

**Hurst Green**  
**14<sup>th</sup> Jul 19**  
**Neh 7:73b - 8:12**  
**The word**

We have had our three returns or waves:

- The place of worship has been rebuilt
- Worship has been restore
- The walls are up to defend it

Speaking of waves Margaret and I are privileged to be part of the YWAM Next Wave which is a sail boat in the Mediterranean taking Christian love and aid to various ports while training people both in formal schools, in sailing and individually. If you fancy a holiday with a difference that will build you up let us know.

But from this series hopefully you have picked up on the themes that are relevant today for us:

- The providence of God. He always providing for us as individuals, as a Church and as a nation
- The joy of worship – as it says this week “*The joy of the Lord is our strength*” (Neh 8:10)
- The opposition we will face and how we can defeat it – greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world!

And many more sub themes I have picked out for you along the way. Including that great question

**“What have you done this week to further the Kingdom of God?”**

Keep asking yourself that – it will keep you productive and growing in the Spirit of our God.

Now today we turn to Nehemiah 8 which we have just heard – the section is called Ezra reads the Law but for our purposes it should be “Ezra reads the Word” because back then the only written part of the Word that they had was the Law.

We are looking at the Word and our love for the word and of course we have the complete revelation of the word of God to love where Ezra and the Israelites only had part of it and so only knew part of it. I am sure he is surprised to know that his book made it into the complete revelation for us and that we are studying it today!

Now some things to note about the uniqueness of this occasion.

Neh 8 1 “*All the people*” This is one of those rare occasions when all the people assemble – not just the men. Verse 2 tells us it was *all who were able to understand* and it was done outside of the temple.

They assembled before the Water Gate. In the temple they would have been split up but here they could all assemble to hear this momentous event.

When you heard this read did you consider it a momentous event?

Reading the word of God is always momentous. Margaret and I and our family once took part in the reading of the bible for a week. 24 hours a day in our church someone was reading from the bible and even in the wee small hours those before and after the reader were asked to stay and hear the word.

It had a deep effect on the Church and the area. We should not be surprised – the Word of God has a deep effect. Not sat on a shelf, although even there God can use it, but when we read it expecting it to talk to our hearts and souls. It will make a difference to us.

I know week by week reading, studying and preaching it makes a huge difference to me and I hope hearing the word of God expounded makes a huge difference to you but most of all I pray that your reading of the word makes a huge difference to you.

So we come to the first day of the seventh month – the seventh month that keeps occurring in this book.

The seventh month that is the start of the New Year for them and is stuffed full of festivals for them to enjoy and praise God.

So this year how did these people celebrate – what was their New Year resolution?

On day one they assembled before the water gate, all together – everyone who could understand but did you hear what they did.

They **told** Ezra to bring out the Book of the Law. (verse 1)

This was not Ezra telling them they should hear this. This was not lead by the powers that be. This was a populist movement.

The people told Ezra to bring out the Law of Moses.

They wanted to know. They had celebrated the stages of this momentous rebuilding but now they wanted to know what they should be doing. They wanted to know what God had said to them individually and as a people.

They were desperate – are we?

This series is Love the Word to inspire us to love the word of God. These people were desperate to hear it – they told their high priest to go and get it and read it to them.

They respected the word of their God

Did you see in verse 5 what they did – as soon as he opened the word of God everyone stood up and they then worshipped the Lord their God bowing down with their faces to the ground.

This would make our services somewhat different wouldn't it?

When our reader comes to the front we all stand up and go into a period of spontaneous worship and then stay standing for the reading of the word.

High churches can have a similar approach to this. We might dismiss it but the Word of God is processed around the Church while everyone stands out of respect. Sometimes they kiss the book. We don't do it but understand those that do – they are showing respect.

And do not forget he read from daybreak to noon – some 6 hours. To the whole assembly; men, women and children, all who could understand.

And all listened attentively – I wish that was true in Churches across this land this Sunday. If everyone would listen attentively to the word of God and let God speak through it to them we could have a very different land.

Of course in all churches there are some that do but for some Sunday makes no difference in their actual lives and they go back to worshipping other Gods on Monday.

These people had decided to be passionate about their God and had seen his amazing provision for the rebuilding of Jerusalem once their period of exile was over. They had seen their God move the hearts even of pagan kings to make his will happen.

They were now passionate to know more.

Did you also see the small group ministry that was going on?

***Nehemiah 8:8 (ANIV)***

<sup>8</sup> *They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.*

The Levites went out teaching the people. Can you picture it? These men in their full ceremonial robes out there among the people answering their questions and ensuring that everyone understood what was being read. Stopping to answer questions and ensuring all understood.

Of course our small group ministry is here on Wed at 8pm

And the Word of God had an immediate effect on them

***Nehemiah 8:9 (ANIV)***

<sup>9</sup> *Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred 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.*

They wept as they heard the Law – we assume because they realised how far from the law they had drifted.

All of the people began weeping. This was revival Old Testament style.

The people turning back to their God wanting and seeking him.

You see this when the Spirit of God moves. I was speaking to a pastor recently who is seeing this sort of movement in his young adults, the 20 somethings. They are coming to find out more about Christianity, believing and then hungering for the word, they want to learn and do, and they are going out and telling their friends to come and find out more.

That passionate desire – that first love which we must not lose.

But then, in the midst of their weeping, they are told what could seem to be a strange thing

***Nehemiah 8:9 (ANIV)***

<sup>9</sup> *Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred 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.~~*

They are told to obey the law for the seventh month is full of festivals of rejoicing in God and all he provides for us.

***Nehemiah 8:10 (ANIV)***

<sup>10</sup> *Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."*

We have a faith of great joy – we are saved! That is enough.

Do not forget that the Angels at Christmas came to bring news of great joy. The salvation of God was at hand. Anna and Simeon in the temple responded to meeting the Messiah with great joy.

Do we live lives of joy? Of great Joy? This is not the false mask that we have to put on this is Joy deep down in your soul. It is a joy that cannot be removed and one that can never depend on circumstances.

It should flow out of our lives regardless of what is going on.

Along those same lines C.S. Lewis once wrote, "God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing"

This joy rests in Christ and we find it by resting in him.

When working as a Consultant I used to find Christians working in the various companies by their eyes. Eyes alight and ready for Christ and looking for others. When talking to one lady about Christians in our company I mentioned a name and she said "I should have known I could see it in his eyes!"

We find this joy throughout the scriptures

***Psalms 16:11 (ANIV)***

<sup>11</sup> *You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

For us that is the present tense "You fill me with joy in your presence" because you have the presence of God in your lives every day. It is not some occasional event as it was for these Israelites it is a permanent factor in your lives. It should form part of who you are and all that you show.

Or

***Psalms 21:6 (ANIV)***

<sup>6</sup> *Surely you have granted him eternal blessings and made him glad with the joy of your presence.*

The joy of your presence – the joy of the presence of God and we have that presence every hour of every day because we have the Spirit of God in us.

Joy – that fruit of the Spirit

Joy that is internal and eternal. All other joys are fleeting and will fall by the wayside but this is for ever and can never be taken away from you.

**Isaiah 12:3-6 (ANIV)**

<sup>3</sup> *With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.* <sup>4</sup> *In that day you will say: "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted.* <sup>5</sup> *Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world.* <sup>6</sup> *Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you."*

And we have drawn from the well of salvation and so we give thanks, proclaim his name and sing for joy

And as Nehemiah has said to the people

**Nehemiah 8:10 (ANIV)**

<sup>10</sup> - *This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."*

The joy of the Lord is your strength. So you say it .....