

### GOD KEEPS HIS COVENANT OF LOVE

Nehemiah 9:1-37 (key 32a)

“Now therefore, O our God, the great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps his covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes.”

Some people like to say our God is a God of second chances, that we fall and we rise. However, our God gives more than second chances actually. Today's passage reveals how we could have second chance to rise again when we have fallen or sinned before God. It is not because of chance, coincidence or luck, but it is because our God **keeps** a covenant of love. Unlike mankind our God is faithful to keeping His covenants. Through the lens of the nation of Israel, we will learn how great, mighty and awesome our God is. Moreover, that through Jesus Christ our Lord and saviour we too have a covenant of love with God. However, there is a condition that we need to meet in order to enjoy God's love. It is when we are convicted of our sin before God and repent. I pray that through this message God's word may convict us of sin so we may repent and experience God's faithfulness in keeping His covenant of love. Amen!

It is not easy for anyone to see sin in their own lives, it is more easier to see it in others, sometimes even if one is aware of their sin, they still remain stubborn and arrogant to come before God and say, Lord I am a sinner, have mercy on me. In today's passage is revealed Israel's repeated rebellion against God. However, when they hear the word and repent before God the lord welcomes them in His full arms. God usually also will place them in hard and oppressed situation so they may realize their sin and return to Him. We are continuing from last week message, where they had been reading the bible for seven days and got convicted of sin. Look at verses 1, “On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and putting dust on their heads.” They fasted, wore sackcloth and put dust on their heads. Sackcloth was a rough fabric, and putting dust on their heads was to show their complete poverty of spirit before God. As if to say, we are so troubled by our sin, the comforts of life are not important. They humbled themselves both before God and before people, because this was a public display of repentance. Because of the word of God read by Ezra, they were convicted of sin in their hearts and could genuinely repent. Look at verse 2, “Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors.” They not only confessed their own sins but the sins of their ancestors. This was also important, because they had to admit that, not only were they sinners, but they came from sinful ancestors. This does not mean there was some type of “generational curse” that had to be broken. God does not punish the children for their father's sin (Ezekiel 18). We do acknowledge that those raised in an environment of sin may very well repeat those same sins, but not because they must, but rather because their environment made it an easy choice to make.

Look at verse 3, “They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the Lord their God.” Here we can see that repentance and confession of sin, is always coupled with the word of God. And ultimately it will lead to worship not self condemnation or all sorts of things that many Christians end up feeling. When our repentance and confession of sin is as a result of the word of God, It will lead to a desire for the word of God and worship. Unfortunately, without the word of God in our hearts, we end up left with guilt of sin, beating ourselves for failing at our own moral standards of living and feeling regretful. When we do not have the word of God in our hearts, our testimonies also become empty, only filled with human emotions and a sense of still being conquered by sin, even though they may be tears they are actually empty tears. I still remember back in the days, I committed sexual immorality while I was shepherd, I was will filled with great sense of guilt, hoping that a big truck could come hit me. I did not even want to come to church because I felt I had failed God's people and to honour his word. However somehow I kept reading the bible and I came across Romans 4: 4-5, I knew the passage however, that day I received one word of God who convicted me that, I am righteous not by works by through faith in Jesus as my Lord and saviour. This gave me so much peace in my heart. I felt and free and victorious because of what Jesus did for me on the cross. It is my prayer that we may receive the word of God in our hearts who reveals all kinds of sins so we may repent, confess our sins and restore our relationship with God through worship. Amen!

The leaders were not happy with their spiritual condition and situation in Jerusalem. Though the wall was built, the gates were fixed and the temple was completed. They were still under an oppressive regime, they were not enjoying the promises of God. However, they focused on who God is first, remembering his love through the history of Israel through verses 5b to

32. And because God keeps his covenant of love they could confess their sins and seek deliverance through verses 33-37. From verses 4-5a, we see the eight leaders standing up and encouraging everyone to stand and praise our Lord God. They then provide the people with the reason to praise God as seen in verses 5b to 31. From verses 5b – 6 they praised God for He created the heavens and the earth, from verses 7 to 8, they recognize the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants. The Lord kept his promise because here they were in the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Gishathites, the Lord kept and fulfilled His promise based on His covenant with Abraham. It did not matter that Abraham was a mere human being, because of who God is, he keeps His covenant. From verses 9-15, the Lord delivered Israel from Egypt and provided for them in the wilderness. In verses 16-17a, we see the sinful response of man to God's goodness, "But they, our ancestors, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and they did not obey your commands. 17 They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery." However we see the gracious response of God towards Israel from verses 17b to 21. 17b-19 reads, "...**But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.** Therefore you did not desert them, 18 even when they cast for themselves an image of a calf and said, 'This is your god, who brought you up out of Egypt,' or when they committed awful blasphemies. 19 "**Because of your great compassion** you did not abandon them in the wilderness. By day the pillar of cloud did not fail to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take." The Lord did not abandon them even though they had horribly sinned, rather he even gave His good Spirit to instruct them. God did not withhold the manna from their mouths and gave them water for thirst. This is all because, God is forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in Love.

Even when Israel made a molten cow to worship it, the Lord still did not cast them out but still continued to provide the pillar of fire in the night and a cloud during the day. From verses 22-31, we see once again, repeated rebellion from Israel from the blessings of God, they were given kingdoms, they could make numerous children as the stars in the sky, their children went in and took possession of the land. They took possession of fortified cities, found good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees all in abundance. They ate and were all well nourished and enjoyed the Lord's goodness [22-25]. But then they rebelled, look at verse 26 "But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they turned their backs on your law. They killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies." However, the Lord delivered them into the hands of their enemies and when they cried out to God, in God's great compassion the Lord gave them deliverers, however look at verse 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." Time after time they kept falling into arrogance and disobeying the commands of God. Look at verses 30 – 31, "For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you warned them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you gave them into the hands of the neighbouring peoples. 31 But in your great mercy you did not put an end to them or abandon them, **for you are a gracious and merciful God.**" From these verses we see repeatedly, it is because God is compassionate, gracious, forgiving, slow in anger and abounding in love. It is all because of who God is nothing special about Israel. God kept his covenant. Unlike a contract, where if either party breaks the rules the whole contract become null. With a covenant, even though one party breaks the rules the covenant still stays. God kept his covenant he made with Abraham and Israel was under the Lord's covenant.

After the leaders and the people recited this prayer of praise to God, they could then make a solemn request to God. Let us all read verse 32a, "Now therefore, our God, the great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps his covenant of love, **do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes...**" At this time Israel was not an independent nation — they were a province of the Empire of Persia and were under heavy Persian taxes and obligations. Yet again Israel was pleading for God's deliverance and mercy, look at verse 33, "In all that has happened to us, you have remained righteous; you have acted faithfully, while we acted wickedly." They had recognized their sin, realized that they were wrong and God was right. Look at verse 34, "**Our kings, our leaders, our priests and our ancestors** did not follow your law; they did not pay attention to your commands or the statutes you warned them to keep. 35 Even while they were in their kingdom, enjoying your great goodness to them in the spacious and fertile land you gave them, **they did not serve you or turn from their evil ways.**" Just like in olden days, though they enjoyed the goodness of God, they did not serve him or turn from their evil ways [35]. As we can see time and time again, Israel found themselves dis-obeying God. Taking advantage of the Lord's goodness, became arrogant

and intentional with their own way of living. When their kings, leaders and priests did not follow the law of God the whole nation lost their spiritual identity with God. Now, how could the leaders, priest and Israel have the confidence to come to God for deliverance?

Let us all look once more at verse 32a, **“Now therefore, our God, the great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps his covenant of love,** do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes...” Israel knew who God was, they could then pray, O our God, the great God, mighty and awesome [terrible], who keeps his covenant of love. God had made a lasting covenant with Abraham, which God kept faithfully. Though Israel would sin time and time again, when they returned to God in genuine repentance. Because God keeps his covenant of love, the lord would rescue them, the lord would deliver them from their enemies. Israel had a personal relationship with God through their forefather Abraham, whom God made his covenant of love with for Israel. Because they read the word of God they could be humbled and realize they were in sin. However, sin could not hold them down because they remembered that God keeps his covenant of love. They could accept that that God is right and they were wrong, and genuinely turned away from sin. This is really the greatness of God, a show of God’s mightiness and awesomeness, that he actually keeps his covenant of love no matter what. No matter how Israel rebelled, no matter how serious their sin was. When they realized they were wrong before God, confessed their sin and repented, there was nothing that could separate them from the love of God. God would still treat them as though they had no sin.

Here we can see that God is not great, mighty and awesome because he can he make something out of nothing, or because he can create huge lightning strike over the continent. He is not great, mighty and awesome because, he can make the blind see, or make a person be filled with riches. God’s greatness, mightiness and awesomeness is because even though a person sins time and time and again, if they can realise their sin through the word of God and come to God in repentance, the lord would deliver them. Also lets remembering that God hates sin, he left his own son Jesus Christ on the cross because our sin was imputed on Jesus. He cannot tolerate sin. Yet still our God will forgive and treat that person as though have no sin if they can with a repentant heart. This is really an amazing thing, all because God keeps his covenant of love. This is all the more true in our times, because we too have a covenant of love with God because of what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross. It was because of the love of God that he gave His one and only begotten son Jesus Christ, so that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. This is the covenant of love over us through Jesus Christ. And the most beautiful and wonderful thing that we can be rest assured about is that, God is faithful, he keeps his covenant of love. God’s love endures forever there is no limit to his love. He is a mighty God, he is great and awesome such that when a sinner repents God will forgive.

However, as we started off with in this passage, it all begins with firstly receiving his word, for it is His word which reveals who God is, it is his word that can piece through our hearts and reveal our sin. As in the case of Israel, when we are proud and arrogant to live the way we want, we remove ourselves from God’s protection and we end up being vulnerable to all kinds of principalities of this world. We end up living under oppression of our own fears of the future, overwhelming anxieties resulting is us living according to our human understanding. Either we become our own god’s or we allow ourselves be ruled by what God has created or even live under the fear of man. Some people get depressed to see that on social media they only got one like from their status. Others need to receive praise from others otherwise their day become miserable. Our careers are given higher priority than serving God. Others cannot constrain their sexual urges, and end up falling into sin of sexual immorality, either pornography and sexual sin with another person. We indulge in risky relationships that lead us into sin before God or we entertain feelings that are detrimental to our spiritual growth. Just like in the case of Israel, their own leaders, kings, priests and forefathers were doing evil before God. They did not obey the commands of God. That is why they were all in such a situation. Because the priests and leaders failed to live up to their office, the nation of Israel also lost their spiritual identity, lost God’s promises and became oppressed by other nations. The past few months have shown that our ministry is not special or unique as if we are immune to sin. Unfortunately, some of our shepherds and shepherdesses, our senior brothers and senior sisters end up living according to own desires, being stubborn to obey God’s commands. And because we are leaders our sin compromises our spiritual leadership over those we lead. We end up having sisters and brothers who indulge in sinful relationships secretly. We then as a ministry are becoming head knowledge Christians, with no spiritual authority and no genuine repentance. Like the nation of Israel, the temple was built, the walls and the gate were finished. Outwardly they had a spiritual look but in truth they had a broken relationship with God, they were still under the oppression of other nations and lost God’s promises.

How could Israel realize their sin and repent? they invested lots of time in the word of God. In that way they could remember who God is and have their sin revealed. Our God is great, mighty and awesome because of he keeps his covenant of love. And because of this, we can come to him, he will not reject us but rather deliver us and restore our relationship with him. It is my deep prayer that God's word may convict our hearts of sin, so that we may truly repent and trust in God's love for our futures. We may feel as though God has gotten tired of us, that we can't ask him to forgive us for something He has forgiven us for so many times before. But God never gets tired of us, and never turns away the repentant heart. So my sister, brother, shepherd and shepherdess, if you are burdened due to a life of sin. I pray that God's word may convict you of sin, so you surrender your arrogance and come In humility before God. Accepting that you were wrong before God. The lord will never turn away a repentant heart. Because God keeps his covenant of love, he will be gracious to you and me and give us His peace. As Jesus said in Matthew 11: 28-30, "28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

**In conclusion**, the hope of Israel was God himself, when they studied the bible they could be touched by the word of God and sincerely confess their sin and repent. And because God keeps his covenant of love, God could have compassion and forgive their sin. Time and time and again when they sinned and came to God with repentant hearts, God would deliver them and save them. If this was the case for Israel which was still looking forward to the coming of the Massiah Jesus Christ. How much more for us who are in the faith because of Jesus Christ. God established a new covenant of love with us through Jesus Christ. There is now therefore nothing that can separate us from the love of God. It is us who reject God's love, I pray that when we hear the word, we may not be stubborn and reject it but rather receive it so we may accept we are sinners before God. Because God keeps his covenant of love, we are all the more blessed. God will forgive our sin and save us so we live by faith. Amen!