

NEHEMIAH

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Nehemiah chapter 6 as we continue our study through the Word of God. Keep in mind that Nehemiah is leading the third return home from Babylon in 445 B. C. and the city of Jerusalem was a mess. The walls were broken down, there was no protection for the people returning home or those that were there under Zerubbabel and Ezra's return.

And Nehemiah has a passion to rebuild the city, rebuild the walls of the city and as he begins the work, the enemy comes in to try to discourage them from completing it, to try to stop them from rebuilding the walls of the city. And even with all that opposition, they worked together and the walls are almost completed, but don't think the enemy will stop his assault against them to get the work to cease! As you will see tonight, the enemy does not give up and like the people in Nehemiah's day, we need to be alert, we need to pay attention, we need to stand strong in the battles we are in. The work that God has called us to do should not stop, but we should forge ahead.

Let me share with you a few verses to show you what I mean in regards to always being ready, always being alert because the enemy will try to bring you down, ruin your witness, make you ineffective in your service to the Lord. Peter warns us in I Peter 5:8-9, **“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.”** Peter is calling for us to be alert, to pay attention because the Devil is like a lion that goes around seeking people he can devour. But we can resist him steadfast in the faith; keep your eyes on Jesus!

Paul, in Romans 13:11-14 tells us, **“And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”** Once again we see the writer tell us to wake up, pay attention, the days are evil and thus, be on guard and walk worthy of the high calling by which you have been called. Fill yourself up with Jesus and there will be no room for the Devil to tempt you!

Paul again tells us, this time in Ephesians 5:15-21, **“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.”**

Years ago I was at a nursing seminar in the Milwaukee area and I got up early in the morning to go running. Some snow was falling and it was beautiful out even though it was still dark. As traffic was building on the roadway, which I was not familiar with, for whatever reason I was not paying attention, which is a bad idea, and I ran right into a sign, knocking me to the ground. I was not running carefully, I was not watching where I was going!

That is what Paul is speaking of here. We are to walk carefully, pay attention to what is happening around us, where we are walking because the days are evil, it is dangerous and you don't want to be drawn into it. Be wise with what you watch, be wise on the Internet, be wise with your relationships at work! And as we are walking carefully we also need to take advantage of the days we are living in, the opportunities that come our way. We shouldn't cower and hide ourselves but buy up the time, use it for God's glory, to bring people into the kingdom of God – to shine forth our faith! Be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit; be controlled by the Lord and not this world or the flesh or the Devil!

With that said, let's begin reading in Nehemiah chapter 6, starting in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study through His Word!

NEHEMIAH 6

VERSES 1-2

1. Look at what is taking place here. The walls are almost completed, except for the doors or the gates. All the gaps in the walls were now closed and when these enemies heard about how fast the work was being done, they were very concerned.

So these guys wanted to arrange a meeting with Nehemiah and on the surface everything looked fine. They wanted to meet Nehemiah in the plain of Ono, which was some 25 miles northwest of Jerusalem and 6 miles Southeast of Joppa, near the boarder of Samaria, Sanballat's home province. Here's the thing, I guess the lesson you might say from all of this. When the enemy wants to meet you in the plain of Ono, just tell them "Oh, No!" and don't fall for their deception.

2. You see, Nehemiah recognized that these men wanted to do him harm but he did not fall prey to their schemes! Yes, outwardly things looked fine, but Nehemiah was able to see what was going on, that this friendly offer was not for good but for evil. I think it is difficult at times to see through what people are saying, but I believe if we are sensitive to the Holy Spirit, He will show us so we will not get burned.

And sadly, as Redpath wrote, "Whether you be a pastor or a teacher or evangelist or Sunday school leader, or whatever your position may be in Christian leadership, let me say that there will always be those who are friendly to your face, but plan your downfall behind your back. Beware of the fawning, flattering Christian who is always fluttering around you, and who behind your back will be the first to rejoice when you go down."

Now, in saying that I don't want you to become paranoid and think that everyone is coming against you, but keep your eyes on the Lord and He will direct you! It is called

DISCERNMENT!

3. One more point here. The enemy didn't like the walls going up, they felt the land was theirs, but it wasn't! You see, they wanted to control what was going on within the city. They wanted to prevent the walls from going up. If you remember back in Nehemiah 2:20, Nehemiah said to these guys, "**... you have no heritage or right or memorial in Jerusalem.**" I wish people today would understand that fact. The land does not belong to the Arabs, but to the Jews, it was given to them by God!

4. Look at the next few verses and see how Nehemiah responds to this offer!

VERSES 3-4

1. We have seen the enemy try to stop the work through ridicule, threats of attack, discouragement and-so-on. And now, they are trying to stop the work through compromise. To make friends with the enemy and how often do Christians fall prey to that form of attack and their witness for the Lord eventually comes to a halt!
2. But Nehemiah has a proper perspective over this situation. He was busy doing the work of God, rebuilding the wall, and that work was not going to stop. This happens even today when various groups of people want to waste your time. They are not interested in resolving their problem, but wasting your time. Many times they are full of anger or bitterness and in meeting with them there is really no point to it. If there is a legitimate concern, fine, but if they are not looking to resolve the problem, then it is time for them to move on and find another church.

You see, the work is too great, and it is not the time to get off the wall and stop doing the work. Keep focused on where God has called you and don't let the enemy deceive you, for if you do, you will be saying "Oh, No!" as you travel down that road and then you realize your error!

3. And notice that Nehemiah did not say, "I am doing a great job here!" No, he said, "**I am doing a great work.**" What is the difference? One is focused on you and what you are doing. The other is focused on the work of God and thus, God will get the glory! And here's the thing. As a servant of God there are all kinds of causes out there that are competing for your attention and how do you know what to do and what not to do? Use the discernment that God has given you, be led by the Holy Spirit and you will not go wrong! You can be busy 24 hours a day 7 days a week and most of what you are doing may not be the great work that God wants you to do. Be sensitive to His leading!

4. There is one more point I want you to notice here and that is in verse 4. Notice how persistent the enemy is to get us to compromise. Don't give in, don't become weak but be like Nehemiah who answered the enemy each time, "**... 'I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it and go down to you?'**" So the work continued on for Nehemiah and may the work that the Lord has called us to do continue on as we are led by Him!

5. Now don't think the enemy is going to give up even after all this. Look at what takes place next.

VERSES 5-9

1. The attack through compromise did not work, so now the enemy uses slander, false accusations to get Nehemiah to stop the work of rebuilding the walls of the city. You see, the enemy still does not give up and in this slanderous attack he sends an open letter, for public viewing, filled with false accusations that the Jews are rebuilding the wall to rebel against the people of the land, to make Nehemiah king. In doing this, they were hoping that Nehemiah would stop the work and try to resolve this issue or discourage the people from working as they heard these things. Once again they want to get together for a meeting to resolve this problem! You see, this was not an idle threat. What the enemy was saying to Nehemiah and the rest of the Jews was, “You better come down now and talk with us or else the king of Persia will hear of what you are doing and he will put an end to your work permanently!”

2. Now the enemy knows how to push our buttons and get us to react a certain way and we do a good job of going down that path. You see, if someone did that to us the first thing we would do is defend our position, explain why that was not true! But Nehemiah did not run around trying to defend his position and put an end to the rumors. He told them that these things were invented in their own heart, and he continued doing the work that God had called him to, asking the Lord to strengthen them in it. You see, God was Nehemiah’s defense against these false accusations that were being spread.

And let me say this. We can spend all our time trying to defend ourselves and guess what, the great work we were doing for the Lord has come to a halt because we are spending all our time defending ourselves. And guess what? The enemy won because we responded to the buttons he pushed. May we do as Nehemiah did, give it to the Lord and ask the Lord to strengthen us in the work, “**. . . Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.**”

And I guess I need to say this to you. If you are doing the work of God you will get opposition from family, from friends, from co-workers and-so-on. Redpath makes that point as he tells us, “No man can lead a work of God if he allows himself to be governed by what other people think. He is to secure help, fellowship, prayer, advice, and he is foolish not to take it; but if his ultimate decisions are based on popular opinion he is going to fail.” Don’t be swayed by what others are saying, give it to the Lord, let His strength guide you because it truly is not by our might, it is not by our power, but by the Spirit of God working in us and through us for God’s glory!

3. Once again don’t think the enemy is going to give up. He will just try something different. You see, he keeps coming at us to weaken us, discourage us and that is why we must keep our eyes on the Lord!

VERSES 10-14

1. Here we see the enemy use treachery, deceitfulness to get Nehemiah and the Jews to stop the work they were doing. And please understand that Shemaiah seemed genuinely concerned for Nehemiah on the outside, but he is an informant for the enemy, trying to destroy Nehemiah. How was he trying to destroy Nehemiah?

Nehemiah is told by this guy to meet him in the house of God, lock the doors, for the enemy is trying to kill you. And on the outside it sounded so good but there was a big problem with what Shemaiah said. You see, only the priest was allowed into the sanctuary. Shemaiah was trying to get Nehemiah to transgress the Law of God and when the people saw that, they would be upset with him and maybe God would then put a halt to the work.

But Nehemiah is wiser than that and he tells him that he is not going to transgress the Laws of God to save his life. He is a servant of God and thus, why should he flee. He was called to do a work and when it s done, then its time to go home. You see, you can't stop a man with a perspective like that!

Paul had that same perspective of ministry and he tells us in Philippians 2:17-18, **“Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with me.”** He was willing to give his life for the work of God and there is no way to stop a person who has that perspective!

2. Now here's the thing. From a human perspective, it seemed that Shemaiah was concerned. But God gave Nehemiah the gift of discernment, and he recognized that this guy was a phony, hired by the enemy to destroy him. Again, we need to be open to what the Holy Spirit is showing us and not be deceived by the enemy just because things look or sound good!

3. There are a few things I would like to look at and apply to our lives today. First of all I want to talk about this idea of hiding out in the house of God because you are fearful of the enemy. You see, many in the church do the same today. They hide out in the house of God, never wanting to get involved in the work because they are fearful of the enemy.

But the great commission that the Lord gave to us says, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** Matthew 28:19-20.

You see, we are to go out not come in! We come together as a body of believers to worship the Lord, praise Him, get built up in the faith, but the battle is outside these doors, it is in this world as the enemy is trying to destroy souls and God is trying to save them and He uses us as His instruments to bring to them the Gospel message! May we do it!

Another point that I want to talk about is this idea of compromising our faith so we don't rock the boat, we don't tip the boat over baby! You know what I mean and if you are not sure, Redpath explains it very well. He wrote, "He seeks to persuade Nehemiah into an easy-going, compromising religion that will shirk persecution, that will carry no cross, and that is governed by fear of the opinions of other people."

There is a push today for us to compromise our faith. The Gospel is non-negotiable! Don't listen to the enemy, stand strong in the faith!

VERSES 15-16

1. The walls of the city were completed in just 52 days, an awesome work of God as the people worked together in unity, with the same vision, and the work was completed. Now let me ask you a question. Why did they not work on the walls and complete them some ninety years before? Why did it take so long for them to do this work, in fact to start this work?

Here's the thing. Everyone saw the work that needed to be done! I am sure that most if not all the people wanted the walls to be rebuilt! Then what was the problem? The problem was that the people were wishing the walls to be rebuilt but no one was willing to step forward and do the work!

We see that in the church today. People see problems in the churches, or needs in their churches. They may even want to see those needs met. But no one is willing to step forward and do the work. The work does not get done by wishful thinking but by stepping forward and doing the work by the power of God! You see, apart from stepping out to do the work, you will not see the power of God in your life!

2. Remember in Nehemiah that when he heard what was going on in Jerusalem he prayed for four months. That is important. Now, in saying that, how long did it take to rebuild the walls, to do the work? It took less than 2 months, only 52 days! They prayed twice as long as it took them to complete the work. I wonder if it takes us twice as long to do a work because we pray half as long! Please understand that the spiritual battle is bigger than any work and thus, may we pray before we work!

3. Remember that the enemy was trying to discourage the people in the work, and Nehemiah prayed that God would turn the tables on them. And that is exactly what God did. Now the enemy is discouraged as they see that God strengthened them in this work. They could not believe that the walls were completed in only 52 days and they saw the hand of God upon the lives of these Jewish people!

VERSES 17-19

1. Now this is interesting and sad. You see, Tobiah is a relative of the Jews by marriage and because of that the nobles, the leaders would inform him on what was going on in Jerusalem, the work that was being done. In other words, he has informers on the inside, telling him what Nehemiah is doing and Tobiah is still trying to discourage Nehemiah. Tobiah was the enemy; he was trying to destroy the work of God. They should have never kept in contact with him. But maybe they thought that since he was good to them, he must be okay, but he was not. He was the enemy and you don't take the side of the enemy!

2. Now, what did Nehemiah do since he was still getting these letters to frighten him? He continued doing the work! What a great lesson for us to learn. The work was not stopped, and there will always be those Tobiah's around to try to frighten us. Don't focus on them, focus on the Lord and the work He has called you to do! What a great lesson for us to learn!

NEHEMIAH 7

VERSES 1-3

1. Now that the walls have been completed, the gates have been hung; the city had its protection from the enemy, but that is not the end of it. You see, having the walls up did not mean anything if the gates were left open all the time and Nehemiah is telling them not to open the gates of the city early or close them late. Also, what good are these walls and gates if you have no one guarding them, watching them and thus, he is also setting gatekeepers, watchmen, at various locations to watch for the enemy! Yes the walls were important, but you also had to be careful that the enemy would not just slip in.

2. How true that is in our own lives. We need to be careful after a victory because we tend to become lackadaisical or careless in our walk. We think we have taken care of the problem, the walls withstood the attack and then we are defeated because we are not watching. We have not set the safe-guards in our lives! Those safe-guards that we have are the Word of God, our brothers and sisters in the Lord and the Holy Spirit. All are important and we must be vigilant, we must stay on guard because the enemy is relentless in its attack! But remember that greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world and thus, may we stay focused on Jesus!

3. One more point here and that is this man Hanani, he is the brother of Nehemiah and he is the one we read about in Nehemiah 1:2 who came from Jerusalem and told Nehemiah all that was going on!

VERSES 4-6

1. The walls were completed, the gates were hung but the city itself was not filled with people. So Nehemiah is going to take a census from the first registry during the first return under Zerubbabel and you can read of those names again in Ezra 2:1-70.

VERSES 7-72

1. So what Nehemiah wanted, to fill Jerusalem with people, took place as this census was taken and the people moved into the city.

2. In verses 64-65 we see that some of the priests could not prove their genealogy to be priests. And they are told to wait until the High Priest could determine with the Urim and Thummim, literally, “lights and perfection’s.” Now we are not exactly sure what these things were, but whatever they were, they were used to discern the will of God in various situations. Here it is used to see what God would say in regards to those priests that could not identify their lineage, if they could practice still as priests. You see, to be a priest you had to not only be a Levite, but you had to be a descendant of Aaron!

3. In verses 70-72 we see the gifts that were given for the Temple and the support of the work!

VERSE 73

1. How wonderful this must have been. They are back in the land, the walls of the city are up, the people are living in Jerusalem but please understand the work is not done. The work does not end until we go to be with the Lord. It is as Jesus said in Luke 19:13, **“... occupy till I come.”** In other words, continue doing the work, the battle continues on, it is not time to rest or be complacent but forge ahead in the work and we will see what happens next as we move into chapter 8 of Nehemiah!

NEHEMIAH 8**VERSES 1-3**

1. As I have said, the walls were completed and yet it was not time to rest, for the work was not completed. Yes the walls protected them from the enemy attack, an attack that came from outside. But the reality is, there is a much bigger enemy, the enemy from within, the flesh!

Paul put it this way in I Corinthians 9:27. **“But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”** Paul dealt with the flesh, the enemy, on a daily basis, not because he was worried that he would lose his salvation. His salvation was based on God’s grace and not his works. But what he was concerned about was being removed from serving the Lord, from doing the work that God had called him to do, which he loved, for he loved to serve the Lord!

And please understand the passion that Paul is writing with here. That phrase **“I discipline my body”** can be translated, “to strike under the eye; to give a black eye.” In other words, Paul did not want his flesh to get the better of him, not that he physically beat himself up, but he fed his spirit and made his flesh a slave and not lord of his life.

Thus, be in the Word of God and be submissive to the Holy Spirit, listen to what God is saying to you, have a disciplined life, have self-control under the control of the Lord. Paul did finish the race that God set before him. How are you running?

2. So they got out the Word of God, the book of the Law, that is Genesis through Deuteronomy, the first five books of Moses, and they read them. And all who could understand were there. Now some today have a hard time understanding why the adults are here in the sanctuary and the children are in the Sunday School classrooms. The reason is simple and it follows the example here in Nehemiah. Those that gathered together to hear the Word of God were only those who could understand what was being said. Thus, having the children here in the sanctuary would not only be boring for them, but it would not help them grow in the Lord. In fact it may give them a bad taste of church in general. We teach the children at their level and as they get older and can understand and learn from what I am teaching, then they can come into the sanctuary. Even the infants and toddlers are introduced to the love of God through the workers and they are developing a love to come to church even at that young age.

3. Now this reading of the Law took place on the first day of the seventh month, which would correspond to our September/October. And Ezra is reading the Law of God, from Genesis to Deuteronomy, for several hours in the area of the water gate. Knowing that, I still have several hours to teach and plenty of CD's! Just kidding!

Now this area by the water gate was very busy as people would be coming and going for water. You see, Ezra did not try to hide his faith, but lived it openly and taught it so all may hear. And the people, wanting Ezra to do this, listened very carefully to what God was saying to them through His Word. And remember this; our faith is not lived under some bushel so that no one will take notice. Our faith is lived out in the open for all to see that what God has done on the inside, in our hearts, overflows into our actions.

You see, don't be ashamed to live your faith! Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 5:15-16, **“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”** May we shine for Him as we live out our faith! May we boldly proclaim the Word of God to people so that they may see that the Lord is good!

VERSES 4-6

1. They built a platform for Ezra to stand on so the people could see him when he spoke forth the words of God. I think we can learn from that, not that I need a bigger platform or platform shoes so you can see me, but that we do all that we can so as God's Word is taught it will have the greatest effect. Now granted, you can't please everyone and you will not but you do the best you can. I remember several years ago a person was complaining that I wasn't looking at them enough and then there were those who felt I was looking at them too much when I taught the Word. You can't please everyone and I felt since I covered both bases, I must be doing okay!

And it is not just the outward things that we can work on to make the Word of God go forth, but we need to be praying not only for our own heart but the hearts of the people, that they would be open to receive it. We must be open to the Lord.

2. Now as the Word of God was read, all would stand, and then as the teacher began to expound on what he just read, he would sit down while the people remained standing. This was a common practice even during the time of Jesus. And as Ezra read the Words of God, the people shouted, “Amen!” or “Let it be!” They were rejoicing in what God was showing them, they were praising the Lord.

Not only that, but they then lifted up their hands to God as they worshipped Him. Now what does the lifting of our hands mean or what is it trying to show? I think worship is correct, of course, that we are giving to God the honor that is due His name. I think it can speak of prayer. But also I think it speaks of our dependence upon God. Think of it this way. A child lifts his hands to his parents for help, for comfort, for strength, and-so-on. We do the same to our Lord as we, in our weakness, look to Him for strength. It is as James 4:10 says, “**Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.**”

VERSES 7-8

1. Obviously a large group of people has gathered, and as Ezra read the Scriptures, these men would then go around and explain what was spoken. I love verse 8, because that is how the Word of God should be taught by teachers today.

This is a great definition of what expository preaching is all about. First the Word of God was read to the people. Then the text was explained to the people so that they might make sense of what is being said. And then the text is applied to their lives that they may take with them the truths of God in their walk with Him.

That is what we do here at Calvary Chapel. On Thursday evenings we are going through the Word of God, verse by verse, moving rather quickly and yet trying to take those principles and apply them to our life. On Sunday mornings we are currently in a series called Foundation of Faith as we look at what we as Christians believe according to the Bible. Prior to that study on Sunday mornings we just finished an in-depth study on the book of Romans.

The key, of course, is not just reading the Scriptures to the people. It is not just explaining what the text is saying. It is not just about applying those verses to your life. It is all three that are important and that is why we follow that pattern here at Calvary Chapel. And again, all this is done to help us to grow in the Lord. The first study I ever did here at Calvary Chapel Manitowoc was based on Acts 2:42 which says, “**And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.**” In fact, Chris Johnson wrote a song for our teaching studies that are on the air based on this verse because it is what we are about. Our teaching studies on the radio and television are called The Sustaining Word because we believe God’s Word will sustain us as we read it, have it explained to us and apply it to our lives! Is it simplistic? You bet it is and yet God has and will continue to use it to help us to grow in our relationship with Him.

VERSES 9-11

1. Why were the people weeping? It was because the Word of God was convicting their hearts. Could it be that in the church today that many are not weeping over their sin because there is no conviction? Why would that be? Because the Word of God is not being taught! Man's philosophies don't convict a person's heart, they may condemn a person, but not convict. Experience does not convict a person's heart. But the Word of God convicts a person's heart, drawing them towards God and not driving them away from God. Condemnation, which comes from the enemy, drives us away from God. Paul put it this way in Hebrews 4:12-13 as he wrote regarding the Word of God, "**For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.**" Hebrews 4:12-13.

2. Now think about this for a minute. Why, when the Law of God was read, was there no joy? It is because the Law of God shows us we are sinners separated from God. And what the Law does is drive us to God's grace, to the cross, where there is forgiveness of sins. Yes, the Law was and is perfect; there was and is nothing wrong with it. The problem was not the Law, but us, we could never keep it!

Paul said in Romans 8:3-4, **“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”**

3. Now why was there a call for them to change their countenance? Instead of being sorrowful, they were told to be joyful. Because this was a new day and they were to take those things that God had shown them and rejoice in what He was doing as they applied these things to their life. And the same is true with us, each day we start as a new day with the Lord; His mercy is new every morning. So start the day with the joy of the Lord and end it with the joy of the Lord!

It always bothers me when I see people enter and leave church with an angry countenance. That should not be. You see, our joy is never based upon ourselves and what we have accomplished, but our joy is based in the Lord and what He has done. Zephaniah 3:17 says, **“The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”** Knowing that, rejoice that God loves us unconditionally, not based upon our works, but upon His grace and mercy through Jesus Christ. That is where true joy is found, in Him!

VERSE 12

1. Why did the peoples countenance change? Why did they now leave rejoicing in the Lord? When people hear the Word of God, are taught the Word of God, and then apply the Word of God to their life, they find great joy and strength in that. Remember what John told us in I John 1:4 where we read, “**And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.**” Many churches today have become social, political and experienced driven institutions, which God never intended them to be. Many today are jumping and dancing all over the place, but the reality is, it is not how high you jump, but how straight you walk! And when you truly understand what God has for us, His great love for us, you will find that you will have great joy in your life!

VERSE 13

1. All the people gathered together on the first day of the month to hear and be taught the Word of God. Now, on the second day of the month we see that the heads of various families gather together to be further instructed in the things of God. Why is that important? Because the leaders need to clearly understand what God desires so that they can then not only teach the people but lead the people by their example. Leaders have a powerful influence upon the people, either good or bad, but they will influence them.

VERSES 14-18

1. As they are reading through the Word of God, they must have come across the section found in Leviticus chapter 23, which speaks of the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. What they would do is move into these loosely thatched shelters for 7 days. And the way they were constructed was to have space enough to see the stars at night and to allow the wind to pass through. Not very comfortable and yet they did this to remember how God brought their forefathers those 40 years through the wilderness wanderings and into the Promised Land. Thus, it would not only remind them of the faithfulness of God, but they in turn would use this time to teach their children lessons of faith as they told them of what God had done to sustain His people. And even today in Israel many Orthodox Jews make these thatched dwelling places and observe the Feast of Tabernacles.

2. Why was there great joy? Because there is always joy found in obedience to God's Word. There is also pain and sorrow found in disobedience to God's Word. That is why many people are in therapy today, taking all kinds of medication to make them feel happy because they are trying to have their sinful lifestyle acknowledged as being the right thing to do, and yet their conscience is telling them otherwise. As Jeremiah said, "**Your words were found, and I ate them, And Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; For I am called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts.**" Jeremiah 15:16.

3. So for 8 days the Feast of Tabernacles was kept, from the 15th of the month till the 22nd of the month, with the high holy days falling on the first and the eighth day of the Feast.

4. During the time of Jesus, the religious leaders added some religious activities to this Feast. For the first 7 days the High Priest, along with the other priests, would head down the Temple Mount in this procession, to the pool of Siloam and as they traveled the singers would be singing Isaiah 12:3, **“Therefore with joy you will draw water From the wells of salvation.”**

And at the pool of Siloam they would draw out some water with a golden pitcher and take it back to the Temple area. And as the crowd gathered around them, the High Priest would pour out this water on the ground signifying that God had provided for their forefathers water from the rock for those 40 years in the wilderness.

Then, on the eighth day there was no procession, no pouring out of the water, signifying that God had indeed brought them into a land that would provide water for them. God was faithful in what He said. It is at this point that Jesus stood up, in John chapter 7, and said, **“... ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”** John 7:37-38.

The providing of the water those 40 years in the wilderness from the Rock was symbolic of Christ and what He was to do. One was physical, the providing of water, the other spiritual. You see, Paul said in I Corinthians 10:4, **“... For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.”** Jesus is now saying to the people, your physical thirst has been met, and if you want your spiritual thirst quenched, come to Me and out of your life will come torrents of living water that not only will satisfy you, but also will touch the lives of others. And John goes on to tell us that He was speaking of the Holy Spirit who would empower us for the work.

5. This revival that began by the Spirit of God in Nehemiah's day was working through the Word of God and the same is true today. True revival is born out of the Word of God as people are convicted of their sin and walk in obedience to the Lord! "Lord, give us a hunger to not only know your Word, but to obey it!"