

### ***Nail It to the Cross 10-06-02***

Ephesians 1:3-12; Nehemiah 9, 10; Deuteronomy 8:11-17; Romans 6:6-8

These past few Sundays the Holy Spirit challenged us to live for Jesus and for Jesus alone. He is really asking us is to obey the Great Commandment, that is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. That is what the Holy Spirit always does, magnifies Jesus, and encourages us to exalt Him to a higher priority in our lives until He is our all. The Apostle Paul tells us that our lives are to be to the praise of His glory! Eph. 1:11-12 (NIV) *11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.*

It's a simple little expression, "*for the praise of his glory*", but absolutely mind boggling when you consider the implications. The glory of God is the radiance of His perfect character, of His pure heart. Our lives are to be for the praise of His glory and that means that our lives should be yielded in grateful expression of the beauty of the heart of God. This lump of clay is supposed to be to the praise of the purity and perfection that God is. What a calling! Paul said we have this treasure in earthen vessels. Just the fact that He would have that in His plan for us shows how gracious and unlimited He is. He can take the rebels that we are and transform us into His greatest advocates that actually express a portion of His great goodness. The letter to the Ephesians says that God had this plan long before He formed the earth.

You have to stand beside the Apostle as he writes this passage of praise to God. He's in jail. In the cell across from him a man is being dragged away screaming as he is tossed to the lions. There is the smell of human waste in the air. Groans of agony fill his ears. He doesn't know if he'll live through the day, and yet he breaks out in praise to God as he starts the letter. It is praise for all the goodness of God in choosing us, and calling us to such a high calling. Eph. 1:3-8 (NIV) *3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will-- 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8 that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.*

I have to ask myself, why is it that my heart is not overflowing with this kind of conviction, joy, and praise in the midst of my difficulties? It is because I don't clearly see the wonder of all that God has called me to. I don't get it. I read the words he wrote but my mind doesn't grasp the enormity of it. It doesn't yet fill my vision to the extent that it should. I can try to understand it in greater depth but I have one more problem. I'm so wrapped up in today and the pleasures of this life that I have a very hard time relating. I have heard the repeated stories of third world Christians praying for us in the USA, that we not be overcome with our abundance. The suffering of the early church created such a contrast with their hope in heaven that they relished the goodness of God in all His

many expressions. We are so dulled by our abundance that we have a hard time becoming desirous of anything beyond our physical satisfactions.

The warning of Moses has come to pass some 3500 years after it was written. Deut. 8:11-17 (NIV) *11 Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. 12 Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, 13 and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 15 He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. 16 He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. 17 You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me."*

In **Psalm 51** David said that God would never despise a broken and contrite spirit, but ours are satisfied and proud. Somehow God has to get through this apathy that our lukewarm spirits have become satisfied with. I think one of the few ways for Him to get through our dullness is to open up our senses to His presence. We need eye salve from the Lord to put on our visionless eyes so we can see the greatness of God and our sad condition. We need to see what real wealth is and receive it from His hands. We think our wardrobe is good, but we don't realize we are like the emperor with no clothes – naked. We have to come to Jesus to ask to be clothed in Him. Our enemies laugh at our nakedness and we just think they are being evil. Our nakedness is our insisting that we are like Christ when our community says we are considered the last people anyone would want to do business with. We are in the most desperate need of transformation because we don't even see the need. That is the blindness Jesus was referring to.

There is one condition for revival given from God through the prophet Malachi in 3:7. *Return to me and I will return to you.* As we saw last week, return means to confess, to repent, and do the right thing. Guilt is a powerful influence and a heavy weight. The only way to get free of it is to take it to the cross. Oh the freedom, the joy, and peace that comes when you let go of your rebellion and cling to Jesus alone. Return to Him and He will return to you. He is waiting, but sin stands in the way. He longs to embrace you but He cannot embrace your sin. You cannot drag your sin with you when you return to Him. You have to leave it behind at the cross.

There are two types of revival, of returning to God, in history. Let me describe each one to you. A group of believers comes under heavy conviction of sin. This usually happens because someone has devoted themselves to praying for change in the believers lives where they fellowship. The presence of God becomes so real, bringing an intense conviction of the seriousness of sin. There is weeping and confession and a lot of emotion. It seems to come over almost everyone at once. The place explodes with new people coming to repent as God draws them. Not a lot of teaching or preaching takes place because the presence of God gets the message across. Testimonies of the transformed lives are abundant.

**Commented [Q1]:** 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.  
Psalms 51:17 (NIV)

**Commented [Q2]:** 14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.  
15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!  
16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.  
17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.  
18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.  
19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.  
Rev 3:14-19 (NIV)

The other type of revival comes more gradually. The one thing that they have in common is that there are those who are made aware of the desperate situation and are praying for God to bring about a change. The people become hungry for the Word and attend Bible studies. They are drawn in to participate and apply the Word to their lives. Gradually life after life is changed as individuals get right with God. The affect is that those they come in contact with are drawn to the Lord. No one can pick a certain day that it began or give the credit to the presence of anyone's ministry, but everyone knows things have changed. There is a brotherly love that is deeper than before. The little issues fade, and the focus is Jesus. Everyone is aware that God's presence and power have returned.

The first type is like a downpour, a cloud burst, and people can never forget the experience. Just recalling it brings tears to their eyes and a residual encounter with the presence of God. The second is like a steady rain. It is gradual and over a period of time. Both make the riverbeds fill up, but the first is sudden and short lived. The second is gradual and endures for a longer time. Either way, lives are changed, people come to find Jesus as Savior, and everyone knows God has visited His people.

In the 1790s there was a revival of the second kind. It led to the Second Great Awakening. It began in England around 1792 but was probably birthed years earlier when pastors of the Northhampton Association issued a Call to Prayer for the first Sunday of each month. Prayer meetings began to spread to other areas and across denominational lines. There were several prayer objectives. The first was that the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon the ministers and their congregations. Then, that the lost would come to know Jesus. They prayed for believers to grow, for a hunger for God to be renewed, and that everything to do with Jesus would have the favor of the community. The last but not the least of the requests was that the Gospel would spread around the world.

God began to answer the prayer as ministers and their congregations experienced His presence. By 1797 the same thing began to happen in the USA as testimonies filtered in from England. In the first Great Awakening, God seemed to be working through the instrument of foreign evangelists. This time God was working in the pastors and their churches as they preached the great truths of God's Word. Their emphasis was on God's sovereignty and man's great need for redemption. The Holy Spirit brought a deep conviction of sin, and lives were transformed. One-third of the Yale student body was converted and half of them surrendered to preach. In the Southeastern United States, camp meetings began in which the conviction of sin came so powerfully that the wailing of the people would be so loud the speaker would have to wait till it died down to continue. The joy of conversion was as extreme as the conviction of sin. It is hard to estimate the total affect, but churches everywhere were greatly increased in size. The affects went on for two to three decades.

One of the greatest things to come out of this period was the modern missions movement. The Baptist Missionary Society along with at least 5 others began. Colleges went back to training ministers, and 17 new theological seminaries were opened. Literature distribution groups began. With revival came a new heart of compassion for the lost around the world.

In the book of Nehemiah 9 we find something more along the lines of the sudden revival. Most of chapter 9 is Nehemiah's prayer of repentance. He outlines their history and all the ways they have turned their back on God in the midst of His great goodness to them. Neh. 9:25-28 (NIV) *25 They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they reveled in your great goodness. 26 "But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they put your law behind their backs. They killed your prophets, who had admonished them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies. 27 So you handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. From heaven you heard them, and in your great compassion you gave them deliverers, who rescued them from the hand of their enemies. 28 "But as soon as they were at rest, they again did what was evil in your sight. Then you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies so that they ruled over them. And when they cried out to you again, you heard from heaven, and in your compassion you delivered them time after time.*

When Nehemiah finished praying, the people wanted to make an oath with God. They began the oath in chapter 10 by listing the areas in which they were most likely to be tempted. Sex and money were the biggest issues and next was keeping a heart to worship. They pledged to stay faithful in these areas. They knew what their weaknesses were. They knew they were prone to go back to those ways. We, too, know where we are tempted. I've been asking you to consider those areas in your life over the last few weeks. I'd like us to do something very different this morning. If you know those things that are tempting you have caused you to fail, if you've confessed to the LORD and repented and have chosen not to go back to those things again, I'd like you to take an action to demonstrate that intent. Just as Judah gathered around Nehemiah to make an oath, I'd like us to gather around this cross. It was on the cross that all our sins were dealt with. He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us. He took it upon Himself and took the justice those sins deserved. You and I nailed Jesus to the cross with our sins. I think it will help us to get a sense of the horror of sin and just how completely it was dealt with if we will nail ours there on this cross.

We're going to take a moment to write out on the piece of paper that is in your bulletin the idol or sin that comes between you and the LORD. Has pride made you so independent that you don't seek God's direction? Write it down, fold it closed, and nail it to the cross. Has greed taken you into the bondage of debt? Write it down. Or maybe you think you don't have a need. Then you need to write down spiritual blindness. Remember if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. There are four hammers, take turns, and then we will have communion. I will burn all the papers after the service. No one but you and God will know what you have written down. Let us take a moment of prayer to ask God what is keeping us from a deeper walk with Jesus. Then, come and nail it to the cross as symbol of getting right with God in that area of your life. (After sing 'It is Well With My Soul' verse 2)  
Romans 6:6-8 (Message) 6-7 *Could it be any clearer? Our old way of life was nailed to the Cross with Christ, a decisive end to that sin-miserable life— no longer at sin's every beck and call! 8 What we believe is this: If we get included in Christ's sin-conquering death, we also get included in his life-saving resurrection.*