

**Committed to the Task**  
Nehemiah 7-8  
Rev. Brian Bill  
November 10-11, 2018

### **Set-up to Video**

- I mentioned last weekend we're going to show a video today that communicates our updated facility plans – I can't wait for you to see it!
- We'll be posting the video on Facebook, our website and on the growtime.us site on Monday. We're also making the raw footage of the facility fly-through available. We'll show this video again next weekend for those who miss it today.
- On Monday we'll also be posting pictures of the model in the lobby.
- As you watch the video, please note not all the colors, finishes and signage have been finalized.

### **Play Video**

- Buildings don't change lives...but what happens inside does.
- This project is bigger than us...and that's a good thing. Psalm 127:1 – *“Unless the Lord builds the house, the laborers labor in vain.”*
- All of our plans are dependent on God stirring up His people to give sacrificially and generously, over and above our regular giving. If we don't give, what we've seen is just a cool video.
- Explain importance of **Commitment Weekend – December 1-2** (Hold up commitment card). If you won't be here, you can fill out the commitment card early, put it in an envelope with the words, “Grow Time” and our financial secretary will get it.
- Explain importance of **Celebration Weekend – December 15-16**. This is when we give a special offering and begin our Grow Time giving. 10% of this offering will go toward 3 of our Go Team partners – Youth Hope in Rock Island, the Contreras' ministry in Fresno to help rescue those trapped in sex trafficking and the construction of two church buildings in Southeast Asia.

I received an email some time ago from a missionary in the Philippines. She had only been there about 10 weeks and was learning the language and culture. This is what she wrote after attending a worship service.

*“I heard my pastor announce that we were going to take up an offering to purchase some ‘sin’ for another developing church.” This was the pastor’s announcement: “Their church building is nearly finished, and they are in desperate need of more “sin.” If you would like to make a donation toward the purchase of more “sin” or if you would just like to go out and buy “sin” to give them yourself, let us know as soon as possible. If you aren’t going to be here next Sunday and would like to leave your donation for “sin” with us, that would be fine. I know the Lord will bless you for your generous gift toward this project!”*

The missionary continued: *“At that point I was nearly unable to contain myself! I leaned over and whispered to my friend, ‘So, you can actually go out and purchase “sin” here in the Philippines? What a shame they don’t have enough “sin” in their church already!”*

Later on, they figured out what was going on: *“The Cebuano word for “tin” is “sin”! They were in fact, needing more tin to complete the roof of the new church building. Could it be said, then, that they were in sin over their heads?”*

My guess is that most of us have plenty of sin to deal with in our lives – we certainly don’t need to purchase any more! What the missionary was experiencing in another culture is very common. Due to the difficulty in understanding a new language, she was faced with some misconceptions.

As we come to Nehemiah 7-8 the emphasis shifts from *reconstruction* to *reinstruction*. The walls were finished in 52 days, but the people inside sure weren’t – they still had some significant sin problems! We move from a rebuilding project to rebuilding the people; from building walls to building worshippers.

We see this in verse 1: ***“Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed.”*** The rebuilt walls of Jerusalem enabled God’s people to rejoice in worship with the singers leading in praise and the Levites handling the preaching. In a similar way, the renovating of our facility is not an end in itself but the means to accomplish God’s purposes.

Let’s dive in and discover at least four things that matter to God.

**1. God longs for us to guard what is important to Him.** Listen to Nehemiah 7:2: ***“I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge***

*over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many.”* Nehemiah was looking for two key qualities in his leaders – faithfulness and the fear of God.

In verse 3, we see his security strategy: *“Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. And while they are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts and some in front of their own homes.”* It was customary to open city gates at sunrise but he wanted them closed until later in the day to prevent attacks. In a similar way, we must always be on guard because 1 Peter 5:8 says, *“...Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*

**2. God desires to gather His people together.** A large chunk of this chapter, from verse 5 through verse 69, reads like a Hebrew phone book! While these names don’t mean anything to us, they mean a lot to the Lord because God’s people are not nameless to Him.

We’ve established before how important genealogy lists were to the Jewish people. God wants to make sure they are not forgotten so He lists their names twice – here and in Ezra 2.

One author says it like this: *“These are the descendants of Abraham. The ones to whom God promised He would give this land...These are the descendants of those that God drove out of the land because of their...disobedience with the promise that one day they would be replanted in the land. Most significantly these are the ones through whom the promised one is going to come...we also know that there are those in this list who were not descendants of Abraham, but they had joined themselves to the people of God because they wanted in on the promises of God.”*

So here’s a question. Are you in on the promises of God? The promises of God only apply to those who are part of the people of God. Is your name in God’s book? The only way to get there is through the new birth.

**3. God wants His people to be givers.** We see in verses 70-72 how God uses the giving of His people to accomplish His purposes: *“Now some of the heads of fathers’ houses gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 darics of gold, 50 basins, 30 priests’ garments and 500 minas of silver. And some of the heads of fathers’ houses gave into the treasury of the work 20,000 darics of gold*

*and 2,200 minas of silver. And what the rest of the people gave was 20,000 darics of gold, 2,000 minas of silver, and 67 priests' garments."*

We see fathers giving, the governor giving, and all the people giving! While it's true the governor gave 1,000 darics of gold and 500 minas of silver, the rest of the people gave a total of 40,000 darics of gold and 4,200 minas of silver! A daric was a thick gold coin, equal in value to 20 silver coins.

One pastor estimates all the gold and silver given totaled about \$15 million in today's dollars. We know from the census there were 42,360 people, which would come to an average gift of \$350. This might not seem like much but remember money went a lot further then.

A mina of silver represented five years wages, which meant the average Israelite gave 5 years salary to the wall-building project! Another commentator estimates the value in today's dollars at \$100 million!

Whatever the exact amount, the people gave over and above what was expected of them. When you think about it, they had plenty of reasons *not* to give...

- They had just returned from Babylon and still needed to get settled
- They didn't have stable jobs and the economy was uncertain
- There was no guarantee the walls were even going to work
- Many of them didn't live in Jerusalem and therefore could have thought, *"This won't benefit us."*
- Some could have reasoned they were serving by building the wall and therefore didn't need to give any money
- I wonder if a few of them were thinking this way, *"Nehemiah has all the money. He should give to make this happen."*

But instead of giving excuses, they gave what they could with what they had.

Let's drill down a bit more:

- **The leaders gave first and the people followed.**
- **They all gave something** – *no one can give everything but everyone can give something.* The word **"gave"** is found four times in three verses and means they *"put"* or *"placed"* or *"presented"* an offering. It was an act of worship for them.

- It's natural for God's people to give.
- Many gave gifts other than cash – like basins and garments.
- They gave generously. I'm reminded of 2 Corinthians 8:2: *“For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.”*
- They gave sacrificially. 2 Corinthians 8:4-5: *“For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.”*
- They didn't give out of guilt because God stirred them to give. 2 Corinthians 9:7: *“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”* There is great joy in generous giving, isn't there?

**4. God's goal is to get His Word into people.** Let's move now to Nehemiah 8 where we will see how God's people responded to God's Word. We'll spend the rest of our time on this point because it's so important. This chapter addresses three misconceptions about the Bible.

- It's too confusing to read.
- It's too boring to study.
- It's impossible to apply.

#### **#1: The Bible is too confusing to read (8:1-8).**

Take a look at verse 1: *“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.”* Notice they came together as *“one man,”* eager to understand God's Word. A sense of unity and renewed purpose replaced the disunity and disagreements from the *“great outcry”* of chapter 5.

Ezra was the ideal man to conduct this outdoor Bible conference. He had come to Jerusalem 14 years before Nehemiah and was a scribe, priest, scholar, and teacher of the Law. Ezra 7:10 gives us insight into what kind of man he was: *“For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.”*

He was committed to personal study of the Word, he looked for ways to apply the Bible to his own life, and only after that, did he teach it to others. This is one of my favorite verses because I strive to emulate Ezra.

When I think of Ezra I think of Pastor Mel Brown. Here's what I posted on Facebook this week: *"It was 50 years ago Wednesday that Dr. Mel Brown and his wife Barb began their ministry at Edgewood! What an honor to continue the gospel work that he and Barb so faithfully proclaimed for 44 years! I'm also privileged to serve alongside Pastor Tim and Pastor Ed who partnered with Mel for nearly 35 years!"*

BTW, I posted this tribute early Thursday morning and by 9:00 a.m, there were already 116 "likes," 9 "shares" and 21 comments! By Friday morning, there were nearly 200 "likes," 14 "shares" and 41 people mentioned what they most appreciated about his ministry.

Look at verse 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."*** God's Word must be understood before it can enter the heart and release its life-changing power. The word, ***"understanding"*** is used six times in this chapter and means, *"to perceive or discern."*

Verse 3 tells us Ezra began reading at dawn and read until lunch! We know from verse 18 this continued for a week and ***"the ears of all the people were attentive."***

There's no greater thrill to a preacher than when people listen attentively to the Word of God. When I was interviewing here at Edgewood, the deacons told me this church really responds to biblical preaching. They were absolutely right – thank you for your compelling desire to understand and apply God's Word. In an effort to follow Ezra's example, we're going to have six-hour sermons beginning next weekend! JK.

In verse 4 we read, ***"And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose"*** so they could see and hear him better. In a similar way, our sanctuary renovations will improve our sightlines and acoustics.

When Ezra opened the Book in verse 5, the people honored God by standing up. They knew this was not just a man speaking; they were about to hear the very Word of God. They didn't have their own copy of the Scriptures and Bible apps hadn't been developed yet.

After Ezra praised **“the great God”** in verse 6, all the people lifted their hands and responded, **“Amen! Amen!”** No one fell asleep in this service. *Everyone* listened alertly and *everyone* responded. Then they **“bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.”** God was renewing their reverence for the Word of God. I think of Isaiah 66:2: **“But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.”**

The people went from *sitting* to *standing*. They *raised their hands*, shouted their agreement by saying *“Amen”* and then *bowed down* and worshipped by putting their *faces to the ground*. The anticipation of hearing the Bible in a way that they could understand totally gripped them.

In verses 7-8, the Levites join Ezra in helping to instruct the people. They **“made it clear”** and **“they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”** The word **“clear”** has the idea of *“showing and explaining”* and to **“give the sense”** means they offered *“insight.”* They likely mingled with the people, answered questions and told them how to apply the Law. There was both a public proclamation of the Word in a large assembly as well as face-to-face interaction.

Misconception #1 is that the Bible is too confusing to read. What we learn from verses 1-8 is the Bible is designed to be understood. Here are three ways to better comprehend the Word of God.

- **Utilize some tools.** Follow the EBC Bible Reading Plan. Use a Study Bible. Grab a notebook and write down one verse that impacts you.
- **Be attentive during the preaching time.** Bring your Bible and follow along. BTW, we have study questions and sheets for taking notes available at the Guest Services counter. The sermon manuscript is also available on the website or you can request to have it emailed to you by sending an email to [info@edgewoodbaptist.net](mailto:info@edgewoodbaptist.net).
- **Get into a Growth Group.**

## **#2: The Bible is too boring to study (8:9-12)**

As Ezra read and the leaders explained the Word, the congregation’s first response was one of conviction and weeping in verse 9. One speaker captured it like this: *“They saw the incongruity of their lives in relation to God’s law, their lack of gratitude for God’s provision and they wept. They felt the weight of the failure of God’s people over the centuries to be all they were intended to be.”*

The natural reaction to the Bible is remorse and guilt – that’s actually why some people don’t want to hear it and end up unplugging from church. As Romans 3:20 says, “...*through the law comes knowledge of sin.*” Scripture caused them to see the ugliness of their own hearts and the beauty of God.

While some pastors serve up syrupy and sentimental sermons that just make people feel good, the preaching of the Word should confront and convict us, leading us to confession and cleansing. We’re called to have a holy church, not just to focus on what makes us happy.

Having said that, the Word of God also brings us joy; for the same Word that wounds also heals. Jeremiah 15:16: “*Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart...*” Psalms 19:8: “*The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart...*”

It isn’t enough for us to *read* the Word, or *receive* the Word as it’s preached and taught; we must also *revere* the Word and *rejoice* in the Word.

In light of that, please stand as I read verses 10-12: “*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.’ So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, ‘Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.’ 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.*”

As the people applied God’s truth, they did so with an attitude of joy. Verse 12 says they made “**great rejoicing**” and verse 17 adds: “**And there was very great rejoicing.**” This is literally translated as “*gladness great very.*” If we are truly a people of the Book, we’ll live by the Book and we will have great joy.

Misconception #2 is the Bible is too boring to study. The truth is that we will find great joy when we jump into God’s Word.

### **#3: The Bible is impossible to apply (8:13-18)**

In verses 13-18 we see how the Israelites put God’s Word into practice. As they paid attention to what they heard, verse 14 says they discovered they were not fully

following the Lord in all areas so they determined to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

I agree with one pastor who remarked, *“Most Christians are educated way beyond their level of obedience already. We don’t need to know more; we need to do more.”* That reminds me of what Mark Twain once said: *“It ain’t those parts of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me, it’s the parts that I do understand.”*

The Feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths, was a reminder of their deliverance from Egypt. It followed the Day of Atonement, which shows that rejoicing only comes after we are right with God.

God’s Word affected their heads, it went down into their hearts and then it was lived out through their hands. God gave us the Bible to impact us intellectually, emotionally and volitionally!

Let’s seek to apply the four things that matter to God by putting them in a question format.

1. In what ways are you guarding what is important to God?
2. Do you know for sure your name is written in God’s book?
3. Are you giving what God has given to you?
4. Do you have a plan to get into God’s Word so you understand, rejoice and obey Him?

Nehemiah 8:10 contains what is perhaps the most quoted phrase in the book: ***“For the joy of the Lord is your strength.”***

I listened to an outstanding talk this week from Nancy Guthrie called, “Coming Together Around God” from Nehemiah 7-8. Here’s part of what she said (I’m thankful to Marie Guyton for transcribing this for me): *“What is being described here is not merely a joy that you and I can create for ourselves or for each other. This is the joy of the Lord. It is the Lord’s joy. And you see, the Lord intends for His joy to be our joy.”*

As I reread chapters 7-8, I wrote down 6 things that bring God joy.

- 1. The Lord rejoices when He records our names in His book.**

2. **God has great joy when we rediscover and recapture our identity as the people of God.**
3. **It brings God exceeding joy when we are hungry to hear and heed His Word.**
4. **God delights when we see our sin and surrender to the Savior.**
5. **God is pleased when we give Him thanks by celebrating all He has done.**
6. **God rejoices when we gladly obey Him without hesitation.**

In every genuine revival in history, there have been two major thrusts:

- Proclamation and preaching of the Word
- Responsive mobilization of God's people

As you've listened to God's Word some of you are ready to respond because you know you need to be revived. It's so easy to slip, isn't it? Our natural tendency is to head south spiritually and to be in sin over our heads. Some of you have lost your joy and feel a bit dry. You can relate to the psalmist when he cried out in Psalm 85:6: ***"Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?"***

Are you ready to turn from your sin and experience the power of the Lord again in your life? If so, commit to *understand, rejoice, and obey* the Word of God.

If you have not yet put your full faith in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins, would you do so right now? You have no need to purchase more sin in your life because you have plenty already. The Bible says that each of us are stained by sin and because of that, we have been separated from God. Jesus, when He died on the cross, paid the price for our sins so that we can have forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Someone has said this about repentance: *"If we put off repentance another day, we have one day more to repent of, and a day less to repent in."*

Listen to how Guthrie concludes:

*"In Revelation 21, John tells us that only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life will populate the New Jerusalem and entrance into that city won't be based on blood coursing through our veins, but on the blood of the Lamb which covers and cleanses our sin...I promise you, we will not be bored when that list of names is read. We will be on pins and needles*

*listening for our names. Oh, what joy we will experience on that day when our names are found written in the Book of Life.*

*And on that day not just 50,000 people, but a great multitude, and not just descendants of Abraham, but people from every nation, tribe and tongue will stand...around the throne crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.' And we'll gather around God's Word which we will hear, not read by Ezra, but spoken by the very mouth of God...from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man and He will dwell with them and they will be His people and God Himself will be with them as their God.'"*

God is doing His work among every nation, tribe and tongue and we have the joy of joining in what He is doing. Psalm 67:4 says: ***"Let the nations be glad and sing for joy."*** Recently a team from Edgewood ministered in India. Watch this video to see what they did, then we'll hear what they learned.

### **India Go Team Report**