

## Leadership in the Contemporary Church 6

### Revival Breaks Out! (Nehemiah 8-10)

Nehemiah 8:1-18

In every genuine revival in history, two major thrusts have always appeared: 1. Proclamation of God's word & 2. In response the mobilisation of the believers: God's people. Strange as it may sound, a revival does not relate directly to the unsaved. You cannot revive the Lost. You can revive the saved. Revival occurs as God ignites the fire of His Word and mobilises His people to go and win the Lost. When the Reformation put the Bible into the hands and language of God's people: out went formalism, replaced with living vibrant Christianity. The 1572 Psalter has Wycliffe lighting the fire, Huss kindling the coals, Luther brandishing the flame: Reformation and Revival followed. Similarly John Knox with the Scottish Revival, and Wesley & Whitfield with the English Revival, and a hymnal too. Luther said: 'Let them loose. The flame will spread on its own.'

Now tucked away in Nehemiah 8 is the first recorded revival. The first two verses herald the most exciting experience since the wall was completed. The context is interesting: a spiritual vacuum: the wall had been completed, people had moved into their homes, Chapter 7 tells of an excellent organisational set up (Jerusalem, like many congregations, was a well oiled machine) but something was missing!! N realized it as did the people. It was not enough to have a well constructed superstructure if there is little or no life on the inside! How true this is of the Church! Effective Congregations, buildings that are beautiful **but!** Don't get me wrong: I am grateful for this brilliant building and that St Andrews is reasonably effective organisationally - but deepening our lives in Christ, making effective our witness to Him, and adding to His Family the Church is fundamental to the life and health of the whole Church and we ignore it at our peril. What happens within the 'walls' is of vital importance.

*In Ch. 8 we see that 3 Things happened:*

#### **1 Fresh Personnel**

Evidently both the Lord and N knew that Ezra would do a better job at getting things going inside the wall than N (presumably too that's why

you called me as your Pastor in 2012?). We have already seen how good N was at delegating tasks. So he utilized the skills of an Ezra at this crucial time in Jerusalem and E became the spokesman before the people. (The Augustinian sacred/secular divide caused the cause of Christ huge damage and sent it into the dark ages for 100 years. We make this divide at our peril today: Nehemiah's needs Ezra's and vice-versa. But we can also confuse the two by trying to impose sacred leadership in a secular context (political) and create real problems. For example: Egypt, Iran and the USA).

## **2. Established Truth**

Scripture was opened and boldly proclaimed. Often when success comes - be it in business or in the Church - there is a tendency to operate on emotional fuel (enthusiasm, good feelings) instead of using the authentic fuel of established truth. This is the first major trust in genuine revival: God's word being proclaimed (e.g. Apostles stayed with the Word/ & Reformers took church back to the Word) v1-3

- A. *Reading God's Word*: not the opinion of man but the established truth of God. From daybreak 9am to 12 noon: three hours! Let's declare the word of God over Canterbury!!
- B. *Obvious respect for truth*: the people listened attentively (v5/6)
- C. *Truth was explained and understood*: v8 Heb: 'to make something distinct, to make it flow together in meaningful fashion.' Why did they need to make it clear? Because they were Jews but not by tongue or culture: but from Babylon they brought the Chaldean mentality and life style. It unlocked the door to understanding (how like today this is in a post Christian context!!)
- D. *Truth was applied and those who heard it responded*: v 9 Then N&E said. Why were they crying? They knew they were guilty. They were thinking back to those years they had had with no spiritual input. They also recalled the sins of their forebears that had caused them to fall into captivity - the depth of guilt brought weeping. That's a good sign: Guilt motivates us: not all guilt is wrong. It is often what God uses to bring us to Christ. N stood and said: Now stop that. God is forgiving. Let's move on. This is a holy day not to cry but to celebrate: v10 the joy of the Lord is your Strength (a song of

salvation)!! v11 shows all the Levites calming the people and calling upon them to be still (Psalm 46:10) and know that He is God!! It seemed they were living in an era not unlike our 1960's during which some declared that God was dead. To the Jews of N's time God had been away on a long weary journey, they had lost touch and were fearful of Him. Now the Jerusalem Jews (a bit like the Elder Brother in the Prodigal parable) were thinking: Gods been gone and now he's back and he's mad. N and his men said: Oh no, you are the ones who left! You should celebrate today. This marvellous God of Heaven still stands with open arms and says: I'm ready to forgive and forget. I'll take everyone who will repent; come to me, just as you are. I'll take you!! V 12 tells us that they applied the message personally; they became a mobilised people: this was a revival!! Bible proclaimed and people mobilised!! That's my calling too, if you hadn't realised it (proclaim the Word and mobilise the people, equip the saints).

### **3. Distinguishing between the means and the end (long term v short term).**

N had chosen to do essentially a short term job, a means to an end project rather than a comprehensive end job. The purpose of the wall was not just to have a wall, but to contain, to protect, and to identify the people of God. Beyond the wall project was a goal N never forgot. Discerning leaders know how to distinguish the means from the end - because they are free from tunnel vision. Discerning Leaders keep in mind the whole scene not just their own contributions. N made provision for the final completion of God's full plan. He wisely avoided the 'monument mentality'. He entertained no inflated opinions of the brick and mortar project. To him the wall afforded the people a useful and helpful environment (the means) for experiences in revival which would have a far more lasting and profound effect (the ends). N was unselfish, he didn't want his name in lights. He stepped aside for E who would do a better job handling scripture. As E did this N stood with the people and applied the truth that was proclaimed. I am unhappy about leaders who have no servant heart and who indulge in excessive image building. From the start N refused all temptations to turn the wall project into an ego

trip. He was satisfied being an Indian among Indians - not a chief. May His tribe increase!! So lets recap:

Ch 1-6 reconstruction of wall/Dominant Character: N  
builder/superintendent/governor of Jerusalem)

Ch 7-13 reinstruction of people within wall/Dominant Character: E  
priest/scribe/led people into revival.

Central theme: LEADERSHIP. God uses a person to motivate and encourage others into new fields, new vistas/ new actions for change.

8:1-12 Revival of the Word of God had a great effect in the people of God. Thrilled to hear Word: led to understanding and motivated.

**Input: Day One (on surface) reservoir of knowledge enlarged.**

**Day Two (v13) Key Leaders (fathers, priests, Levites) to E for INSIGHT!** Hugely important for leaders to see the big picture, to project into the tomorrows of any undertaking, to visualise the outworking of a plan. A vast knowledge of Bible facts is not a guarantee of insight. Some even teach it year after year but never gain insight. E.g. Disciples (Feeding of 5000...boat trip. storm...panic Mark 6:51-52 Exposed to Christ and miracle, and heard teaching about bread of life: absolutely. Input but not insight!!)

How do we acquire insight?

**It takes time:** don't suddenly become wise/ Psalm 119:100/not instant insight.

**It takes the right people:** they came to E/ caught rather than taught

**It takes the right attitude:** All came (young and old)/teach us! / open teachable minds.

Some come to Church services and it does nothing for them: it's a turn off. Others can't get enough. Just like sponges they get bigger and bigger spiritually. All about Attitude! Soil prepared: hearts open to welcome God: speak to me! Result: change!!

When we get beneath the surface facts and start to traffic in the realm of in-depth truth 2 things usually happen: 1. we walk in total obedience. 2. We discover genuine happiness (the joy of the Lord).

Those leaders in N's day experienced both (v14-18).

God told them to live in booths (intelligent grown men, respectable leaders). They were to go out, fetch some branches and sticks, and make

booths for their families to live in. Imagine that!! But out of obedience they built shacks as God required. Regardless of how strange it appeared the people obeyed. When God gives you insight (not just knowledge) you say: 'Lord take over: nothing in my life is private, here are the keys'. Total unreserved obedience comes as a result of gaining insight (8:17 read). They obeyed. God said build a booth - a booth we will build!!! And amazing though it may sound, these people were happier than they had ever been. "And there was great rejoicing" N wrote. NT equivalent is feast of tabernacles where Jesus spoke of the Spirit: streams of Living Waters!!

Can't explain it but when you do what is right you are happy! When you do what is wrong you might make millions but you are miserable. How could a family live happily in a shack - because they were obedient. Believe me, insightful leadership is attainable. N had it, so did E but they had no 'monopoly on the virtue'. No one does. It is available to all who are willing to pay the price. Insight will not only give you a perspective on the past and enable you to face the future with confidence and vision, but it also will give you an honest appraisal of yourself, especially in the area of priorities.

Lord revive your Church today and raise up N's & E's to lay the foundation for that to happen. Lord give us an absolute realisation that we need to fill these buildings with Living Stones that are step by step being built into a spiritual temple that will stand for eternity.

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