

G Jones Bible Survey 5 of 7

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 February 2018

Preacher: Gethin Jones

[0 : 00] Great, thank you Chris. And if you came in and missed the very beginning, we're in Nehemiah chapter 9, which you'll find on page 404. And what's great about Nehemiah 9 is the people of God sort of confessing the sins of their past, which means that they very helpfully give us an overview of their past.

So in a series doing an overview of the story of the Bible, Nehemiah 9 is a brilliantly helpful chapter, because it can just zoom in on some of the details and give us a great summary for us.

So Nehemiah chapter 9. I think one of the most moving songs from the canon of Negro spirituals is a song called Motherless Child.

I don't know if you know it, but it's very simple. Sometimes I feel like a motherless child. Sometimes I feel like a motherless child. Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.

A long way from home. Last week in our journey through the Bible, we met a childless father. A man whose name meant father, a man called Abraham.

[1 : 14] And yet he had no children. But God had promised to make him a great nation. Even a father of many nations, as he changed his name to Abraham, father of many nations.

And when we get to the book of Exodus, which is the second book, which this chapter sort of summarises for us, we see that God has been keeping that promise.

He has grown from Abraham. He's provided a son. And he has grown this nation. And he is still keeping this promise as this family has grown into a massive tribe.

A massive group of people. The rest of Genesis, from where we were last week, sort of traced the line from Abraham through Isaac, his son. And through Jacob, one of his sons.

Jacob is also called Israel, which is why they're called Israelites. And Israel and his 12 sons. And now we are a few centuries and several generations later.

[2 : 13] The sons of Egypt, the sons of Israel had ended up in Egypt at the end of Genesis.

Through Joseph being there. And his work and him saving food for lots of people. And the family coming to join Joseph there.

And now a few centuries later. The descendants of Israel have multiplied. And to the point that the Pharaoh, or the king of Egypt, has been getting nervous.

And his solution has been to enslave the Israelites. And so last week we started with the childless father. And now we have thousands upon thousands of people who sort of collectively, as a family, feel like a motherless child.

A long way from home. And to make it even worse, Pharaoh has got so nervous that even those who are mothers among this great clan of people, they're having their sons taken away from them just to stop the growth of the tribe.

Until one mother, in a bid to save her son's life, gives up this son and puts him on the river. To be found by Pharaoh's daughter. Who in turn then returns him to his mother and sort of hires his mother as a nurse for this boy that she found.

[3 : 29] The movies that show you that sort of Moses never ever met his mother until the last days. The Ten Commandments film or the Prince of Egypt film. They get that bit wrong. They get a lot of things right.

But that is one thing they get wrong. He was raised as a Hebrew, although sort of almost in disguise. But the boy Moses became a man and was exiled from Egypt for murdering an Egyptian as he saw how this Egyptian was treating his people.

And when all of that has been said and done, all of that happens very, very quickly in the beginning of Exodus. And at the end of Exodus chapter 2 we read these words. And God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.

God saw the people of Israel and God knew. It's not that he had necessarily forgotten the covenant. But he has heard their cries.

And he has heard their cries in the context of that promise that he made to his people. He hears the cries of his people even from the blackest pits on the earth.

[4 : 56] The Bible then is full of people crying out. As we've seen over the past few weeks, this world really warrants crying out for many reasons.

And here we meet a God who hears those cries. And much of what follows that hearing of the cry is summarized for us here in Nehemiah 9. And as we see what gave them and did for this people of Israel, we also see a picture of what Jesus is for us.

I mentioned before that reading the Bible is like watching a plant grow. And so Jesus is at the heart of this plant. And this is all teaching us about Jesus as we see God work through history.

And so we're going to see five things, very briefly hopefully. We're going to see five things about what God is doing here. We're going to see that what God brings is strength where there was weakness.

A rule of rest where there was a tyranny of toil. Patience where there was folly. Mercy where there was rebellion. And his presence wherever his people were.

[6 : 10] So let's start with strength where there was weakness. And we'll look at verses 9 to 11 of Nehemiah 9. There was no way for the Israelite slaves to fight their way out of it.

And there was no way Pharaoh was letting them go. Even as God bombarded Egypt with plague after plague, ten in total. He was not going to change his mind.

And even at the very last one he does change his mind. At the death of his son he changes his mind. But even then he changes his mind back again.

And as the people are on their way he chases them. All the way to the Red Sea. But throughout all of this God displays his power. Ultimately he breaks in with his power to open the Red Sea.

And let them go across. And then the sea by which these people are saved is also the sea by which Egypt is punished as the sea closes in on them.

[7 : 12] As we read there. Incidentally, just keep in mind, this is the third time that we have seen God's wind or spirit. It's the same word.

Over some waters to divide them from dry land. In a way that culminates with God's people being established. We saw it in creation with God's wind or God's breath over the waters.

And then Adam being established. We saw it in the story of Noah. As the waters were then divided with the new people there at the end. And this is the third time we see God working to divide the waters with his breath.

To establish his people at the end. And so here we see that the only hope that humanity really ever has is for God to break in.

In power. That the Bible shows and teaches that everyone is a slave. And not to an Egyptian king but to sin. Slave to that serpent that we met in Genesis chapter 3 as it were.

[8 : 18] And if you're not convinced of that. If you're not convinced that all humans are slaves to sin. Then given what we've seen in Genesis over the past few weeks.

Then you should see that you have the burden of proof. It is for you to prove that I'm wrong on that. Because it is clearly what the Bible is teaching. And I hope that when you hear Christians preach that people are sinners.

That I hope they are not doing that. And I hope I'm not doing that. In a way to say you're all bad people. And I hate you. Hopefully what you're hearing is we are all in this mess together.

We are all slaves together. But there is good news of a God who breaks in. To break our chains. That is what we see here.

Is good news of God who breaks our chains. We see God's strength where there was weakness. Then in verses 12 to 14 we see a rule of rest. Where there was a tyranny of toil.

[9 : 24] So having gone through the waters. We see a pillar of cloud leading them. And a pillar of fire leading them in the night. Until they come to Mount Sinai. And Sinai is sort of the key point of what the story of Moses is about.

Sinai is where God meets with Moses to give the law for Israel. That he is now creating to be not just a massive family. But he is making them a nation.

He is making them a political organization. He is temporarily making the church a country. And he is giving them rules and laws. And good statutes and commandments.

And you made known to them your holy Sabbath. And so you have got rule and law culminating in Sabbath. So what they needed once they were out was not just anarchy.

Not total freedom from any kind of rule over them. Their problem in Egypt was not that they were being ruled over by a king. But that they were being ruled over by an evil king.

[10:24] And what they needed now was good rules to help them. I was listening to a podcast recently. Just the other day. About various political issues in America.

And the history behind it. And they were discussing a law passed in the early 20th century. By the federal government. By the Congress.

Over the whole country. That regulated the laws for child labor. And a man called Ronald Dagenhart. I think in North Carolina. Wanted to sue the government.

Claiming that the federal government had no right. To make that kind of a claim. That the local state government could do it. But the federal government had no right to put in that kind of a law.

And he won his case. The Supreme Court ruled in his favor. Said yes you're right. The Congress doesn't get to do that. And so that law was overturned. And so.

[11:22] Mr Ronald Dagenhart. Could get his sons to work in his cotton mill. Even from the age of 12. Six days a week. 12 hours a day. Just ask his children what that was like.

Which one journalist really did do. And after those 12 hours a day. Six days a week. From the age of 12. His growth had been stunted. He had no education.

Said yeah I really wish that law had been kept. I would have preferred to have that rule in place. Now. What we have here. Is God giving a good rule.

Pharaoh was a king. That was all about getting work out of you. Getting you to work your hardest. And no break. No stopping. And he would even make it harder. If things were getting too easy.

There's a point where. We're being too effective in making bricks. And it will take away the straw to make it harder. But here we have a king. Who gives a law.

[12:22] Not oriented towards how hard you can work. But a law that leads you to Sabbath. A law that brings you to rest. A law that is oriented around. The rest that he will give.

In the church where I work. In the church that organizes these. We have a booklet that kind of summarizes. The doctrine that we believe the Bible teaches. And one place explains.

What does it mean for Jesus to be a king. And he says. Well one thing he does. Is he seduces us to himself. That is one thing Jesus does as a king. Is he seduces us to himself.

And I think in our society. That can sound threatening and oppressive. But when you remember. That we are slaves of sin. To have a good king. Come in and subdue us to himself.

To subdue our rebellious hearts. To himself. This is actually. Wonderful news. The way you see God giving the law. This is actually incredibly good news.

[13:21] This is incredibly kind of him. Thirdly we see patience where there was folly. From verse 15. You see in verse 15.

You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger. And brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst. As soon as they had got to the other side. And the people.

They sang a song initially. But pretty much straight away. They were grumbling. That detail isn't in verse 15. But this provision of food and drink. Was all in response to Israel.

Grumbling. And complaining. In the desert. That is why he gave food. And water. And we even see that. Some of them wanted to return to Egypt.

They appointed a leader. To return to their slavery in Egypt. Sure they had been slaves. But. They were complaining. Well at least then they had access to better food. They could get garlic.

[14:16] And leeks. And cucumbers. And all kinds of wonderful things. Sarah Groves. Who is a brilliant singer songwriter. And she wrote a song based. On this idea.

Called Painting Pictures. Of Egypt. Longing back to go where. Where she had been. She writes this. I don't want to leave here. I don't want to stay. It feels like pinching to me.

Either way. And the places I long for the most. Are the places where I've been. They're calling out to me. Like a long lost friend. It's not about losing faith.

It's not about trust. It's all about comfortable. When you move so much. And the place I was. The place I was. Wasn't perfect. But I have found a way to live.

And it wasn't milk or honey. But then neither is this. The past is so tangible. I know it by heart. Familiar things.

[15:15] Are never easy to discard. I was dying for some freedom. But now I hesitate to go. I'm caught between the promise. And the things I know.

I've been painting pictures of Egypt. But leaving out what it lacks. And the future feels so hard. And I want to go back.

But the places that used to fit me. Cannot hold the things I've learned. Those roads were closed off to me. While my back was turned. So often we want to go back.

So often. Even though that wasn't as good. At least it's familiar. At least it's something I know. At least it's something that's comfortable. But going back. You can't go back there.

And forget about the God. Who just opened the sea. And in any case. The sea has been closed. God has saved them. But that slavery to sin.

[16:16] That they were in. Is so powerful. That they can end up painting pictures of Egypt. And even missing out. What was wrong with the place. And even trying to get back.

And that is the experience of many Christians. As wonderful as the good news of Jesus is. We are so enslaved to sin. There's old habits to die hard.

There's that old desire. Just to go back to what is comfortable. Is still there. And yet. They are always met here. With amazing patience. Of God.

So there is patience. Where there is folly. And then mercy. Where there is outright rebellion. From verse 18. So look at verse 18 with me.

Even when they had made for themselves. A golden calf. And said this is your God. Who brought you up out of Egypt. And had committed great blasphemies. You in your great mercies.

[17:13] Did not forsake them. In the wilderness. That while Moses was on the mountain. Receiving this good law from God. They were losing patience.

And decided. We'll just make up our own idea of God. We'll make a golden calf. And we'll worship that. As though that is the God. Who brought us out of Egypt. Now they lost patience with God. But God never lost his patience. With them. And the reason. That God could show this mercy. Was Moses as their leader. As their representative.

Offered himself. As a sacrifice. For the sins of the people. He went up Mount Sinai again. Said take me. Instead of them. But God knew.

And probably Moses knew. That he couldn't suffice. For the sins of all the people. He would not be a sacrifice. Good enough. Or big enough. For all of the people.

[18:12] And yet if you remember. From what we've been seeing. There is a promise of one. Who is coming. Who will decisively. Crush the serpent. And who will decisively. Win back the hearts.

Of God's people. And so in. In anticipation. Of that one coming. God shows amazing. Mercy to them. Finally.

God's presence. Wherever his people were. From halfway through. Verse 19. The pillar of cloud. Which represented.

God's presence to them. Pillar of cloud. To lead them in the way. Did not depart from them by day. Nor the pillar of fire. By night. To light for them. The way by which they should go. You gave your good spirit.

To instruct them. And did not withhold. Your manner from their mouth. And gave them water. For their thirst. For forty years. You sustained them. In the wilderness. And they lacked nothing.

[19:06] Their clothes. Did not wear out. And their feet. Did not swell. God was always with his people. Throughout Exodus. I used to live in America.

And one of. The church I attended. Had a class for adults. Before the service started. And we would read through. Big chunks of the Bible. Each week. And I remember.

It was about my third week there. And we just read through. A chunk of Exodus. And there was a wonderful lady. In the class called Sally. And she had brilliant insights. But we just sat down. And the minister.

Who was leading this class. There's maybe about ten of us. In the room. Said. So how did you find this week. Reading through Exodus. And she said. It was bothersome. Reading through Exodus. For her. She thought was really. Really. Bothersome. And I said. Well. What about that bit. Where. God saves his people. From Egypt. Well.

[20:00] Yeah. I guess. But what she found. So bothersome. Was there's such a long. Chunk at the end. There's all about. Regulations. For building. A tabernacle. Just building.

A tent. And she found that. Bothersome. After all that. Interesting story. Why did you spend. So long. Giving. Regulations.

And blueprints. For a tent. But not even. That is bothersome. That is. Wonderfully. Good news. Now.

It goes along. With what we see. About the pillar of fire. And the pillar of cloud. That tent. Was to signify. I will be in your midst. I will live with you.

That tabernacle. Was to signify. God's presence. In the middle of the camp. So the camp. Would always be arranged. Around this tabernacle tent. There was always. To be a symbol. Of God's presence.

[20 : 54] Among his people. God is not a God. Who went into Egypt. And said. Okay. Get out. Saves them. And says. Now get out of my sight. I've saved you. And now I've.

Want nothing to do with you. Even when they. Basically. Don't want anything to do with him. He insists. That he is better for them. Than Egypt was. And so. He insists.

You will be my people. And I will be your God. He knows what is best for them. And he does what is best for them. And he loves them. He wants to be in their midst.

That is the God who. The Bible presents. The God whom we serve. Is the God who saves. And then dwells with his people. Is the God who is with us.

That is the God the Bible presents. So as we. As we look at this picture. As it grows. As this seed grows into a plant. We're getting more and more detail. About this story of the Bible.

[21 : 51] And this is a story of a God who saves. Saves in powerful ways. Saves in amazing ways. Who enters into relationship with us. Through this covenant.

That does what we mean. When he comes into relationship. And sets the terms through law. He enters into this covenant. Which is an intimate relationship. And he longs to be with his people. In their midst. Is that how you see God? Do you see him as a good God. Who wants to rule you for good. And a God who wants to be with you.

To be in. In our presence. And for us to be in his presence. And to be actively involved in your life. That is the God. The Bible presents. And let me urge you to turn to that God.

And to. To follow him. To obey his rule. He can break in. Very powerfully. So if you're feeling. Well I can't just start following you.

[22 : 50] You're right. You can ask him. Break in. Open that barrier. Open that sea as it were. To let me through. And rule in my life.

Let's pray. Let's pray.