

Nehemiah 7-8

As we step into ch 7 we need to realize that though the work on the walls has been completed, and the enemy has been disheartened, Nehemiah's work is hardly done. There's a reason these walls were built, a city is much more than walls, gates and houses, primarily it's people. And in the 1st ½ of this book it seems that the people existed for the walls. But as we enter into the last ½ of the book we come to understand that the walls have exist for the people, again there was a purpose to this building project, to the building of these walls.

What are walls for anyway? They safeguard certain things on the *inside* while providing a certain amount of defense against other things you don't want entering in from the *outside*. So to with you and with me and our relationship with the Lord, you want to wall up through prayer, through God's Word, and through godly interaction with brothers and sisters in Christ, the inner recesses of your heart that are reserved for the Lord, keeping watch over the work so that those things that want to enter in from the outside and destroy the work are kept effectively out. That's what Nehemiah ch 7 is really all about, preservation, and population. Preserving the work and repopulating the city, we have here Nehemiah's plan for pressing on from this point. Because it's cool to have a city with walls, but if the walls aren't preserved, or there's no people in the city, what's the point? So ch 7 continues to chronicle Nehemiah's plan for preservation and repopulation, the point of the walls is to benefit the people.

Vs1-2

One thing I noticed about these vs is Nehemiah's heart in not turning over something left undone or out of order before he (for lack of a better term) resigned from office. God was still going to use him there in Jerusalem but his point in being there wasn't for political platform. He'd done the work that God had called him to, and now he could let it go, he wasn't lobbying for position, or on some sort of power trip, he was willing to humbly turn the authority over to others at the completion of the work he'd been called to. But what I want you to see is the fact that *he didn't* give charge over, or resign from his office *until* everything was in order both practically and spiritually, no one was going to inherit a ½ baked headache having to tie up all these loose ends or try to figure out which way to take undone aspects of the project or work at hand. It wasn't a, "Hey look, things are better than they were," or "I just can't take it anymore, I'm outta here" kind of a thing. The walls were built, the doors had been hung, and gatekeepers had been appointed. Translation: "Everything on a practical level had been set in order and was ready to roll." We also read that the singers and Levites had been appointed as well. Translation: "Everything on a *spiritual* level was where it needed to be as well." People weren't with out direction; there wasn't a big carnal mess of people going at each other for someone else to inherit, things were properly placed in order.

And with the mention of the singers and the Levites we're reminded of the reason for the building of the walls in the 1st place. They were there to lead the people and help facilitate the people in their worship of God. The walls weren't built for the sake of having nice walls to look at or perhaps hang some nice décor on to prettify the city.

They were built so that the people might be able to worship and serve God with greater freedom than they'd ever experienced before. And really that *should* be the end result of every victory that we experience in life, if you're not praising God any more deeply now than perhaps you were a couple yrs ago, than you might want to survey your life to see if in fact you've been growing, experiencing victory.

There's a difference between simply *making it through* and really experiencing the *victory of God*. You can make it through an experience but come through on the other side more embittered or sour about a situation than you were previously, that's not the victory of God in your life. God's victory will result in a sweeter spirit (as opposed to bitter or sour) and an ability to praise God on a deeper level than what you had previously experienced and enjoyed.

So when everything was in order practically, and spiritually Nehemiah turned the reigns over to his brother Hanani, (who was the one who told him of Jerusalem's condition in the 1st place back in ch 1) and Hananiah the leader of the citadel. Why? 2 reasons are listed, #1 Faithful, and #2 God fearing. And these are qualities that are looked for in any godly leader, they're qualities that *God* looks for in the raising up of a leader, we read in the Ps where David wrote, "*Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, Him I will destroy; The one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, Him I will not endure. My eyes shall be on the faithful of the land, That they may dwell with me; He who walks in a perfect way, He shall serve me." Ps 101:5-6 Remember Jesus said that it would be the faithful and wise steward whom his master would make ruler over his household. He said, "*He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.*" Luke 16:10 Paul told the Corinthians, "*Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful." 1 Cor 4:2 So Nehemiah selected *faithful* men to be entrusted with authority. We've spoken before about how the greatest ability to possess is *availability*, but hand in hand with that is *dependability*. And really that's 2 different ways of saying the same thing, because if I can't count on you, then you're really not available. But if you would be one who would excel in ministry, or desire to be used in leadership capacity, dependability is a huge necessity. If I can't *count* on you, than how could you expect that I would *call* upon you? God doesn't entrust authority to one who is unavailable, undependable, unfaithful.**

Not only were they faithful, they feared God. The fear of God is a prerequisite for godly leadership. The other day I was online on my x-box (sorry I'm a bit of a gamer), and my gamer tag is "Pastor ccj," which lends itself at times to some interesting conversations. We were between rounds of this particular game and a guy asks me, "If God is love, and perfect love casts out all fear, than why are we to fear God?" That's a good question, the 1st thing I thought was, "Well, because we're *not* perfect in love, that is we don't have God's nature, we have a sin nature." And that is in essence what I told him, when we see Him we'll be like Him because we'll see Him as He is, until then however we have this sin nature to contend with, and not only is God love, He's also holy, and righteous, which means He has to deal with sin. Now in Christ our sin is forgiven, and the old man has been crucified with Christ, but every now and then he'll raise his ugly head.

And if I'm walking in the fear, that is the reverence and respect for God that I'm exhorted to, that will have a tendency to steer me towards the path that keeps me clean as opposed to indulging myself in the filth of the flesh invoking the chastening hand of God upon my life. The fear of God will keep me leaning *towards* and walking *on* the pathway of holiness, as opposed to falling prey to the pressures of the flesh or compromise with man. If I'm occupied with what God thinks I'll be way less likely to compromise because of what man thinks. So the fear of God is a must for godly leadership. Remember when Moses' father in law was exhorting him to select leaders from among the people to help him handle the day-to-day difficulties of ministry? He said, "*Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness;*" Ex 18:21 We read in 2 Sam 23:3 where David said, "*The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me: 'He who rules over men must be just, Ruling in the fear of God.'*" Faithfulness, and the fear of God, 2 essential attributes of any who would rule over men.

Vs3-6

Back in vs 3 we read where Nehemiah gave general instructions for the preservation of the walls. Don't open the gates till the sun is shining hot in the day, and don't let the guards leave their posts until the gates are shut. Other than that he had various guys appointed at various stations on the wall, others on those portions that were in front of their homes. Why, because the enemy wants to take advantage of us when we've been "lulled to sleep" as it were, catching us off guard. And we see here again to be on guard with respect to our homes, do your best to be aware of what's going on in your kids lives, because the enemy wants to wipe them out too. Overconfident, or off-guard, either one will work just fine as far as your enemy is concerned. That's why Jesus told us to "watch and pray" we're to be alert to our surroundings, practically and spiritually. It doesn't do much good to have walls established if there's no one watching for an approaching enemy. That's one thing I try to instill in all the people who serve here, especially the leaders, they're watchmen stationed on the wall. And they're not to be afraid to tell me what they see coming, or concerns they may have personally, otherwise how can we wage wise and effective warfare. Once the enemy has overwhelmed us and breeched the wall it's often times too late. "Well I saw the torches and lanterns coming a couple miles out, but I didn't want to alarm anyone." What's the point of having a watchman then? A watchman watches out, reports what he sees, so that preventative measures can be taken whenever possible.

After Nehemiah sets in order the necessary provisions for the general *preservation*, his heart is burdened with a *repopulation* of the city; he wants to see Jerusalem prosper. But most people didn't occupy their homes in a city with out walls, so many of the people that had moved back had established themselves in other areas of the region where they felt more fortified. And Nehemiah wants the purity of the people to be preserved so he goes back to the record of the genealogy of those who'd returned about 100 yrs earlier with Zerubbabel and he's going to begin to deal with and compel the people of these families and we'll see more on that when we get to ch 11.

And so we have before us this list that's virtually identical (for all intents and purposes) to the one we find in Ezra ch 2, so we won't rehash it now since we spent considerable time on it then. Suffice it to say that these were people with a pioneer/new work kinda spirit who loved the things of God more than the things of this world and God recorded them in His eternal word not only once, but twice in honor and remembrance of what they'd done in "losing their lives" that they might gain the life that only God could give them. Hebrews tells us, "*For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name,*" Heb 6:10. And here we have a picture of that principle, these names don't mean much to us, but God has shown them honor eternally for the work they did for His name. And he has a book of remembrance that has every work that you've done in his name recorded in it as well.

Now over in vs 64 we have that mention of some of the priests that couldn't verify their genealogy so they were excluded from the priesthood. And the idea there is that we shouldn't find ourselves in a "think so" situation when it comes to our salvation, but rather we're to have a "know so" salvation. I'd be real uncomfortable rolling the dice on an "I think so" with respect to salvation only to find myself excluded, you can "know so." If you're in Christ it's not a "think so," it's a "know so" salvation. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him should *not* perish but *have* everlasting life. For God didn't send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

(Look at vs 73, read).

Ch 8

Vs1

Now there's a couple of things we want to briefly note here as we ramp up into ch 8. Back in the last vs of ch 7 we read where this particular happening took place in the 7th month, which to you and me would be around this time of year. Their 7th month is around our October, and a majority of the 7th month was spent celebrating for the Jew, it was on the 1st day that the feast of trumpets was held, the 10th day was the Day of Atonement, and from the 15th –22nd day was the feast of tabernacles, so there's obviously some divine timing going on here in *correlation* with this *celebration* of finishing the walls. And we're tipped to that with the information given to us that they were in the 7th month. But I've discovered (and I'm sure that you have as well) that there's really no such thing as coincidence anyway, God is in control and He ordains the details of our lives. Last time we went to Africa I was so sick before we even got there, had lost my voice completely, was congested and just miserable. We're at the airport in one of the major hubs in Germany (I don't even remember what city) and lo and behold here comes David Guzik (another Calvary Pastor) who was in transit from Germany back to California because he was in the transition of stepping out of the ministry in CC Simi valley and heading up a bible college there in Germany. And what did he have in his pocket but a bag of Riccola cough drops that he saw I was in desperate need of so he just gave them to me. Small world? No, big God! No coincidence there, and we have those kinda of things happen to us, divine timing.

And in vs 1 we read that all the people gathered *as one man*, speaking of unity, in the open square in front of the Water Gate and they told Ezra to bring the book of the Law of Moses. Or to understand that another way, they were asking for a reading of the Word of God. Smells like the makings of revival to me, we've already discovered that the *Spirit* of God moves in the unity of the *people* of God (Ps 133). And when you add the dynamic of the *Word* of God, you've got the beginning ingredients that make for a revival. And we can see that the Holy Spirit had already been work in and preparing the hearts of the people simply by the way this scene unfolds. They're requesting the Word of God; you're not interested in the *Word* of God, unless a *work* of God as by the *Spirit* of God has already begun in your heart. If you have a desire to come to a place like this where the Word of God is read, and the sense of it is shared, that's evidence of the Spirit of God moving in your life. Because you don't desire the Word of God apart from the work of the Spirit of God in your life.

And it's sort of interesting that the people chose the "Water Gate" to stand before because in the scriptures a washing of water is picturesque of the work of the word of God in our lives. And water taken in is a picture of the work of the Spirit of God in our lives, so they come to the water gate that they might receive a washing of water as by the Word. And they request Ezra to be the man who brings to them the reading of the Law of Moses (the 1st 5 books of the bible). And he was the perfect man to do it; he was a scribe, one who devoted his life entirely to the preservation of the integrity of the Word. Remember this vs, "*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.*" Ezra 7:10 When we studied the book of Ezra we learned that he was a man who wielded the Word with accuracy and authority, and now here he surfaces again ready to share the Word of God with the people of God collectively.

Vs2-6

What an incredible scene this must've been to see, thousands of people gathered around all tuned in and paying attention. And when Ezra opened the book they all stood up, he blesses the Lord and they all shouted, "Amen, Amen!" and then bowed down with their faces to the earth and worshipped.

But notice back in vs 2 who it was who was in the assembly. It was those men and women and perhaps certain children, but the key was to be, "Those who could hear with understanding." Every now and then people will question why we encourage small children to be apart of the children's ministry and discourage them from sitting in the sanctuary. And quite frankly its because at the adult level of study, most of them are unable to hear *with understanding* and it can become a distraction to those who could otherwise hear with understanding. So we provide an atmosphere that's conducive to their understanding and encourage them to enjoy the area of ministry that caters to their specific needs. But here they were careful to maintain an environment that gave proper attention and respect to the Word of God; the assembly was made up of those who were able to understand as they heard.

And he began to read from the dawning of the day until the midday, so probably around 6 hrs. Now in our western culture we begin to get jumpy after 30-45 minutes, but it's not like that everywhere. And here they couldn't get enough, the people stood for about 6 hours silently while the word of God was being read to them corporately. And man they were tuned in, you might notice in vs 3 where the words, "were attentive" are in italics, that means they were added by the translators for the sake of clarification. But more literally this reads, "The ears of the people to the book of the Law." We're seeing here honor *for* the Word, and humble subjection *to* the Word.

And we notice in vs 4 where they'd built a big wooden platform that stood *above* the people and he stood with his back to the wall so that his voice reverberate and project out *over* the people. And the whole point here is that they did practical things to make sure the word of God could be heard clearly to the best of their ability. And that's a wise thing, sometimes people are a bit curious as to why I'm willing to spend a significant amount of money on a good sound system. And it's for this very reason, when it comes to projecting the Word of God we want to do the best we can to make sure that it's a clear and distinguishable and understandable as possible or else the primary point in our gathering is defeated. I've never understood why people spend an incredible amount on money on an ornate/elaborate sanctuary and then cheese out on the sound system. And you feel like you're listening to a bible study at the drive thru speaker of burger king or something, you can't hardly make out a thing the guy is saying and it just gets on your nerves to try and sit through a study. We're looking for the balance, a comfortable sanctuary, low in distractions, where the Word of God is clearly heard that it might have the most effective opportunity possible to work in our hearts and lives. Of course the greatest thing that can happen in giving the word a chance to work comes not from the end of the church but from our own hearts in preparing our hearts in advance to hear, take *in* and be changed *by* the Word. So that when we come here we lay down any agenda of our own, just forget about ourselves, and submit ourselves before the Word, giving ear *to* the Word. Not the Pastor's word, but God's Word.

And we see 3 basic things happening here through the work of the Spirit of God and the Word of God and that is the people gave heed and agreed with the Word, "Amen" means "So be it," or "Let it be" so when you hear someone say "Amen" in a bible study they're in essence saying, "I agree whole heartedly and let it be even as it's been said." Now if it's said at the beginning of a sentence its intent is, "I'm telling you the absolute truth" so that when you read of Jesus saying, "Truly truly, unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The Greek is literally, "Amen Amen" so that Jesus is saying, "I'm telling you the absolute truth of which there is no shadow of variance or turning, unless you're born again you'll never see the kingdom of God." and So the people are in agreement *with* the Word, subjection *to* the Word, we see the posture of prayer in the raising of their hands.

And worship as they bow to the ground face down. And this is a pretty good barometer of how the Spirit of God and the Word of God are working in us, if we're in agreement with and subjection to the *Word* of God, if we're spending time in prayer *with* God and we're giving our lives to the praise and *worship of* God.

Vs7-8

So the word was read distinctly, clearly, perhaps if need be translated from Hebrew to Aramaic, the overall gist being emphasized that they gave people the sense of it, helping them to get a grasp on it, that they might understand it. And that's the primary goal of the Pastor teacher; to read the Word, give the sense *of* the Word, that I might help you to *understand* the Word. You might just note the repetition of the words "Understand" and "Understanding" as you go through this ch. If I'm unable to help you understand God's Word, I've failed. If you leave here with 7 steps to a better life, but with no greater understanding of the Word, than I've failed. If you leave here all amused by humor, or entertained through anecdotes, or captivated by dramatic stories or emotionally all warm and fuzzy, but don't have a greater understanding of the Word, I've failed. Maybe you'll even be motivated to take action in some area, but if it's not due to a greater understanding of the Word, than I've failed. I'm not here to entertain you, or impress you, or win friends and gain admirers, I'm here to help you understand the Word of God. And I'm to give you the "sense" of the passage, not my own opinion, or personal favorite topics, you're not to leave here with a better grasp of my opinion, but of the Word of God.

And it's easy to see why we need help in this way, 1st of all because the Word of God is spiritually discerned, not intellectually discerned, so the Holy Spirit gifts certain people to be teachers of His Word to help sharpen our spiritual discernment. 2^{ndly} the bible was written in a vastly different time period, different culture, different language, the teacher of God's Word helps us place it in a setting that's relevant to us today. But also human nature is slow to understand the things that will convict our hearts and so often times we need it spelled out to us point by point. The teacher of God's Word helps us to see such things clearly.

So it seems as though Ezra would read for a while, pause for a time, and these guys would mingle through their designated area asking if anyone had questions, helping them understand any area that confused them. They were explaining, or expounding upon the Word, just like Jesus so often did, or the apostles did, or like we do here, they gave them the sense of what was being communicated.

Vs9-12

Notice they understood the Word, and were impacted *by* the Word. There's much to say here but obviously the only thing I'll draw your attention to is at the end of vs 10, stop mourning and start rejoicing, your sin has been forgiven, the joy of the Lord is your strength. We may be great sinners, but we serve an even greater Savior, rejoice. There are so many vs that deal with joy, I'd encourage you to dive into them, the Word of God should bring joy to your heart which will bring strength to your soul, that unquenchable resolve to follow fully after the Lord.

Vs13-18

The next day they had a leadership meeting, more fellowship in the Word, found that they were right on the brink of the Feast of Tabernacles, so they all took part in the feast such to an extent that hadn't been done for nearly 1,000 yrs and what was the result (Vs 17) very great gladness. Obedience brings gladness, it's not about being a hearer of the Word only, but being a doer of the Word. We're often deceived into thinking that the pathway to gladness is found in doing our own thing, but its when you lose your life for Christ sake (Jesus said) that you truly find life. Submitting before the Word, being obedient *to* the Word, that's where joy and great gladness is truly found.