

REBUILDING A LIFE FOR GOD - Studies In Nehemiah - Part twelve
Sunday, December 3rd, 2023, 5:30 p.m.
Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

LEARNING TO HEAR GOD'S WORD WITHOUT CONDEMNATION

Nehemiah 8:1-18 - “And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. [2] So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. [3] And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. [4] And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. [5] And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. [6] And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. [7] Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. [8] They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. [9] And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law.”

[10] “Then he said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” [11] So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.” [12] And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them. [13] On the second day the heads of fathers’ houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the Law. [14] And they found it written in the Law that the LORD had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, [15] and that they should proclaim it and publish it in all their towns and in Jerusalem, “Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths, as it is written.” [16] So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. [17] And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing. [18] And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the rule.

I hope you can keep the big picture of the book of Nehemiah in your mind as the weeks roll by. It’s all about a people who move back from captivity to freedom as their own people. It’s all about people who move from slavery to finding their full potential, their full place as the people God intended them to be.

First, there comes the miraculous decree of deliverance. This godless king, Artaxerxes sends them back to their own land. Ezra is used by God to rebuild the temple - the heart and soul of their relationship with God. Then God raises up Nehemiah to rebuild the walls around the city.

The temple re-establishes worship and the law of God. The walls establish their security and future as released people. The walls make sure that the deliverance from their oppressors is more than just a temporary fix.

Listen, you have to do more than just **“come to Jesus.”** That’s a precious first step. And if you’ve never taken it, you must be born again. There is no other way to be put right at the very center of your life.

But once you’ve made that important decision, there’s the whole orienting of the life to His ways and His Lordship. He speaks by His Spirit and by His Word. There’s so much rubble that needs to be cleared and removed. There are so many structures that need to be re-established and put into place.

In fact, we’ve been looking at this whole book as a picture of the **“rebuilding of the human soul”** - the way you come to deal with brokenness and rubble in your life **after** you’ve committed your life to Jesus as your Lord.

Now we're at a place in the book where the walls are back up. A fresh start has been made. The rebuilding of a home, a marriage, a devotional life - the fresh renunciation of some secret sin, whatever it may be - much work and prayer have been invested into some area of your life.

The people are ***out of captivity***. They are back in the security of their ***walled city***. The ***gates are hung and established***. If you recall, we spent a good part of one of the earlier messages in this series talking about the entry and exit points of your heart and how they must be guarded with wisdom.

What happens now? After all of this is done, what comes next? I have only one primary teaching point in tonight's teaching:

- 1) **NEW BEGINNINGS CAN ONLY BE SUSTAINED BY A DEEP, FRESH COMMITMENT TO THE CARRYING OUT OF GOD'S WORD**

Nehemiah 8:2-3, 5-8 - "So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. [3] And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law."

[5] “And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. [6] And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. [7] Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. [8] They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

It is God’s design that restored, reclaimed people learn all over again the discipline of ordering their lives daily under the authority of His Word. It’s highly significant that ***the very first corporate act of the people after the walls were built was this public reading and explanation of the Law of God.***

The reading and heeding of the Word of God was the life-link between ***getting*** free and ***staying*** free. The Word of God was what Ezra and Nehemiah set the people’s attention on ***first*** once they had made their fresh start.

It's as though God were trying to tell them, "Listen! I know you're back in the holy city. I know the temple is back in place. I know you've worked long and hard to establish the walls around all that is important to you. But listen to me, ***your strength and your future isn't guaranteed by that building called the temple, and your future isn't secured by those walls, and your success isn't going to be held in place by the work of your hands or the counsel of men. My children, hear my word! Keep my laws! Understand my instruction! That's where your strength and future lies!***"

Remember, these people ***had*** the temple and the walls in place when they ***went into*** captivity into Babylon. It was their failure to honor God's ways that was their undoing.

O, listen to me, all of you who are in the middle of trying so hard to make something work again for God in your life, your home, your marriage, your work place - I know this is a day of much learning and thinking. I know we hear all about the greatness of human potential. I know there are more experts than ever before. And I'm not necessarily knocking any of those things. ***But I want to urge you today, and I know it's of the Lord, that so many times we need, even as Christians, to be recalled, summoned all over again to a simple, obedient, regular exposure to God's precious Word.***

Have you studied God's Word every day this past year? What is your plan for 2024? There is no bigger issue to come to terms with than this.

God gave these words to Moses and closed by saying, ***“These words are life unto you!” - Deuteronomy 32:46-47 - “...he said to them, “Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. [47] For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.”***

Joshua repeats the same thought, with the words of the Lord still ringing in his soul: **Joshua 1:8 - “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.”**

Another great king, a leader after God's own heart, with a will of steel, refuses to let this idea die in the minds of the people on his watch:

Psalm 1:1-2 - “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; [2] but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.”

This is a principle God simply refuses to allow to cool with the passing of time. There is no other way to sustain spiritual life. Once the walls are up God leads the people straight into the Word. You never get your life on track enough that you no longer need to budget your time and diet your mental intake around the living Word of God. The truth **made you free**. And only the truth of the Word will **keep you free in your walk with Jesus**.

The view you have of God shapes everything else about your earthly and eternal life. Jesus told His closest followers to consider God a heavenly Father. He was **loving**, but manifested a certain **kind** of love. It was a **Fatherly** love. It was a firm and shaping love. But it was a full love nonetheless.

That’s the point Ezra makes to these people. They **knew** it was their failure to keep God’s Word that led to their bondage and captivity. They **felt** the weight of past guilt. Notice that they all **wept** when they heard the law read.

And it's right at this point Ezra teaching them something important about hearing God's Word at this present moment as it was read. God reminds them to **not** let past moments of failure and regret - perhaps times of **deep** failure - keep them from starting to hear **now**. The Devil want past failures to to prevent present faith and obedience.

So **come** to this Father. Father's don't quit loving their children. They are to be taken **seriously**, to be sure. But never let the devil so doubt about God's Father love.