, Patrick Hamilton, Andrew Melville for the Gospel. In the early 1600's, the King James authorised the translation of the Bible and it has become the most read volume of literature in the world. For centuries it guided our laws and how our nations were governed. In 1620, the Pilgrim Fathers left our shores and settled in the USA. Also in the first half of the century, Samuel Rutherford was a mighty influence for God in Scotland, and in the second half of the century upon the Covenanters. During this time in England there was the influence of Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans. Also in England, there was the great Christian awakening in the 1700's through the Wesley's and Whitefield. Missionaries went throughout the world from Scotland, such as David Livingstone, Robert Morrison, Robert Moffat, Mary Slessor. Great preachers and theologians like the Haldanes and the Bonars and Robert Murray McCheyne ... In 1859 there was the revival in Ireland, followed by the revival along the east coast from Great Yarmouth in England to as far north as Wick. In Wales, with Evan Roberts, there was the 1904 revival. In the late 1940's and early 1950's there was the Hebrides Revival on the Isle of Lewis with Duncan Campbell. ... Our United Kingdom can surely testify to and boast in the greatness of God, not least to His protection through two World Wars ... Another significant blessing was in November 1917 when the British General Allenby occupied Jerusalem, taking it from the Turks without a single shot being fired. Almost thirty-one years later (1948) the United Kingdom was privileged to hand it back to the Israelis. ... Indeed, well ought our nation to be saying, "How good is the God we adore, our faithful, unchangeable Friend". He has indeed shown us how righteousness exalteth a nation (Prov. 14:34)

Sadly though, in recent times we have been rediscovering how sin is a reproach to our United Kingdom. Through such perilous straits as the political uncertainty which threatens us, and many of our good laws being replaced by evil laws, rebellion against God has cast our nation into the

gutter. Nothing is certain anymore. Nothing is wrong anymore for evil is accepted while good is cast aside. We are being brainwashed by a hostile godless media, stoked by an apostate church. Men and women have put themselves in the place of God, with the consequence confusion reigns and catastrophe looms. ... And that is what the people in Jerusalem, - in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, - were being confronted to realise. They repented before God though. They returned to listen to His Word. They rediscovered the faith of their fathers. They acknowledged their sin and turned again to God. They humbled themselves and prayed, they sought His face, and they determined to turn from their wicked ways. In response, God heard from Heaven and He replied in grace, forgiving their sin, He healed their land (II Chron. 7:14).

The people were reminded of *The Greatness of God*. ... They were also reminded of *The Goodness of God*. At the water gate, they stood and listened to His Word being read, - the law He had given to Moses. They had the respect to listen to God speaking directly to them. And they heard the Levites, - their religious leaders, - pray ... not lifeless prayers from an old dead liturgy but living prayers from men whose lives had been transformed (9:4). Stand up and bless the LORD your God for ever and ever: and blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise (v.5), they read. ... God was using these witnesses in the open air, outside the temple, with nothing of pomp or ceremony, but He was simply using them to restore His people to true worship, to His Word, and to prayer.

And notice it was not Nehemiah and Ezra who led this meeting and reminded the people how great was their God, but it was the Levites. *The men* were not the priority, but *the message* they proclaimed ... there is no God like the God of Israel, 'the Lord your God for ever and ever' (v.5) ... He was not carved out of wood or stone but He is the God Who made 'heaven, the heaven of heavens, all their host, the earth, and

everything in it, - the seas, oceans, rivers, mountains, hills, trees, plants ... *everything* ... and He sustains and preserves them. ... Then the Levites began to relate how He had demonstrated His faithfulness to their forefathers.

Beginning with their father Abram who was called out of a foreign and idol-worshipping people (v.7), God privileged him with the new name Abraham, for a father of many nations have I made thee (Gen. 17:5). ... All nations would be blessed through his seed (Gen. 12:2,3), unequalled among the nations.

Generations later, when Joseph was the Egyptian prime minister, God led the children of Abraham-Isaac-Jacob down to Egypt in preparation for the impending famine. ... After thirty years, during which Joseph had died, they became enslaved for four hundred years ... but even in bondage, God cared for them and maintained their unique identity (v.10). Through Moses, He demonstrated signs and wonders to Pharaoh (v.10). Afterwards, He then led his people out of Egypt, and through the Red Sea, and into the wilderness ... guiding them by the cloud during the day, and by the pillar of fire by night.

He spoke to them from Mount Sinai (v.13), where He gave them right judgments, and true laws, good statutes and commandments: And madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandedst them precepts, statutes, and laws (v.13,14). ... When they were hungry, He fed them (v.15). When they were thirsty, He provided for them to drink (v.15). He assured them of the Promised Land (v.15).

Notice up until now how the Levites have not mentioned the gripes and groans of their ancestors ... that is because the Levites were concentrating the peoples' attention on the blessings from God. Had it

not been for His keeping power, they would not have survived. If they would not have died in Egypt, they would have perished in the wilderness. ... They would have been *finished* but for God.

Were they grateful? ... God had provided for them, protected them and preserved them but no, they revelled in disobedience, they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments (v.16). Nevertheless, the Levites reminded their people God is ready to pardon, [*for He is*] gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not (v.17). ... He did not even abandon them when they did it again by creating and worshipping the molten calf (v.18,19). Despite what they were doing, He kept the covenant He had made with Abraham and, they lacked nothing; their clothes waxed not old [*did not wear out*], and their feet swelled not (v.21). God never stopped being good to them.

And when they came to the edge of Canaan He graciously brought them into the land and gave them the kingdoms and the nations (v.22), and multiplied them ‘as the stars of the heavens’, and broughtest them into the land, concerning which thou hadst promised to their fathers, that they should go in to possess it (v.23). With God they made the land their own (v.24,25).

Ought they not have been grateful? Of course, but instead, the pattern was repeated, they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations (v.26). ... They abandoned God again, even though He had done everything for them! ... As a consequence, during the period of the Judges when every man did that which was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25), their land was invaded and occupied by a succession of cruel masters such as the Moabites, Ammonites, Amalekites, and

Philistines. Through it though, God provided them with ‘saviours’ (v.27), such as Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Samson.

However, they kept returning to evil (v.28) ... again, and again and again ... He delivered them on each occasion (v.28), speaking to them through the prophets, but they would not listen and eventually He chastised them by using the Assyrians and the Babylonians (v.30), - ‘if you want to live *like* them, I’ll send you to live *with* them!’ Once again, they could have been wiped from off the face of the earth, were it not for *The Greatness of God* (Neh. 9:1-6) and *The Goodness of God* (Neh. 9:7-30) ... and *The Grace of God* (Neh. 9:31-38), **31** Nevertheless for thy great mercies' sake thou didst not utterly consume them, nor forsake them; for thou art *a gracious and merciful God*. (Mercy has to do with kindness and compassion ... Grace includes kindness and compassion, *plus* it adds undeserved blessings to the unworthy.) **32** Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepest covenant and mercy, let not all the trouble seem little before thee, that hath come upon us, on our kings, on our princes, and on our priests, and on our prophets, and on our fathers, and on all thy people, since the time of the kings of Assyria unto this day. **33** Howbeit *thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly*: **34** *Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers, kept thy law, nor hearkened unto thy commandments and thy testimonies*, wherewith thou didst testify against them. **35** *For they have not served thee* in their kingdom, and in thy great goodness that thou gavest them, and in the large and fat land which thou gavest before them, *neither turned they from their wicked works*.

The people of Jerusalem as a nation repented. They acknowledged their constant rebellion against God. They accepted it was of His mercy He did not forsake them ... And they responded, **36** Behold, we are *servants*

this day, and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are *servants* in it: **37** And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress. **38** And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it.

What does this passage teach us? It teaches us many things ... and I trust the Lord has been speaking to us individually, as well as a fellowship ... One of the greatest truths it teaches though is how wonderful a God we have. He is full of love for His people, overflowing with mercy, abounding in grace ... And how wonderful we are privileged to serve Him. It is more than we deserve. ... How we should be serving Him to the best of our ability, until He calls us home, or until He comes again. Indeed ...

How good is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable Friend ...
We'll praise Him for all that is past
And trust Him for all that's to come.