



VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

Weekly Bible Study - 27:06:2012

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Study 33: ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS TO EFFECTIVE FASTING – II

Nehemiah 9:4-38

In the last study we saw that as part of their preventive measures, the Jews fasted and prayed. We considered four of the essential components of effective fasting – humility, separation, confession and scripture. They humbled themselves, separated from strangers, read and applied the scriptures to their lives as well as confessed their sins to God. Their confessions were based on genuine heart felt repentance. In this study we continue to look at the other essential ingredients – prayer, worship and covenant.

1. **PRAYER:** *Nehemiah 9:4; Isaiah 55:6,7; Jeremiah 33:3; 2 Chronicles 7:14; James 5:16; John 9:31; Philippians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1 Timothy 2:1-4,8; Ephesians 6:18-20; 1 John 3:22; Hebrews 4:16*

The elders led the congregation into a session of prayers. It is perhaps noteworthy that praying came after humility, separation, confession and scriptural application. They put things in their proper order. They humbled themselves before praying because they knew that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (1 Peter 5:5; 2 Chronicles 7:14). Proud people generally do not pray because of the feeling of self-sufficiency. They find it easier to trust in “chariots and horses” than in the name of the Lord (Psalm 20:7,8). They would rather busy themselves in other alternatives than fast and pray. They despise prayer and exonerate activities. The Jews separated themselves from strangers prior to praying because they knew of the dangers of unequal yoke and the fact that friendship with the world is enmity with God (2 Corinthians 6:17,18; James 4:4). They studied and applied scriptures to their lives before praying because they knew that God heareth not sinners (John 9:31). They also knew that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much (James 5:16); and that it is only prayers offered according to the will of God (as revealed in the Scriptures) would be answered (1 John 5:14). Scripture encourages us to pray and assures us of answers but we must also make sure that we are “**on the praying ground**” (Hebrew 4:16; Matthew 7:7-11; Isaiah 55:6,7; Jeremiah 33:3), when we are praying.

2. **WORSHIP:** *Nehemiah 9:5-37; Psalm 29:1,2; 118:1-29; 149; 150; 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*

Many only remember to pray but forget to worship, especially when weighed down by problems. These Jews were balanced. They prayed and they also worshiped. In their worship, they exalted the name of God; recounted His faithfulness, miracles, deliverance and guidance. They thanked him for the laws, statutes and provisions. They remembered God's mercies despite the rebellion of their forefathers. They narrated the general blessings of God upon them as well as acknowledge God's justice in their current predicament. This enabled them to put everything (including

their current circumstances) in proper perspectives. People that fail to do this often magnify their little problems beyond proportion and allow the problems to overshadow (and even block out their view) from the mercies and blessings of God. A song writer captured this very poignantly when he penned:

When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

Until we review our lives, recount our blessings and name them one by one we may lose perspectives. Present problems may becloud past faithfulness of God, thereby removing the needed stimulus that should challenge us into greater consecration and commitment to God.

In all their worship they ascribed goodness, glory, might, justice, power and faithfulness unto the Lord. We are encouraged to praise and worship the Lord in all situations (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Paul and Silas sang praises in the prison and a miracle took place because God inhabits the praises of His children (Psalm 22:3). As we learn to balance our prayers with praises we will experience a newness and power that was hitherto unknown to us. The command of the scriptures is **“Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord”** (Psalm 150:6).

3. COVENANT: *Nehemiah 9:38; 1 Kings 8:56*

On realization of the goodness and faithfulness of God as well as of the natural tendency of mankind to wander away from the shepherd of their souls, they decided to enter into a covenant with Him as a means of placing themselves on the right path to future blessings and happiness. This gave them a sense of direction without which it would be impossible to steer a strait course. Covenant and vows are some of the means by which those touched by the power of God often expressed their commitment and consecration to God. Such commitment prepared as it were paths for their feet and provided goals for their lives. A life without goal is an aimless wander through the wilderness of vanity. Others in response to challenges and in recognition of the greatness of God made vows that changed their plight and destiny. Jephthah secured victory through vows (Judges 11:30-40). Jacob obtained God's favour, blessings and a bright future through a vow (Genesis 28:20-22; 35:1-5). We must however be diligent to perform our vows and keep to our own part of the terms of the covenant, for God has no delight in covenant breakers (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6).