

**REBUILDING A LIFE FOR GOD - Studies In Nehemiah - Part thirteen
Sunday, December 10th, 2023, 5:30 p.m.
Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON**

**LEARNING TO HEAR GOD'S WORD WITHOUT CONDEMNATION
(continued)**

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.

We focussed on one primary point of teaching last Sunday in the first part of this message. ***New beginnings can only be sustained by a deep, fresh commitment to the carrying out of God’s Word.*** The beginning of any sustained rebuilding of any of the structures of God’s joyful rule and freeing reign in any set of circumstances will always involved a fresh dedication and application of God’s Word. This is the first corporate calling of these delivered people. Come back to the Word of God.

Now on to point number two:

2) **ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSONS A REDEEMED SOUL CAN LEARN IS TO HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD WITHOUT CONDEMNATION**

I didn't say without *conviction*, or without *repentance*, but without *condemnation*.

Nehemiah 8:5-6, 9-11 - "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. [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."

I want to talk to you about receiving the **goal** of God's Word as you allow it to speak to your life. I'm not talking now about the **entry** of the Word. I'm talking about the **goal** of the Word and the Spirit in your life as a believer.

These people hadn't been exposed to the Word of God for a long time. They had been living through captivity and brokenness and rubble. There had been very little of the light of God's Word shining into the darkness of their own hearts.

As they begin to hear the Word again for the first time they are overcome with sorrow and weeping. People begin to moan and groan. Their hearts are overcome with grief as they begin to feel broken by the sheer force of God's law as it is read to them out loud.

I think we all know what that's like. You hear the Word proclaimed or you read it yourself, and over and over again you say, ***"O, I've done that! I've said terrible things like that! I don't love God like that. I've sinned just like those people!"***

And it's no wonder they ended up on their knees. It's almost as though they've been driven, just by the sheer weight of the condemnation of the moment, right into the ground.

And it's right at that moment that Ezra, Nehemiah and all of the Levites realize that something is terribly wrong - ***“Wait a minute! This is not the appropriate response to what God is saying. Stop this!”*** This is surprising because you would think these leaders would have been pleased the people were so broken by their sin before God.

But these are wise leaders. They recognize quickly that this isn't ***brokenness***. This is ***hopelessness***. These people aren't just convicted. They're immobilized. They're ***condemned***.

One of the most needful things for every believer to learn early in the Christian life is the ***arrival at a responsive frame of mind when you approach the Scriptures***. Understand this - the Lord wants His Word to be ***blessed nourishment and joyful encouragement*** to your life.

I am fully aware that we need to confess our sin. I know we need to confront what is off base and wicked in our lives. I know that the Word often is used to bring reproof and correction to our souls.

No one who reads the Bible honestly can possibly avoid those truths:

2 Timothy 3:15-17 - “....and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

Psalms 139:23-24 - “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! [24] And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”

Obviously the Word is used to bring rebuke and correction. Obviously it is used by the Holy Spirit to split open our hearts and lay everything bare before our Creator. And obviously there will be times when that becomes a painful time of exposure and sometimes even chastisement.

I understand all of that and have preached on those passages many times. I’m not downplaying for one second the importance of ***repentance*** in this message.

But just as surely as I believe in the need for a deep and thorough repentance, I believe there is a need to expose another similar feeling, spawned not by the Holy Spirit, and crippling to many believers who want to move ahead with the rebuilding of some area of their lives.

Here's the problem: ***There is a natural, inbred tendency on the part of all of us to confuse the loving prod of the Holy Spirit toward repentance with the life quenching plot of the devil to freeze our souls in condemnation before the searchlight of the Word.***

Let me just sample our hearts with the verses just mentioned:

2 Timothy 3:15-17 - "....and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

What words jump in your memory when you think of those verses - **“reproof and correction”** or, **“complete, equipped for every good work?”** This is a very important question because the first part of that verse only describes the **process** God uses. That last part - **“complete, equipped for every good work”** - describes the **goal** of God’s final work. And you have to appreciate the **goal** of God’s work if you are to **embrace** God’s work!

And what about **Psalm 139:23-24** - **“....Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! [24] And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”**

I was amazed in my own mental wording of those verses how many times the last phrase almost got erased while the words, **“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! [24] And see if there be any grievous way in me....”**

I know every word in those verses is powerfully true. But I also know ***it’s the last phrase of those verses that needs to be quickened to our hearts if we’re ever going to understand what the heart of God is all about as He works in our lives - “and lead me in the way everlasting!”***

Listen to me. This is not just hairsplitting. It's so natural for all of us to miss the **heart of God** when He starts to deal with our lives with the sword of His Word. When He speaks to me about my sin it's never with the intent of merely condemning me with my own unrighteousness.

You can cry over the sin in your past, you can weep and wring your hands. ***Listen to me! Those tears will never erase the stain from your heart. Only the blood of Jesus Christ, God the Son will make you clean in your mind and heart.***

And there are scores of people who miss the truth. Though they know all about the doctrines of the new birth, they miss one of the central truths of the Gospel - that is, ***that Jesus Christ, God's Son never came into this world to condemn you for your sin!***

John 3:16-17 - "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. [17] **For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,** but in order that the world might be saved through him."

John 3:16 is important because it tells us why Jesus came that first Christmas. **John 3:17** is equally important because it tells us why Jesus *didn't* come that first Christmas. Those words don't just apply to those who have never yet responded to God's grace. They apply to you. As long as you live the Christian life with any degree of faithfulness, the devil knows he's not likely to get you to just flat out ***deny God's Word.***

He may not even be able to get you to stop reading it, at least occasionally. ***But he doesn't have to do either one of those two things to suck the Word of its transforming power in terms of freeing up your soul.*** We are already targets for his work of ***distorting the intent of the voice of the word in our minds.*** And closing our minds to the ***loving intent*** of Father God through His Word is as effective in robbing us of spiritual life as removing all the Bibles from Canada over night!

This is such a practical truth. I'm sure we've all had the experience at least once in the past month. God deals with your soul about that impure thought, that caving in to greed, that betrayal of your first love, that unkind word, that promise not kept.

And the fundamental question you have to ask yourself is this. **Why did God speak to your heart about that sin? Was it to make you wail about it? “O God, I’m such a stupid, no good Christian. I don’t think I’m ever going to measure up!”** Or did He speak, and do you understand Him to have spoken, to **“lead you in the way everlasting?”**

Because if it’s the latter, then with God’s help, and a song in your heart, turn from your sin, delight yourself in the Lord, and get on the way everlasting!

3) **YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD’S PURPOSE BRINGS JOY AND STRENGTH TO YOUR PURSUIT OF HOLINESS**

These are such important words in the text:

Nehemiah 8:9-12 - “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.”

Notice the thrust of these words. ***“God has shown you His law. You have just seen the light! He is on your side. Don’t grieve. Break your diet. Thank Him for His ongoing work in your life. Rejoice because the joy of the Lord is your strength!”***

They moved ahead when they came to understand the ***heart of Father God*** in all His words of Law. Learn to know God’s heart even when you feel the ***rod of the Shepherd*** poking you in the side. That’s not to kill or destroy you. It’s to keep you in the right path - the paths of righteousness.

He does correct. He does reprove. He does convict. He does call to repentance. He does chastise. ***But He's still the Good Shepherd!***
He still loves you.

Don't receive the Word with condemnation. Obey with the freeing knowledge of the ***intent of the Lord.*** Always do it immediately. And do it with joy! That's where your strength is.