

was not replaced by joy when the baby came, but it was transformed into joy. God doesn't give us joy instead of sorrow, but gives us joy in the middle of sorrow. With Christ sorrow will become transformed by joy. True joy needs only the presence of Christ.

This feast was given to the people by God for a reason. The people had ignored fully celebrating the feast for hundreds of years. They had blown off God's desire for them because they didn't get it, didn't understand. It didn't make sense to them what God was asking. (V.17) One of the guys on Wednesday morning mentioned this truth. It encouraged him to know that even after hundreds of years its never too late to obey God's truth. Now is always the right time to follow and obey God's truth. IF you have lost the joy of His grace; If you have missed the delight of His forgiveness; Perhaps you have forgotten the ugliness of your past, your captivity. Know this is not a call to dredge up those old dark places, but only a shout out to remember His deliverance. Take joy in His salvation, His freedom. His life. Take joy in the Lord for therein lies strength. Do you long for more insight, more practical wisdom? Receive God's Word, Apply God's Word and Celebrate what God is doing.

"Ancient Promise Keepers"

Sermon Series: Nehemiah

NORTHVIEW BIBLE CHURCH



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Nehemiah 8:13-18

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For those who have ever spent time working in the construction field, you know there is an interesting relationship between the workers on the job and the engineering types. It at times can be conflictual and not always without reason. Because I was a Professional Engineer in my prior work life, I can tell one on my own. Raul Delgado was the Project Manager on the compressor replacement project near Bend, Oregon. I was the Project Engineer on site and Raul managed the numbers back at the corporate offices in San Francisco. He did fine on the office management side of things, but in the field with dirt and concrete he was a fish out of water. One of my inspectors, Kevin told me a story with a wry smile on his face, when Raul had been a field engineer on a previous job. On his project, the form work for the foundation had been completed and the rebar had been bent and wired into place. The contractor was waiting for the Engineer to Ok and schedule the concrete pour. Raul must have been reading his engineering books that morning because when he went out to inspect the rebar, he became very disturbed. The chalk marks used by the construction workers to make the bends in the steel were still visible. Raul must have feared the concrete would not adhere properly to the steel because of the chalk marks, so he instructed the contractor to climb through the rebar and wipe off their chalk marks before the pour. I can just picture Kevin Lehman trying to enlighten this engineer as to the worthless impracticality of what he was asking the contractor to do. Finally, he gave up trying to school this college boy engineer and told him there was a special preparation that was excellent for removing chalk marks on rebar. This was exciting news for Mr. Engineer. Is this readily available? Ken assured him one could get plenty of it at the Walgreens store. He wrote down the name and immediately Mr. Engineer got on the phone to requisition the chalk remover...he ordered two cases of preparation H.

This engineer was well-schooled. He had taken a master's degree from an east coast university. He had plenty of knowledge up in his head. The problem was he failed to apply that knowledge to the real world of dirt and concrete. Failure to exercise wisdom and insight can be quite laughable and even waste a lot of time and money. But I'm afraid too many of us are just as green as that Engineer. We fill our heads with biblical knowledge but fail to live it out in the flesh. We pour in information without insight. I need insight. I need practical wisdom for real life. Certainly, God's Word will tell me what wisdom looks like, but I need more than just hearing God's Word, or studying or read-

ing God's Word. I do need input, but in order to gain insight. In order to gain practical wisdom and the celebrative joy that comes with it, I must apply God's principles. The only truth that makes any difference is the one that I put into practice. So, How can I gain insight and the joy that comes along with it? How can I pursue that insight?

Turn with me in your Bibles to Nehemiah chapter 8. If you have ever been to a professional baseball game, they have something called a 7th inning stretch. People are tired of sitting and are in need of a break. So, we are in the 8th chapter and its time to take a break and look back at the bigger picture of where we've been and where we are going. I would hope that in three years if someone asks you about the book of Nehemiah, or you hear a sermon on the radio, you will be able to think through the big picture themes of the book. Nehemiah is structured in two big sections. The first six chapters explain the reconstruction of the wall around Jerusalem with Nehemiah being the dominant character. He was the project manager who became governor. He was a great leader who knew how to motivate and encourage people. His character was marked by a dependence on God, always looking to Him in prayer. The last seven chapters of the book deal with the reconstruction of the people. The main character in this section is Ezra. He was a priest and scribe. He firmly believed it was the power of scripture that led people's hearts back to God. It is the hearing and doing of God's Word. In the first few verses of chapter 8, Pastor David showed the peoples thirst for truth as people gathered around and God's Word was clearly explained, and that led to worship. He challenged us to not read God's Word out of duty. Check—read my Bible. Done. But read it as one would read a love letter. Read to get to know the One who wrote this for us. The better we come to know the Word of God to get to better come to know the God of the Word. Personal revival begins with a thirst for God's Word. One of the most powerful lines in the whole book is found in 8:10, "The joy of the Lord is my strength." It's joy that gives us our strength. It is not strength that gives us joy. It's not when we are finally strong enough to gain victory over that temptation that we gain joy. It's not when we become strong in our diet or vocation or relationships that we gain joy. No, it's when we take joy in the Lord, His forgiveness and faithfulness, his delight and choosing and naming us. We can't choose strength, but we can choose joy. The joy of the Lord is our strength. So all that review sets us up well for reading Nehemiah 8:13-18.

How can I gain insight and practical wisdom

This message from the Scriptures was presented at NORTHVIEW BIBLE CHURCH, Spokane, Washington.

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and the joy that comes along with it? Take a look at verse 13. The people have been gathered together on the plaza mall just inside the Water gate. On day one, the entire population (men, women, children, all who could understand) celebrated the feast of trumpets and God's word was preached. The people responded powerfully. Now its day two of the month of Tishri. Notice who is here. It's the men, the heads of households, the leaders and priests and Levites gather for a purpose. Look at the end of verse 13, "to gain insight into the words of the law." Insight is essential for leaders. God had called this group to spiritually lead the city, the country, their families and they needed insight how to do this. This has the feel of an ancient promise keepers gathering where thousands of men come anticipating to learn from God's Word and eager to apply it. I wonder if the day before when the book of the Law was being read from Deuteronomy 6 and it said, "and you shall teach all these words diligently to your children and talk about them when you sit down in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and rise up." The truths of God should be practically folded into your life. I can see several of them saying, "What would it look like to take that seriously." We need to learn about how to do that. We need to take seriously what it means to lead well and gather up instructions of the things of God so that we can pass it on to others. You cannot give out what you do not possess. If you have no skill in fixing an automobile you are unable to pass that particular skill on to your kids. They may gain that from another skill, but it won't be coming from you. In order to pass something on, you must obtain it. God's truth is one of those things you must receive so you can pass it along to others.

How? It will take some time. (V.18) Every day of the 7-day festival of booths, the Word was taught. Those things you really care about, you will spend time studying. If you are a history buff, that is what will consume your reading. If you love gardening or cooking or sci-fi fantasy, those things you really care about, you will spend the time to study. If you have a thirst for God's Word, the Bible will unlock it's treasures to those who are willing to invest the time.

I like the attitude these people approached the word (V.1) they asked, "teach us." If you want to receive God's word it will take the right attitude, a teachable attitude that is expectant. Ask yourself. Am I ready to receive God's Word? Do I come with an expectant, teachable attitude? Is my heart glad when I gather with others to hear the teaching of God's Word? If not...why? It will be hard to receive God's word if you are angry. If you have just had a fight with your spouse last night or knock down word exchange with your parents you can't listen to God's Word. Your anger is closing out what God wants to say to you. If you have a dirty mind that is dwelling on evil things, the Word will have a tough

time punching through the haze of sin. Some of you are so easily distracted. Some of you have become professional listeners. You know all the right God answers, but because you haven't applied a single truth in the past 6 months your motivation for gaining insight has become seared, your spiritual mind is dull and lifeless and you are wondering "what's the point in all of this." Bible knowledge without application is deadly to our spiritual life. Prof. Hendricks would tell us it is a dangerous thing to traffic in unlivd truth.

Scripture helps us to see ourselves as we really are. It keeps us from becoming sucked into the illusion and delusion of this confused world we live in. The Word of God brings me face to face with the God of this Word. Am I placing myself in a position to hear God's Word and obey it? Have I made a commitment to gather with believers on Sunday morning? Have I made a commitment to connect with others in a LIFE group so we can come together in community and talk about ways to practically apply Gods truth? Do you want insight? Wisdom? What is your plan to receive God's Word? It will take time, commitment, teach ability and an expectant attitude.

Apply God's Word. It was on the 2nd day of the month Tishri and verse 14 says the Word was read and they recognized God had told them to do something, but they hadn't been doing it. They must have been reading in Leviticus 23 where it describes the feast of booths. This was a week-long festival that started on the 15th of Tishri. It was perfect timing. They had two weeks to get the word out and prepare to celebrate this festival. The festival wasn't something Ezra had dreamed up, it was God's idea. They realized, God said it, so we'd better do it even if it seemed a little strange. God wanted them to remember how He had provided and protected their people out in the desert from the heat and storms, so He gave them a tangible reminder. "Go build some temporary booths and tents out of branches and camp out in them for a week." For those of you who don't like camping this is a crazy idea. Why would anyone choose to leave a perfectly warm and comfortable bedroom with running water and restroom and instead sleep on the ground in a crowded campground with noises and snoring? Sounds crazy! How crazy will you get for Jesus when He calls us to be honest even to our hurt. When we are to love even those who hate us. When God tells us to forgive those who have hurt us so badly. When he tells us to live in purity before marriage and in fidelity after marriage and the rest of the world is saying that is very strange. Last week some of you had your faith stretched yet you obeyed God's command to honor your mother, even when she may have been far from perfect. How crazy will you get in following Jesus?

Regardless of how strange it was, the people obeyed. The Bible records they had celebrated this

feast of booths when Solomon's temple was dedicated and when Zerubbabel first returned from exile. But perhaps they hadn't celebrated this feast in actually building the shacks in such rejoicing, ("in this way" NIV), since days of Joshua. The point here is that they heard a truth and realized. Hey we are not doing what God wants for us. It sounds a bit strange, but let's do this and apply God's truth. James 1:22, "Be doers of the Word and not just those who listen to God's Word and become self-deceived. Do what it says." The goal of study is not accumulation of knowledge, its application. The only truth that makes a difference is the one that I put into practice. We fool ourselves when we assume that because we read, study or hear and even understand God's Word we have internalized the truth. Without application all our Bible study is worthless.

Did you notice that obeying God is not always convenient or comfortable? It can put you into a conflict mode with the rest of the world. I'm sure their neighbors were asking. What are you doing? You have built perfectly good homes and now your choosing to live in shacks?

Obeying God is invasive, all encompassing. Obeying God will affect all areas of our life. Obedience to God will change your plans. People will think you're strange. Look at verse 16. They built these shacks on their roof and backyards and in the temple courtyard and in the public square. I'm sure architectural committee for their neighborhood HOA knocked on some doors asking if they have approval for this strange temporary structure. I'm sure their kids asked, Uh, Dad, why are we all going out to gather these tree branches and making these forts? Dad, this is embarrassing. Do we have to? That was then an opportunity for dad and mom to tell a story of their people who had been held captive in Egypt and God freed them and parted the Red Sea crossing on dry land; About the desert wandering and how God provided food for them to eat, manna; About the grumbling and golden calf and rebellion; About the Jordan river and Jericho tumbling down and battles fought. The temporary tent was a visible, tangible sign of obedience, of one's desire to follow God. An opportunity to remind each other why we do what we do.

When ones mind is opened to God's truth and your heart is moved and the will is submitted, insight and spiritual wisdom comes filling in your life. But it has to be all three. If the mind is opened without the heart being moved then is degrades into intellectualism. If the heart is moved without the mind being informed, then it dissolves to emotionalism. If the will is submitted without the other two, then it grows into legalism. It needs all three. I was told, "All Word without the Spirit and you dry up. All Spirit without the Word and you blow up. Spirit with the Word and a submission of the will, you grow up."

Do you long for insight and wisdom? Then find a way to receive God's Word and put into practice the truth God reveals to you. The instant you obey in that one thing, God will turn on the light in another truth for you to respond. That is when the joy begins to flow. When you begin to do it right, follow God's way, God's truth it will make you happy. **Celebrate God's Word.** (V.17) "And there was great rejoicing." Why? Because they heard God's truth and then decided to live it out no matter how radical or crazy it appeared to others. There can be no joy, no celebration without application and no application without receiving God's Word. One could be motivated to a certain extent by obligation or appreciation, but celebration is a far more powerful motivator. When we celebrate, rejoice in what God is doing, in our youth ministry and children's ministry. When we hear the stories of how God is moving and working it draws people to want to give Alton and Donna a call to become part of the party. They want to get in on the action. When more and more people dare to live out God's truth that transforms, the more it will become a very exciting place to come and worship and celebrate God. It's beginning to happen and it excites me.

Responding to God's Word brings great joy. That joy will be the oil to the wheels of obedience. That joy will whet our taste buds for holiness. Kelly Minter writes that we have complicated joy, too often tangled up our joy with temporary things. We have tangled our joy up with health, income, security, career advancement. If we have a vacation planned or the dress fits or the promotion comes then we think our emotional response is joy. It's not. True joy needs nothing but the presence of Christ. That then frees us from having to constantly feed the meter with our next plans, next pleasure, next purchase to try and chase after an elusive vapor of joy. I wonder if that is one of the reasons why God wanted the people to live in temporary shelters, to remind them to hold lightly to things. To help them reorder their priorities and what they valued. Houses aren't all that important. Cars, money, vacations are not the source of joy. Even if we have none of these things, if we are in Christ, we have the greatest treasure that no one can take away from us. Go live in a tent and remember we are never to settle down here for good. Go build a little temporary shelter so that you never mistake this world as your home. We are strangers here. We are pilgrims just passing through this world. Paul in Philippians 4 says, "I have learned to be content no matter the circumstances."

God doesn't give us joy instead of sorrow. God gives us joy in the middle of sorrow. It is not a substitution, but a transformation. In John 16:20-22 Jesus used the illustration of a mother in the pain of child birth. Her hope for the baby on its way did not replace her pain. When the baby came her pain did not disappear. Her pain didn't go away,