

## Which Master Will You Serve? Nehemiah 9:32-10:39

### **You'll Always Serve Something**

When we read that the Jewish people were slaves in the Promised Land, it should hit us that things should not have ended like this. God had not freed them from slavery in Egypt to become slaves of a different master in their own land.

But the reason they were in this situation has a lot to teach us. They ended up serving other masters because they were not willing to serve God. And the truth is that we all worship something, and whatever we worship we end up serving. And if that is not God, it will become a cruel task-master: whether that is career, or wealth or romance. It will suck the life out of you.

How can we avoid that happening?

### **Repentance and Rest**

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that we will only find true freedom and satisfaction in life if we return to the right path: to God. Nehemiah leads the people back to this path.

They pledge themselves to listen to God's word. When you know you're lost you know you need someone else to show you the way. The people were humble enough to recognise their need for God's word to guide them. We need to hear that voice as well.

Then they identify a number of specific areas where they make their repentance real:

- *Intermarriage*: this resulted in compromising their ability to be God's distinctive people, and a light and blessing to others. But they were also intermarrying with pagans for business advantage or to get ahead socially. Refusing to intermarry was a way to say that God would be their God, not the drive to get ahead.
- *Observing the Sabbath day, and year*: the Sabbath was a sign that they were no longer slaves to work. God was to be their God, not the constant drive for more. And the Sabbath year – when the produce was left for the poor – was a sign that money and selfishness would not be their gods – rather they would be generous and care for the needy.
- *Providing for the temple*: through their yearly financial gift and their firstfruits they were saying they would make the temple their priority. The city would be a place of worship. God and not gain would be their God.

Sadly, their resolve did not last long. So how can we see lasting change in our own lives in these areas?

### **Knowing the One you Worship**

We can start by seeing God as they did: as great and awesome and loving. When we see God as he is, it challenges our attitudes and decisions in life. But we need more than that (because they needed more than that).

God's steadfast love culminated in Jesus dying for us: the firstborn Son of God who gave his life for us. When the full extent of God's love for us sinks into our hearts, all the stuff that competes with him falls into its right place, and you realise that nothing is worthy of your worship and life's service, than him.