

“Confession and Renewal” // Nehemiah 9:1–38 // Nehemiah # 7¹

9:1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. 2 And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. 3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the Lord their God.

Leader: *This is the Word of God for the People of God.*

People: *Thanks be to God.*

You may be seated, and find **Nehemiah 9 in your Bibles, if you haven't already**... We're coming to the end of our study of Nehemiah--we've only got one more message after this one. Nehemiah 9 this weekend.

The year was 1866 and *Rod* was in trouble. Rod was caught in a perfect storm. He was a 23-year-old college dropout who had immersed himself in some new and exciting philosophies--and one in particular, which claimed that history was shaped by “super” men who were basically above the law. These “super” men weren't bound by normal social conventions--they rewrote the rules and sometimes had to bend the law to bring about the greater good. The ideas were intoxicating--and Rod had started to wonder if he might be one of these super men.

He got into this big fight with his landlord--just a nasty, mean, peevish woman--and then he got sick, and in his feverish state he started to obsess about her and how she made everybody around her miserable--and he decided that the world would be a better place if she wasn't in it. So one afternoon he snuck into her apartment and murdered her in cold blood.

At first, he felt free. Empowered. He was a super man. But then everything began to fall apart. His mind couldn't stop replaying the scene--her lying there, dead by his hand. His friends thought he was losing his mind. The guilt slowly gnawed away at his soul until it utterly consumed him. He faced a dilemma--if he talked with someone about what he did, he'd likely end up in jail. But if he didn't bring what he'd done into the light, the guilt of it all would destroy him.

Some of you recognize that that's the plot line of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, one of the best (and yet, least read) novels of modern history. “Rod” is actually **Rodya RomANovich RaskOLnikov**, and he is Dostoevsky's parable of what happens to someone when they fail to bring their sin into the light.

¹ Sources consulted: Eric Mason, *Nehemiah for You*, (London, UK: The Good Book Company, 2022); Tim Mackie, “Ezra-Nehemiah - Session Four”, June 2, 2018, Seattle Area Pastors Network Conference; Skip Heitzig, “[Mourning in the Morning](#)”, June 29, 2005, Calvary Church; Dr. Tony Evans, “[Nehemiah - Rebuilding a Broken Culture, Part 6](#)”, July 31, 2020, Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship; John Piper, “[Responding to God According to His Word](#)”, June 28, 2014, The Gospel Coalition's National Women's Conference. And others as noted throughout.

Nehemiah 9 is all about confession of sin too, and it shows us that unconfessed sin does more than simply eat away at our souls; it drives out the presence of God from our lives. Confessing sin, however, if done the right way, restores it.

Nehemiah 8, you might recall, was all about how the Word of God brings spiritual revival to people. Today, we'll see the role that "confession of sin" plays.

I will tell you in advance: **confession of sin**--*true confession of sin, not the "yeah, well, we're all sinners, nobody's perfect" kind of confession*--but **true confession of sin, is one of the hardest things to do**--it takes humility and courage, and the only thing that will enable you to truly do it is a desperation for the presence of God that exceeds the discomfort of confession. When is the last time you honestly confessed a sin to someone?

The majority of Nehemiah 9 is a prayer. It's not addressed to us, the reader; it's addressed to God. *The word "you" as a reference to God appears more than 30 times in this chapter.*

Let me set the context--but first, know that at the end of the message today you're going to have a chance to participate in the ultimate act of confession, if you never have--baptism--the public confession that you're a sinner but you want the presence of Jesus Christ back in your life. As always, we have everything you'll need if you make that decision--we have a change of clothes for you, hairspray, deodorant; everything. That will happen at the end.

Now, let's walk through Nehemiah 9.

Vs 3 tells us that the Levites, who were basically the pastors of the community, spent a quarter of the day teaching from the Law of God (*so, what, about 4 hours?*) and then, it says, they worshiped and confessed their sin for another 4 hours; so overall, this was like an 8-hour church service. (Some of you are like, "Oh, church felt SO LONG today." Yeah, I get it. And for the record, I hate rambling, unnecessarily long church services too--but I'm telling you, when the Spirit of God really starts to move in our midst, your sense of time just evaporates. So if church really seems like a drag to you, maybe that's your cue to go home and pray--either pray for me, that I'll do a better job facilitating the movement of the Spirit; or for yourself, that you'll do a better job at recognizing him.)

Vs 1 tells us they dressed in "sackcloth" for this worship service and put dirt on their heads.

- Sackcloth was a coarse cloth made of black goat's hair. It was ugly, scratchy, and uncomfortable, and symbolized how uncomfortable they felt in their sin.
- Mud on their faces, of course, expressed how dirty they felt before God.
- Now, to be clear, I'm not suggesting that you come to church like this next week, but let me make one passing observation: In modern society, we've largely lost the importance of adopting physical postures as a reflection of the attitude of our hearts. We worship like this (hands folded in front). We repent over sin like this (same). We plead with God for help like this (same).

- Scripture often encourages us to connect our body posture with our desired soul posture because--get this--what you do physically, externally, with your body, actually helps shape the attitude of your heart.
- You see, your physical posture not only expresses your heart; it actually *guides* your heart. ****For example****, when you get down on your knees and do this (hands raised), it will lead your heart to an attitude of surrender and humility. I guarantee it. Try it!
- One of the reasons we sometimes encourage you to come *forward* and pray is because we know that just the act of kneeling before God can guide your soul into adopting a posture of humility and surrender before him. Again, your physical posture not only reflects the attitude of your heart; it actually shapes it. Does that make sense? You say, "Well, sometimes I don't feel like raising my hands or kneeling, and it seems hypocritical or inauthentic to do something I'm not feeling." But see, you're looking at it wrongly! I don't raise my hands or get on my knees because that's what I feel; I do that because that's what God is worthy of. My posture is a cry to God, saying, "God, I know my heart is supposed to feel this way; please train my heart to feel this way!"

So they adopt a posture of mourning.

Vs 4 begins their prayer of confession. The prayer is actually voiced by the Levites, but it reflects the attitude of their hearts. This prayer reveals 4 crucial things about confession of sin and how it leads to revival. (You ready? Some of these are really "in your face.")

I. Confession begins by saying, "God, you are right, and I am wrong."

The Levites open their prayer, vs 5, by saying, "Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you." In other words, "God, there's no higher authority than you--there's no constitution, no politician or ethics book that sits in judgment of you. Right and wrong come from you and are defined by you. You are perfect, right, and faithful. Your name, vs 5, is *...glorious, exalted above all blessing and praise.*" You are above all critique or criticism.

And then what follows from there is the longest recorded review of Israel's history found anywhere in the Old Testament: The Levites go event by event from the time of Abraham all the way through to the present day, and as they do, a clear theme emerges: God has been faithful to them, but they haven't been to him.

The first event they highlight, **vs 7**, is the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 15. In Genesis 15, God promises to make Abraham and his descendants into a great nation, to bless them with his presence and to use them to bring that blessing to the world; their only part is to follow and obey him. And then at the end of Genesis 15, God and Abraham want to formalize their covenant by means of an ancient ritual in which the two covenant signatories would take a couple of animals and cut them in half and put the cloven halves on either side of a little ravine so that the blood flowed down into the ravine, making a little blood river; and then, both covenant signers would walk through this little river of blood together, letting the blood splash up on the edges of their robes, basically saying, "If I fail to keep up my part of the covenant, may *my* blood flow like this." In those days you basically wore one outer garment your whole life, so for the rest of their lives, people could point to the blood stains on the bottom and say, "You made a promise!" (By the way, I know this is all a little gross from our point of view, but you have to admit it got the point across--I

mean, the most dramatic thing I ever did with a promise was make a pinky swear--you remember those? You interlocked pinkies with someone and made a promise and said that if you broke your promise, the other person got to break your pinky. This was way more weighty than that.)

Well, at the end of Genesis 15, as God and Abraham prepare to go through this ritual, the strangest thing happens: God causes a deep sleep to fall upon Abraham, and then God walks through the river of blood on his own, all by himself--signifying that he is going to make himself responsible for both sides of the covenant. In other words, if God breaks his side of the covenant, he'll pay with his blood; but also--if Abraham breaks his side, God would hold himself, not Abraham, accountable, and still pay with his blood.

And then the Levites review story after story in the Old Testament of how God kept his side of the covenant, even as Israel consistently broke theirs. God provided for them, protected them, showered them with blessing. The people respond by taking him for granted, by forgetting him and rebelling against his guidance.

- Vs 16: "...Our fathers [they say] acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments." "Stiffened their neck," by the way, was a phrase used to describe when a stubborn ox would resist the farmer trying to steer it. The farmer wants the ox to go this way, so he pulls the yoke in that direction, but the ox stiffens his neck so it won't turn.
 - One of my favorite illustrations of this, I've told you: When I was a lot younger, just getting started in ministry, I went to a pastor's conference with a really famous pastor, and at the end he said if anyone wanted to receive a special gifting of the Holy Spirit, to come up and he would pray over them. Well, I wanted everything the Holy Spirit had to offer, so I went down there, and there was a line of us about 20 deep or so, and I was close to the end, and I noticed that as he prayed for each of them, they'd fall down, and some started to flop around like a perch on the dock. And I was truly fascinated. But as I watched it happening, it really looked to me like he was *pushing* them down. And I wasn't trying to be a know-it-all, honestly, but I said, "Lord, I'm in for whatever you have for me. Seriously, God. If you want to knock me on my back and make my shirt fly off my torso and then tattoo John 3:16 on my chest, I'm here for it--but I'm not letting that man *push* me down." Well, he finally got to me and he began to pray, and after a while I could feel his hand pushing me, and in my heart I was like, "Bro, that's not the Holy Spirit, that's you," so I "*stiffened my neck*," and so he started pushing harder, and I started pushing back. And we did that back and forth for a few moments, and then he said "Amen" and moved on to the next person. Now, I'm pretty sure later he said, "Yeah, that one guy out there was pretty stiff-necked and resistant to the Lord." But I'm not feeling guilty because I'm pretty convinced I wasn't actually stiffening my neck to the Holy Spirit, only to that guy--but still, it's a good picture of what some people actually do with God. God is trying to lead you in one direction, into some act of obedience, and you stiffen your neck and say, "I won't do it." That's what Israel had done over and over.
- Vs 17: "They... were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them." They forgot all the blessings and all the miracles of grace and lived with a sense of entitlement, like they deserved all these things.

In vs 33 they arrive at the punchline: You have been righteous in all that has come upon us... you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly. That's an idea they repeat, by the way, 7 different times in this prayer.² You are the righteous one; we, God, the unrighteous.

² 9:8, vv 16-17; 18-19; 26-27; and 28-31.

Listen, this is going to be hard for some of you to hear--but getting into right relationship with God means acknowledging that he is righteous and we are unrighteous. You see, some of us assume the opposite. See, when we're in pain, or when we're disappointed with an outcome, we tend to question God's integrity instead of our own, and we say things like: "God, how could you let this happen?"

- Why am I sick?
- Why did you let this fail?
- Why is this friend getting married now instead of me?
- Why didn't you give ME that opportunity?
- Why are MY kids struggling?
- Why is my marriage falling apart?
- *"It's not fair. God, I did my part; you didn't do yours. I'm the righteous one; you are unrighteous."*

The Levites confess the opposite. They didn't say, "God, we don't deserve what happened to us. I mean, the Babylonians who conquered us were WAY worse than we were. Why did you let THEM take US captive?" Or, "Why did you take so long to deliver us?" Rather, they said, "God, you're right; we're wrong."

True confession always begins there.

You see, some of us, when we approach God, feel like we're the righteous ones. We look at suffering in our lives, or suffering in the world, and we think, "How dare God let bad things happen to us good people?" But the Bible, you see, starts with the opposite assumption: This is not a world full of good people to whom God lets bad things happen; it's a world full of bad people upon whom God continues to shower undeserved good things.

Jesus made this point the best with one of the least politically correct things he ever said. Luke 13. There had been this tragic event that had occurred near Jerusalem in which 18 people were killed when a tower fell on them, and everybody was talking about it. Jesus said, **Luke 13:4** **...those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: Do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem?** (In other words, were those 18 the worst sinners in Jerusalem, and God saw them all together in one place and thought, "Now's my chance!" and so he knocked the tower over on them and killed them. "Is that what happened?" Jesus asks,) **5 No, I tell you; *but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.***

- **What's he saying?** He's saying that if we saw things correctly, what would surprise us is not why some people experience judgment, but why any of us don't. What's mind-boggling is not why bad things happen; what's mind-boggling is why God continues to pour good things on a world full of people who've stiffened their necks toward him and consistently taken his goodness for granted.
- The Bible doesn't wrestle with the problem of evil so much as it marvels at the wonders of grace.

Now, to be clear, I'm not saying that any instance of suffering you are going through is some kind of direct response by God to some past evil you've committed.

- As in, "Well, the reason you lost your job is because somewhere back there you did something I didn't like."

- Or, “The reason you’re not married is because of some bad stuff you did as a teenager I’m paying you back for.”
- No, God’s Word never tells us to look at suffering that way.
- In fact, God’s Word tells us that believers should expect to suffer unjustly in the world just like Jesus did, but God is working through all that suffering for our good, just like he did with Jesus, and the beauty he’s bringing through us in eternity will more than outweigh any of the suffering we go through now.

My only point is that confession begins by saying, “God, you are righteous in all that you do. I’ve been the unfaithful one.” In fact, in the ultimate act of faithfulness, after we had broken our promises to God again and again and again, God actually did what he promised in Genesis 15 and took upon himself the price for our disobedience. At the cross, God paid for our disobedience with his own blood, just like he promised Abraham in Genesis 15. By the way, the book of Revelation tells us that when Jesus first greets us in heaven, he’ll be wearing a garment splashed in his blood--blood that shows that he is unfailingly faithful and the ultimate promise keeper.

All that leads me to the 2nd thing:

II. Confession fully owns your part in your sin³

The Hebrew word for “confess” **in vs 3, (yadah)** means to openly acknowledge or declare something to be true. The Israelites in this chapter didn’t try to hide, minimize, or explain away their sin.

You see, when sin gets exposed in our lives, we’ll react in 1 of 4 ways:

1. Hide it. Meaning, we cover it up. We put on the plastic Christian smile and act like everything is fine. One thing I’ve learned as a pastor for 20+ years is that every week there are people here with deep brokenness and darkness. And that’s ok. Opening that up to Jesus is the safest thing you can do. If the Gospels teach us anything, it teaches us that the safest place for a sinner to be is voluntarily exposed in all their sin in the presence of Jesus.

2. Minimize it. Meaning, we shrink it down. We tell ourselves: *Well, what I did is not THAT bad. I mean, I’m not hurting anybody. Nobody’s perfect. And my sin is not nearly as bad as that guy’s over there. Oh, and look at all the good I’m doing, too!*

3. Blame-shift it. *“OK, yeah, I did it, but, see, it’s really not my fault. You just don’t know the pressure I’ve been under. My wife has been like this to me and this guy over there did that... Yeah, what I did was wrong, but this other person’s wrong made me do it.*

³ See [“Repentance”: 2 Samuel 12/Psalm 51, The Search for a King](#); [“Broken”, 2 Samuel 12/Psalm 51, The Life of David](#)

Blame-shifting *has been our go-to move since the Garden of Eden*: When God first confronted Adam in his sin, he blamed the only other 2 people in the conversation! He was like, “Yeah the woman *that you gave me* made me do it.” First of all, it’s her fault; and second of all, it’s YOUR fault for giving her to me. (So then God looked over at Eve and she was like, “SNAKE.”)

Option 4 when you’re confronted with your sin is...

4. Repent of it. That’s what happens in Nehemiah 9. True confession does not lawyer up. It does not justify, minimize, or deflect. It just says, “I’m wrong.”

Our director of counseling here, **Dr. Brad Hambrick**, says that real apologies almost never contain the words, “if,” “but” or “maybe.”

- “IF I did something that hurt you...” (because all that means is I’m not conceding I did something wrong; the problem is probably in your interpretation of things.)
- “BUT”: “Well, yeah, I did that, but...(and then ***insert reason*** why what you did wasn’t so bad or why the other person is really to blame for it.”)
- Or, one of the best ones, “MAYBE”: “Maybe I didn’t do the right thing there...” as if the jury is still out on whether what you did was wrong.
- And I see some of you writing these things down so that you can use them later against your spouse. “Ha, you said “if!!” Stop that. The point here is to think about how often YOU divert the blame for your bad actions.⁴ The moment your apology defends you, it ceases to be an apology.

Listen, I get it: there may be factors that influenced your sin. Others may have indeed wronged you first. But at the end of the day, your sins--your choices--were your own. That’s the dignity God gives you. You weren’t responsible for what they did to you; you WERE responsible for what you did.

And when you’re more focused on everybody else’s faults than your own, that shows you aren’t confessing. Even if you’re right in what you say. **I think of these pastors who have an affair** and destroy the trust of their congregations and then have the audacity to go on a lecture circuit admonishing the Christian world for how unkindly they were treated and lecturing us on how we don’t understand how to show grace. And I get it, but I always want to say, “You’re not the one to give us that lecture.” Your focus should be on your sin. How you manipulated your position of leadership and sinned against the people God gave you to lead. I’ll just go ahead and say it: In many cases, true repentance means you don’t seek to get back into public ministry--at least not for a long, long time. I think in most cases the best way to demonstrate your “changed heart” is to labor in obscurity--not to start a podcast whereby you admonish the church about how they need to get better at showing grace.⁵

Let me make sure you get the point: True confession--confession that leads to renewal--doesn’t seek to hide, minimize, or pass blame for your sin. True confession says, “I sinned. There may have been factors influencing my sin, but nothing minimizes or excuses it.”

⁴ <https://bradhambrick.com/7-marks-of-a-good-apology-vs-8-marks-of-a-bad-apology/>

⁵ Personally, I agree with whoever said, “For many, true repentance doesn’t look like “restoration,” it looks like resignation. The best thing that a minister or a leader with a “changed heart” can do is usually to go away.” I think it was [David French](#).

((Before I move on to #3, one question this passage brings up is whether we are held responsible for the sins of our ancestors. After all, in this chapter the Levites confess not only their own but the sins of their fathers.

Vs 2 says it plainly... 2 And the Israelites... stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.

Or, look again at vv 16 and 17: 16 "...Our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments... 17 "They... were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them."

A couple of things here. First, Scripture makes it clear that we are never held guilty for what our ancestors did. Ezekiel 18:20 says it plainly: "The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son."

But we can and should acknowledge that we live in a society that has been shaped by those sins.

Two biblical scholars right here in our own church, Drs. Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, wrote a great book called *Critical Dilemma* in which they explore the right way to deal with America's racial sins. In it they say it's true we are not guilty for sins we didn't personally commit—but we are responsible for what we inherit from our ancestors and how we respond to it. We may not have inherited guilt, but we have inherited **story**.

And we need to acknowledge that story and pledge ourselves to dealing with the fallout. BTW, that's true for more than just racial sins. If you had an alcoholic or abusive parent, that wasn't your fault, but you carry those wounds and you're the only one who can deal with them. To quote Will Smith (who I typically don't quote during sermons): "*It may not be your fault, but it's now your responsibility.*"⁶)

But let's not lose the primary point here: Confession fully owns its part of sin; it doesn't seek to hide, minimize or blame shift. *And that's hard to do. But when you do that, it sets us up for #3...*

III. Confession appeals to God's mercy, not your righteousness

Look at vs. 32 "Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love..."

They said, "God, we've sinned, there's no two ways about it; we're guilty--inexcusably guilty; but you made a covenant--an unbelievable covenant, and your love is steadfast--it never changes. We're not asking you to restore us because of our righteousness (because we don't have any of that); we're asking you to bless us on the basis of your mercy. Because that is AWESOME.

⁶ 2016 interview

You see, when you give up insisting on your righteousness and your worthiness, you tap into the most abundant, AWESOME resource in the universe: God's grace.

Again, the best picture of this is found in the Gospel of Luke. Another one of my favorite Jesus stories: **Luke 7:2:** Now a (Roman) centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death... **3** When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. **4** And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, **5** for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue." **OK**, let me make sure you understand what's happening. The Jewish leaders come up to Jesus and they're like, "Listen, Jesus; you really ought to heal this guy. I mean, he's such a good guy. He's the nicest of the Roman rulers, he's good to our people; he even built us a synagogue." They're making a case based on his worthiness, and it's a pretty good case.

But now, watch this: **6** ...When he (Jesus) was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. **7** Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed." In contrast to the Jewish leaders, this Roman centurion says, "I have no worthiness to put before you." Now, NOTICE he didn't say, "I'm not worthy, so don't bother." Rather, he said, "I am not worthy; your mercy is my only hope." The religious leaders are making a case for Jesus to heal based on his worthiness; he's appealing only to Jesus' mercy.

And then Luke throws in another wrinkle. This Roman centurion says: **8** For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

Now, here's the thing: This is actually a *very* theologically incorrect statement. Check it: The Roman centurion says that Jesus is like him: I don't have my own authority, the Centurion says, ("I am a man set under authority"), but people obey me because I represent Caesar's authority. You're like that too, Jesus--you don't have your own authority, but you represent God's authority, and people obey you because you represent God.

Wait, what? Jesus *DOES* have authority in himself. Jesus is not just God's representative; he IS fully God; he can speak to a disease or a demon or death itself and send it fleeing. In other words, this Roman centurion's understanding of Jesus has not risen to Nicene-Creed-level--he doesn't recognize Jesus' deity!⁷ He should have shut up in vs 7!

So what was Jesus' response? "Go to seminary, pal, get your facts straight--read some Gospel Coalition blogs and some John Piper books and then we'll talk?" No. **9** When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." **10** And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well. Though theologically flawed, this man's faith is anchored in Jesus' compassion, and (GET THIS), that kind of faith makes Jesus MARVEL.

Listen, I think getting theology right is important. But getting your theology right doesn't make Jesus marvel. Understanding the greatness of his compassion DOES.

⁷ I am indebted to Tim Keller's sermon on Luke 7 for some of this insight.

The Jewish leaders make the centurion's worthiness the basis of their appeal; the centurion rejects that and puts all his hope in Jesus' mercy, and he even gets his theology wrong, but Jesus still responds to him.

So let me ask: What is the basis of your appeals for help?

- When you pray for your kids, what is the basis for your appeal? "God, we did it all right! You owe us!" That's how I did it for years.
- When you are asking God for some blessing--a job, marriage, health--are you like, "God, you owe me this one!"
- Listen, that's a bank account that's bankrupt! But thank God you've got another bank account you can draw from.

Have you ever had the really frustrating experience of bouncing a check at your bank because you tried to draw it out of the wrong account? As in, you have two accounts, and one has a decent amount of money, but the other one doesn't have much at all, and you mix up which account to draw from? A couple of years ago, I had to make some huge payment to something--I think it was for a car or something, so I transferred money out of my savings account into my checking, or at least that's what I thought I did, except I reversed the account #s, so what I did instead was transfer all the money out of my checking account into my savings. It left like \$5 in the checking. So then I write the check for the car, and it bounces, which is bad enough, but also, just random bad luck, I had a bunch of other little checks and payments coming in on that same day, so in the space of like three hours I bounced like seven checks. And all of 'em had the little \$35 charge attached to them that the bank puts on you for drawing out of the wrong account. By the way, how cruel is that? You're charging me for bouncing the check? Money is the last thing I have to give you. If I had money, I wouldn't have bounced the check! Make me come in and take a class or write an essay or something. Don't charge me more money when I'm obviously already broke.

The point is: When you base your appeal to God on what he owes you, you're drawing from a depleted account. ***Your prayers are gonna bounce.*** But thank God if you're a Christian, you have another account in heaven's bank in your name; it's the bank of Jesus' mercy, and it literally has unlimited funds.

When I'm praying backstage before coming out here, I'll often say something to God like, "Father, these people really need to hear from you. And I've worked hard to prepare something for them. But I'm asking you to bless this Word not on the basis of how hard I've worked (because it's not that significant) and certainly not on the basis of my righteousness (that's a bankrupt account); I'm asking you to do it based on Jesus' mercy.

One more thing here: Maybe there's some sin you need to confess, and you're wondering how God could ever forgive you, or how you could possibly ever fix the wrong you've done. And you're like, "What do I have to promise to God to get him to forgive this!" Nothing! There's nothing you can bring. The good news is that Jesus did it all, and if you expose your sin to him, he'll forgive it on the basis of his blood, and he'll help you work to heal it with the power of his resurrection. There's more grace in his heart than there is sin in yours. Again: The safest place in all the universe for a sinner to be is voluntarily exposed in all their sin in the presence of Jesus.

And that brings me to #4, our final observation:

IV. Confession leads to revival

If you go back and study great revivals in history, you'll see that one of the things that always precedes revival is a serious confession of sin. **It's what happens here in Nehemiah 9.**

It's what happened in Korea in the early 20th century.

- In 1903, there were only a few hundred believers **total** in Korea. There are far more believers sitting in front of me right now than there were in the whole country of Korea.
- But **one night that small group of believers held a prayer** service and one of the church leaders--**Mr. Kang**--stood up, trembling, and said in barely more than a whisper, "I have something to confess: I have for weeks harbored intense hatred in my heart for Mr. Lee (another one of the church leaders). I know the Holy Spirit is grieved. I confess before God and before you, and I need you to forgive me."
- **The room fell silent.** Did this man just publicly admit to hating the speaker of the conference?
- Every eye turned to **Mr. Lee** to see how he would respond.
- He was obviously taken aback, but he quickly responded, "Mr. Kang ... I forgive you."
- **What followed was a moment when the Spirit intensely convicted everyone in attendance over their sins.** People began to confess hidden sins, weep over them, and pray for forgiveness. The meeting, which had been scheduled to last only an hour, stretched until 5 in the morning. This led to a massive outpouring of God's Spirit. In one year, 50,000 Koreans came to Christ! That is in a country that only had a few hundred before.
- The local college campus where this started saw **90 percent of its students come to Christ!** Can you imagine that happening here? 90 percent of UNC, Duke, NC State, and NC Central students coming to faith in Jesus? Can you imagine what would happen in America if that happened?
- **South Korea is now one of the most thriving missionary hubs in the world.** It all started with one man repenting of his sin and returning to the God who loved him!
- **I saw this personally ... Campbell** (trembling worship leader/proud; me: jealous; friend who had never told roommate).

What blessing does God have for you--for your family--for our church, that is ripe, waiting on you to confess that sin so that the power of revival can come flooding over you?

Baptism

Like I mentioned: Today is a baptism day, and I think that's providential. You see, baptism is essentially a confession of your sin and renewal in Jesus.

The imagery is clear... You're put under the water, buried with Jesus in his death, and you come up out of the water a new creation; cleansed, washed, all things are new.

For some of you, this will be a huge step. It's you coming out of the shadows, saying, "I'm ready for new life. I'm ready to walk with Jesus."

So if you've never been baptized since making a profession of faith, I want to invite you to come. As I said at the beginning, we have everything you'll need. Change of clothes. Hair dryers and towels. You step out and come; we'll take care of the rest.

Now, if you've already been saved and baptized, but God has used this message to highlight sin in your life that you need to confess, you don't need to get baptized again. Baptism is a once-for-all thing. But when I open up a time of response, you can come up here and pray and renew your commitment. Confess your sin. Bring your spouse. Maybe you need to call someone or ask for their forgiveness. Hey, maybe they're here in this room, and you need to find them during this invitation and reconcile with them. I want to invite you to come.

But first, I know a bunch of you in here need to be baptized, because you never have. Today is the day for a new start—a turning away from your sin, being washed from it, beginning new life with Jesus. So I want you to come... **I'm going to put baptism counselors in the aisles right now, and in a minute I want you to step out and go to one of them, and they'll show you where to go.**

Now, I know for some of you, right now your mind is filling with objections...

You say, "Well, I don't think I'm ready."

- Let me be clear: When you walk forward today, what's going to happen is that you're going to chat with a counselor, who will help determine if you're ready. Stepping out doesn't mean you have all your questions answered ... but it means you're ready to have the conversation ... and there are people at every campus ready to help you make that determination.
- But would you say Jesus is your Lord and Savior, and you've repented of your sin? Then you're ready—at least ready to have the conversation.

"I was baptized as a kid. // I don't want to shame my parents."

- It's not shaming your parents; it's ratifying their decision of faith. When they baptized you as a kid, it was them saying, "I hope this child grows up to follow Christ." Today, you're just ratifying what they desired so many years ago!

You say, "I don't want to become a Baptist."

- Fair point. But guess what? We don't baptize you in the name of Baptist, or in the name of The Summit Church; we baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

You say, "It scares the pants off me to think of doing this in front of so many people."

- Well, to be clear, you get to keep your pants on. Or at least, we'll give you a generous and loose-fitting pair of shorts. But I get it. Maybe something public like this freaks you out. I'll just say this: We will literally hold your hand through all of this. It will be one of the easiest things you experience. And you have my permission to ignore everyone watching; this is about just you and Jesus—just know that every one of us out here is FOR you, not judging you. Which is why they'll cheer.

You say, "Well, I rode with people."

- They'll wait for you. Trust me, they will. In fact, if you tell them you're stepping out, it will be the highlight of their year. They might come with you! This is what they were hoping for!

Baptism is the ultimate confession, the ultimate posture of repentance. So here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to give you a chance to come forward.

Then after that, I'm going to open up the altar for those who want to come and confess sin and pray for God's help.

In just a moment, I'm going to make it really easy; I'm going to count to 3, and on 3, we're all going to stand up, and if you need to be baptized, you're going to step to the closest aisle, where someone will greet you. **Those people are already in the aisles right now.** You step out, they'll find you and take you back to a room we've set up where we can have this conversation. (By the way, to be clear, this is not a great time to leave early or go to the bathroom. Through a series of honest misunderstandings, you might end up in the baptismal pool.) But if you want to be baptized, or at least have the conversation, you step out, and Summit, we'll all cheer as our way of saying "We're so glad you're doing this." OK? So on 3, we'll all stand; you come if you want to be baptized, and Summit, remember, we lose our minds cheering for people taking this step, like always. You ready? Here we go: 1, 2 ... 3.

Now, as our worship teams come to lead us, if you need to get baptized you can continue to come, but I'm also opening the altars if you want to come down here and pray.

Some of you have already been baptized, but there's a step of faith you need to take too. You need to come down here and flood this altar and throw yourself upon the mercy of God and confess your sin. As I've preached today, you know you have sin to confess, and it's burning in your heart. At all our locations I want to open up our altars and plead for you to come and kneel before the Lord and confess your sin. Bring someone with you to pray if you want--a friend, a spouse. You come right now, as our worship team leads us, and you pray.