

Nehemiah Sermon #19

Nehemiah 8 – In Nehemiah we have gone from reconstruction (1/2 of this book) to reinstruction – rebuilding the walls to rebuilding the people.

Bring the Book.

Rejoicing in the Book.

I have entitled today's sermon "Obeying the Book."

Nehemiah 8:13

Let us stand for the reading of God's Holy Word.

Nehemiah 8:13-18

Let us pray.

You may be seated.

Obeying the Book

Vs. 13

We read that a smaller group gathered around Ezra to learn even more of God's law.

Many of the leaders came to Ezra the following day for more instructions.

This is a key movement because the people in Israel began to assume their God-ordained responsibilities for spiritual leadership.

As chief leaders, these were the men to spread the knowledge of Scripture throughout the families within their clans.

And when these people take on their role, it makes all the difference in their families and in their communities.

These leaders are the husbands and dads of a country.

This role could not be left to the priests and Levites – the Temple leaders.

It cannot be left to the school teachers, preachers, and the Sunday School teachers.

The head of the home sets the spiritual temperature and tone for his home.

He must fulfill his responsibility.

To abdicate this responsibility is to leave his home vulnerable.

God has given that role to the head of the family – to fathers.

Fathers must assume their role as spiritual leaders.

These men of Verse 13 really wanted to learn.

This was a very important key in sustaining the renewal and revival that had begun in Israel.

This was a voluntary response – no arm twisting.

God's Spirit was definitely at work in their hearts.

It was the Scripture reading and explaining that were foundational in bringing renewal to Israel.

After the extensive teaching session came the intensive one, which shows how seriously the emphasis on Scripture was being taken.

In this passage, we see the process of becoming a spiritual leader.

How do we become spiritual leaders?

I. To begin with, *it takes time.*

No one suddenly become a spiritual leader.

You will notice in Verse 13 that they came back to Ezra on the second day.

And they kept coming back.

It takes diligence and sacrifice.

These men were putting themselves in position to learn.

Time to think, to meditate, to soak up what they were hearing

That is why church is so important – faithful attendance

Secondly, it takes the right people - look at verse 13c – surround ourselves with spiritual people.

These men came to one individual, Ezra, that they might gain understanding from him.

Where was Ezra leading them? He was in the Book.

Wisdom is often “rubbed off” from one life to another.

Find wisdom – not with foolish or sinful people, but with people who love and honor the Word.

Thirdly, those becoming spiritual leaders are searching the Scriptures – vs. 14.

We must read the Bible and understand it (that's why they came back the 2nd day)

We must determine to devote ourselves to a serious study of the Bible.

Many of us do not study the Bible regularly on our own—partly because we simply neglect this unique opportunity and responsibility – just plain lazy

Or, is it that we just don't see the importance of it?

Here is what we need to do:

We need to determine that we are going to study the Bible regularly.

Then, decide on a study time that fits best into our own personal schedule.

Choose the place that's best for you.

Then faithfully do it.

IV. Fourthly – It takes a teachable spirit.

Some people come to meetings or church services and they don't get anything out of the Word and others cannot get enough.

Some are like sponges; they get bigger and bigger—*spiritually*.

They get more of the Water of Life and grow larger and larger.

What's the difference? It's the attitude.

They have a teachable spirit.

The soil has been prepared and their heart is open, saying, "Teach me Thy Word."

V. The next crucial ingredient in taking spiritual leadership – is implementing what we learn.

We must obey the Word (vs. 15)

Not only did the children of Israel demonstrate their eagerness to revere and comprehend the Word of God, but they immediately responded with obedience.

This is the true test of “hearing” and “understanding.”

They translated their positive attitudes into appropriate actions.

Notice that the leaders had just a few days available for getting the word out to the Jews in the surrounding villages that everybody was going to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

It is not enough to hear the Word of God; we must obey what it tells us to do.

“Be doers of the Word and not hearers only.” James 1:22

So the people celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles – what is that?

The Lord had designed a special experience for all of them – all little camping trip for the entire nation.

They were to live in temporary shelters for seven days (see Lev. 23:33-44).

This may seem strange to us, but God's rationale for this experience was profound.

The children of Israel had wandered in the wilderness for years living in temporary dwellings, in tents.

On the one hand, this wilderness experience was extended because of Israel's unwillingness to obey God and enter the land.

On the other hand, all during this time, God protected them and provided for their needs.

He never forsook them.

God never wanted His people to forget this experience.

That's why He established the Feast of Tabernacles.

Whole families built booths and lived in them for seven days.

You can imagine the questions that were asked by the children and youth—and the unique opportunity this afforded their parents to communicate their sacred history.

God told them to go live in booths.

Those intelligent, grown men—all respected leaders—were to go out, fetch some branches and sticks, and make booths for their families to live in. Imagine that!

Nehemiah 8, vs. 16

Everybody is leaving, looking for sticks and branches.

After a while, they get all their branches bundled up and walk back into the city.

Regardless of how strange it appeared, the people obeyed.

Out of obedience, they built and lived in shacks as God had required.

Vs. 17a, b, c, d

Nehemiah 8:17 does not teach that the nation had ignored the Feast of Tabernacles since the days of Joshua.

We know that the Feast of Tabernacles was kept in the days of Solomon. (II Chron. 8:13).

In Ezra 3:4, it is stated that this feast had been celebrated.

This refers to the spirit in which it was celebrated.

This teaches us another valuable aspect.

Going through the motions does not cut it.

There must be interaction with God and with His Word.

For the first time since Joshua, this feast was held in the same spirit as that of ancient times.

The meaning seems to be that on this occasion greater attention was paid to the finer details, such an attention as had not been applied through the years.

It was *the way* they celebrated, for it appears that everybody participated enthusiastically.

How is it for the family when the leaders is negative about church, the preacher, other services.

So, apparently in previous years, not all the Jews had made booths and lived in them for the week of the feast.

They had given only “token” acknowledgment of the feast – token Christianity

Furthermore, the joyful attitude of the people was beyond anything the nation had ever seen.

It was truly a week of joyful celebration that brought glory to the Lord.

The whole scene teaches us important lessons.

Those temporary houses stood in contrast to their regular houses.

A reminder to the people of the transient nature of the things of this world

We seem to have forgotten that this world is not our home; that we are only passing through.

I Peter 2:11, *“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”*

Vs. 17e

First the word was read, then it was studied and finally it was obeyed.

The people were united around the word.

They were reverent, attentive, discerning and obedient.

This in turn brought great joy to the heart of God and it rejoiced the hearts of His people at Jerusalem.

The foundation of blessing in our day is the same as it was then – the Word of God and our subjection to it.

And, amazing though it may sound, those people were happier than they had ever been.

“And there was great rejoicing,” wrote Nehemiah.

I can’t explain how it happens, but when you do what is right, you’re happy.

When we grow and mature in the Lord, there is real joy in life.

When we do what is wrong, we may get what we want, but we are miserable.

Isn’t that remarkable?

How could a family live happily in a little shack?

They were happy because they were obedient.

Holiness brings happiness.

Since the dads in the home had gained insight as leaders, they had obeyed the Lord completely.

And God gave them happiness.

The people not only had joy in hearing the Word, but they also had “*great gladness*” in obeying it.

My friend, it is one thing to read and study the Bible and have it bring joy to you, but that joy will end unless you obey what you have read and let it have its way with you.

Vs. 18

The final step in taking leadership is a commitment to details.

Little foxes that spoil the vines

The Bible is a detailed Book.

Careful obedience – doing it as prescribed

On every day of the seven days of the feast, Ezra read from the Pentateuch, as prescribed in Deut. 31:11.

It shows that Ezra had followed precisely the precepts of Deuteronomy and also of Leviticus.

What we do should be according to the Bible

No short cuts – no cutting corners

II Timothy 2:5 – we must strive lawfully – follow the rules.

So the move to make Scripture the guiding principle of Jewish life was powerfully initiated.

The great teaching operation on the first day of the month, the training session which had followed it, and now the seven days of readings at the festival had exposed the people to the fundamentals of their faith with considerable thoroughness.

All this surely represents a spiritual condition that needs to be recovered today.

God's people need reviving – spiritual life – spiritual leaders.

Someone asked evangelist Billy Sunday if revivals lasted, and he replied, “No, neither does a bath; but it’s good to have one occasionally!”

Let us stand for closing invitation.

Men, are we taking the spiritual leadership of our home?

The success of our families does not depend on how much money we make, what kind of house we live in, the car we drive, or the vacations we take.

It depends on the spiritual role of the head of the house.

How is our attitude toward the church, the Bible?

Are we putting ourselves in position to grow spiritually?

Are we implementing what we learn?

We cannot take a spiritual role if we do not have God's Spirit.

God gives His Spirit to those who trust in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Rear of Document

8:12 What a difference it makes when God's people "understand" God's Word and apply it to their particular situations. Allowing the use of the Bible to become routine and ritualistic is a violation of its nature and message. . . . "My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge" (Hos. 6:6; Mal. 2:1-9).

There was now a second Exodus to reinforce the message, and the reference in verse 17 to ancient history and to the more recent return from captivity suggests that the point was taken.

Obligation and appreciation are certainly strong motives for serving the Lord, but *celebration* is even stronger.

When we obey the Lord and serve Him because we rejoice in Him, then our service will be a delight and not a drudgery.

To the believer without joy, the will of God is punishment; but to the believer happy in the Lord, the will of God is nourishment (John 4:34).

They had heard the Word of God and are doing what it commanded.

God doesn't give us joy *instead of* sorrow, or joy *in spite of* sorrow, but joy *in the midst of* sorrow. It is not *substitution* but *transformation*.

Did the blessings of the celebration last?

Yes, for a time; but then the people became careless again, and the leaders had to bring them back to the Word of God.

But the failure of the people is not an argument against special times of Bible study or celebration.