

A Pattern for Peace

– Nehemiah 9

Suggested Questions from the Text

Read through the passage from Sunday. These questions are designed to help you consider the text as you read.

Nehemiah 9:1-6 – ‘Blessed be the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting...’

- How can we avoid allowing our sung worship to become ritualistic?
- How can we worship whole-heartedly – particularly when we don’t ‘feel like it’?

Nehemiah 9:7-17 – ‘But you are a forgiving God...’

- Do your personal experiences, or Biblical truth, have more effect on your views and understanding of God?
- Does your approach to how you read the Bible affect the truth that you declare over your situations?

Nehemiah 9:26-30 – ‘but they would not listen...’

- Do you have someone you can confess your sin to? How regularly do you share your struggles and failures?

Nehemiah 9:32 – ‘do not view lightly all the hardships that have afflicted us...’

- How are your prayers and petitions encouraged by adoration, declaration and confession?

Sermon Overview (A Pattern for Peace)

The Israelites are back in Jerusalem, having returned from exile. Finally, they are at peace with their God, and they want to ensure this peace continues. When we talk about peace, we think of security, stillness, rest and contentment. Peace makes us think of the end of conflict, war and stress. We are all wanting peace in our lives.

The message of Christianity is that we can know peace. We can know peace with God. We can know peace in our hearts. We can have peaceful minds. When the Bible talks about peace, there are two main types of peace it is describing. The Bible talks about peace with God – a status which all followers of Jesus have. This peace means that every Christian does not need to worry or fear any judgement from God. Jesus declared on the cross: ‘it is finished’ – and the war has been won. This is not a ceasefire or temporary relief – it is absolute and final. Jesus has conquered – He is the victor.

The other peace which the Bible talks about is the fruit of the Spirit. We can experience peace at different levels through our lives – and this varies for Christians. We have seasons where we feel peaceful, and other times where we feel conflicted, worried or isolated. We want to grow in our experience of this peace – God wants us to grow in our experience of this peace as well. We want to be more fruitful in this peace, to guard our hearts, and our minds. We may not fully experience this peace now – and will not experience the peace completely until Jesus returns – but we should seek to grow in this fruit of the Spirit. We can follow the Israelites pattern to guard themselves – and to seek and experience the peace that God has promised.

Adoration of God (verse 5-6).

The first and foremost priority in finding peace, is to become a worshipper of God; to know that you have been made to worship. Until you discover what - or who - is most worthy of worship, you are lost. We are restless until we find our purpose and reason – to know and worship our God. The opening verses of Nehemiah 9 are a worshipful response to who God is - as He had been revealed to His people until this moment in history. They have found God, and know Him through their history – they love Him, and their top priority is to worship Him.

A declaration of truth, without adoration is bigotry, legalism and hypocrisy. Like the Pharisees, knowledge of the truth, without the love of God does not bring life, but is like white-washed tombs – it might look good, but it brings only death. Adoration comes first. As soon as this is lost – all else unravels. To know peace, we must know God – to love and adore Him.

Declaration of Truth (verses 7,9,11,12,15 & 17).

The risk of adoration without truth is Gnosticism - an old heresy that essentially made one’s own knowledge and experience of God the ultimate reality of God. Without truth, our knowledge of God is based solely on our experience – and so everyone has a different understanding of God. When we declare truth, we remember who He is and what He has done –the truth is objective, not subject to our experience alone.

These verses declare who God is – the story of God and His people. They are re-telling the story - quoting Exodus 34:6 to describe who God is. The gospel is the supreme declaration of what God has done for His people in the coming of Jesus. When we read the Bible, it reminds us of who God is – His love and faithfulness.

Confession of Sin (verses 26,29 & 30)

The people repeatedly confessed the sin of the people. In this prayer we are reminded of the sin of the former generations – rejecting the truth. This sin, this rejection of God, led to exile – being scattered and separated. Having spent the morning hearing God’s word being spoken - they confess the former sin and realign their hearts and minds with God.

Confession without the truth, and without adoration, is a dead religion – it does not bring peace or hope. If we love God, and know the truth, confession brings us close to God – set free from our sin and the darkness it hides in. James 5:16 encourages us to confess, and even links confession to healing. We forget how perilous sin is – but confession reminds us of His grace.

Petition to God (verse 32)

The prayer finishes with a quick request: ‘don’t view our hardship lightly’. Having adored God, declared the truth and confessed their sin and realigned to God – they can bring their petitions with the knowledge that He will listen. There is no doubt in their mind, and so they can easily bring their petitions to God. This should be how we pray, in response to who God is and what He has done, then make our petition.