

WHERE OUR JOY IS FOUND

When you think of God or church what comes to mind? Joy or Sadness? Mourning over sin and its consequences or celebration over our victory? When was the last time you celebrated Jesus and basked in His JOY?

This morning we are going to be in the **Nehemiah 8** and we are picking up where we left off last week. For those who missed last week, Nehemiah has been overseeing the construction project of repairing the wall around Jerusalem as the Jews are beginning to make their way back to Jerusalem after 70 years of Babylonian captivity. As we come to Chapter 8 that work has now been completed and a time of celebration is in order. It just so happens that the wall's completion coincides with the Feast of Tabernacles (which was a yearly Jewish celebration to commemorate God's faithful provision for Israel while they were in the wilderness after leaving Egypt and prior to their taking possession of the Promised Land.) Upon completion of the city wall and in celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles the people who had returned back to Jerusalem had assembled in the open square near the Water Gate and they told Ezra, the priest and scribe, to bring the Book of the Law and read it before the people. A few things we need to note here.

- 1) The Book of the Law would be what we know today as the first 5 books of the OT (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy)
- 2) **Deuteronomy 31:10-13** prescribed that the Book of the Law was to be read every 7 years at the Feast of Tabernacle.

10 Then Moses commanded them: "At the end of every seven years, in the year for canceling debts, during the Festival of Tabernacles, **11** when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. **12** Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. **13** Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."

- 3) It has been over 70 years since the Book of the Law had been read before the people in this way.

We talk all the time about the importance of God's word in our life. We talk about it being the Bread of Life itself. We talk about it being the guide book for how we are to live our life. And all this year we have been encouraging our church to read God's Word together. But this morning I want us to see that God's word is vital if you want to experience abundant, unexplainable joy. **How many of us could use a little JOY today?**

As we look at what takes place here in Nehemiah 8 I want you to see **TWO KEY ELEMENTS** we need to have **to unleash JOY in our lives** and then I want us to conclude our time by answering the question, **Why is God's word so vital to our JOY?**

KEY ELEMENT #1 to unleashing JOY in our lives - We need FAITHFUL TEACHERS and we need to be ATTENTIVE LISTENERS of the Word of God.

Nehemiah 8:1-3 (NIV) **1** all the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel. **2** So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. **3** He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

What does this mean for us? We need to allow ourselves to be discipled by those who have knowledge of God's word so that we can one day do the same for others. There is more to God's word than just reading it. We need to understand what it means and we need to know how to apply it to our lives. There is a big difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is the physical act of receiving sound waves into your ear. Listening is where we receive what we are hearing and it impacts the way you live. This requires a hunger for God's word, an eagerness to learn and a desire to pass it on to others. There is a joy in walking in God's word and there is unexplainable joy when you help someone else do the same. Listen to how Jeremiah the prophet describes his encounter with God's word.

Jeremiah 15:16 (NIV) When your words came, I ate them;
they were my joy and my heart's delight,
for I bear your name,
Lord God Almighty.

(Personal example) God's word applied is a joy and when you help others see that it is double joy!

Parents, are we cultivating this with our children? Follower of Jesus, are you doing this with your friends and people in your life?

What is abundantly clear as the people are learning about God's word, most of them for the very first time, is that the reason they are where they are is because they had forsaken God's word and did not pass it on like they should have. The breakdown took place along the lines of unfaithful teachers and unwilling listeners and it has led to some very real difficulties. Let's not repeat the same thing in our lives. It will hinder our joy. **We need FAITHFUL TEACHERS and we need to be ATTENTIVE LISTENERS of the Word of God.**

KEY ELEMENT #2 to unleashing JOY in our lives - We need to RESPOND to the Word of God (vv.4-8)

Nehemiah 8:5-8 (NIV) 5 Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. 6 Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" AMEN is an agreement where you are saying, "So be it!" In other words you believe it to be true and you want this to be true in your life. Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. It led them to yield their lives to God in humble worship. It changed them!

7 The Levites(and it goes on to list each of them by name).....instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. There is teaching going on. Explanation like Jesus would give when he would read scripture and preach. Like we do when we preach. A very necessary component to learning about what we are reading. That which the Holy Spirit does for us believers as well. 8 They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.

It is not enough to just listen! It is an important first step. But we need to engage our minds in the process. Contemplate its meaning and how it relates to our lives with the purpose of ultimately responding to it. We must humbly submit to others who understand God's word and it should activate something within us. It must move us to action. It is through these two elements LISTENING and RESPONDING that we will experience JOY. But why? **Why is God's word so vital to our JOY?**

Nehemiah 8:9-12 (NIV) 9 Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. 10 Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." 11 The Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve." 12 Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

Why is God's word so vital to our JOY? Because in it we find salvation and forgiveness! We are restored to God's original settings (Like a computer or phone with virus)

First of all notice that the people are grieving because of their sin that has led to their current situation! God's word reminded them of that! But on this day there is a call for celebration! Why? Because, they have recognized the sin that led them to where they are currently and now God wants to restore them if they will turn from that sin and follow Him in obedience as outlined for them in God's word. **God's word shows us that God is both a just God who deals with sin and a good God who blesses obedience and forgives the repentant!** If we are willing to repent He will extend to us mercy and grace!

Israel found themselves where we all find ourselves. Dealing with consequences of our sin that causes us grief. But at the same time He offers us forgiveness and salvation if we repent and turn back to Him. No need for Israel to mourn any longer but now it is time for JOY because God is restoring what sin had demolished and He has not forgotten His people!. This is what God's word does for us. If all we had was God's condemnation for our sin and pending judgment we should mourn. But we have so much more! We have the hope of restoration and the forgiveness of sin upon confession and repentance and JESUS is that HOPE! So as Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites instructed the people, **let's put away our mourning and let the JOY of the Lord be our strength!**

A heart saturated with the Word will lead to hands that do God's work. Will you EAT with JOY the Word of God and find delight in it?

"Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the Lord. Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart—they do no wrong but follow his ways." - **Psalm 119:1-3**

(Pray)

- 1) Mourning because of sin? Receive Jesus today!
- 2) Are you joyless? Have you been getting a steady diet of God's WORD?
- 3) Park - let's let today be a joyous celebration church!

Selfie Challenge (Selfie with someone from each location) and tag Vertical Church