

SERMON FOCUS: Scripture, when properly proclaimed, should result in godly sorrow and godly celebration.

SERMON FUNCTION: The hearer will experience a call to repentance *and* joyful celebration.

BACKGROUND: Last week we had made it to the completion of the wall around Jerusalem. God had been faithful to the returned exiles in allowing them to complete the temple and the city wall. Then, it was time to settle into the city. Most of chapter 7 is a listing of who had returned from exile in Babylon. When we get to chapter 8, we are re-introduced to Ezra, whom we met in chapter 7 of the book of Ezra, which was about 12-13 years before this. We are not told if he hung out in Jerusalem the whole time or if he had been back to Babylon and returned to see the completed wall. Since it is not mentioned, there is no need for us to speculate.

What we do know is that chapters 8-9 of Nehemiah are known as “Ezra’s Revival.” Ezra is going to do what he does best, which is to call the people of Israel back to God. Our focus today is the first twelve verses of Chapter 8, but the last half of 7:73 belongs to the first verse of chapter 8, so we will start there.

SCRIPTURE READING: Nehemiah 7:73-8:12

When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people gathered together at the square in front of the Water Gate. They asked the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses that the Lord had given Israel. **2**On the first day of the seventh month, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding. **3**While he was facing the square in front of the Water Gate, he read out of it from daybreak until noon before

the men, the women, and those who could understand. All the people listened attentively to the book of the law. **4**The scribe Ezra stood on a high wooden platform made for this purpose. Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah stood beside him on his right; to his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. **5**Ezra opened the book in full view of all the people, since he was elevated above everyone. As he opened it, all the people stood up. **6**Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and with their hands uplifted all the people said, "Amen, Amen!" Then they knelt low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

7Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah, who were Levites, explained the law to the people as they stood in their places. **8**They read out of the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read. **9**Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to all of them, "This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law. **10**Then he said to them, "Go and eat what is rich, drink what is sweet, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, since today is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, because the joy of the Lord is your strength." **11**And the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, since today is holy. Don't grieve." **12**Then all the people began to eat and drink, send portions, and have a great celebration, because they had understood the words that were explained to them.

INTRODUCTION:

One thing that often happens when I meet with other pastors is that we will discuss attendance now compared to before COVID. We are fortunate at Sappony, because everyone who took the time to attend before COVID, who is still capable, came back. In a lot of churches, people who were barely attending

got out of the habit and quit altogether. Some churches simply died during COVID, including two from our Association.

We can observe in our society that people do not make a priority of Sunday morning worship attendance. People can be found in lots of places on Sunday mornings that aren't church. But one of the things that we clearly learn from scripture is that I must attend to the teaching of the word of God.

MESSAGE:

1. I MUST ATTEND THE TEACHING OF THE WORD
 - a. (7:73-8:1) When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people gathered together at the square in front of the Water Gate.
 - b. The first day of the seventh month was a day of sacred assembly. It was the Feast of Trumpets. Nobody was to do any work, but it was a day of rest and commemoration.
 - c. There was nothing else competing with worship that day.
 - i. No work.
 - ii. No trade.
 - iii. No ballgames.
 - d. The whole community of God's people were gathered together to hear the word read and taught.
 - i. (8:3) "the men, the women, and those who could understand"
 - ii. We can assume that, at a minimum, this was everyone over the age of accountability (12).
 - e. (8:3) "He read out of it from daybreak until noon."
 - i. (A former church member) "If you can't say it in 20 minutes, it doesn't need said."
 - ii. Our morning sermon is typically about 35 minutes.

- iii. Ezra was leading this service for six hours.
 - iv. This is shorter than Paul's preaching in Acts 20, which caused Eutychus to take a header from the third-floor window.
 - f. This was outside in the sun, literally all morning.
 - g. Yet, we may complain
 - i. It's too hot
 - ii. It's too cold
 - iii. It's too rainy
 - iv. It's too sunny
 - v. The pews are uncomfortable
 - h. The Israelites, coming back from exile, considered the word of God important enough to attend to. So must I.
2. I MUST RESPOND TO THE TEACHING OF THE WORD
- a. (2 Tim 3:16-17) All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
 - b. Scripture always confronts us with ourselves.
 - i. Our sins
 - ii. Our true motives
 - iii. Those things that we put before God
 - c. Scripture was confronting the Israelites with their sins as well.
 - d. We like to call the scripture good news. But it is necessarily bad news first.¹
 - i. BAD NEWS: We are all sinners separated from God.
 - ii. WORST NEWS: There is nothing that we can do to take care of our sin problem.

¹ James Merritt. "The Good, the Bad, the Worst, and the Best." *North American Mission Board*. Accessed Aug. 2, 2022. <https://www.namb.net/resource/the-good-the-bad-the-worst-and-the-best/>

- iii. GOOD NEWS: Jesus did for us what we cannot do for ourselves.
 - iv. BEST NEWS: God's forgiveness and eternal life is a free gift, and all we have to do is receive it.
 - e. We must allow scripture to confront us with those things that need to be corrected. If not, then we willingly live blind.
 - f. Often, the teaching of the word will get an emotional response. Godly sorrow is a good thing.
 - g. The right response to the teaching of the word is repentance.
 - h. This means that when I have been taught the word, I must live differently as the result of it.
3. I MUST GO OUT AND LIVE DIFFERENTLY BECAUSE OF THE TEACHING OF THE WORD.
- a. The people in the crowd were heartbroken over their sin. And they should have been. But they were not allowed to stay that way.
 - b. It is also appropriate for us to be heartbroken over our sins. It is not God's desire that we continually live that way.
 - c. The Israelites were commanded by Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites to go and celebrate because it was a holy day.
 - d. God still loved His people. He allowed them to return home and to rebuild the temple and the city wall.
 - e. After we are sorry for our sins and repent of them, God calls us to live differently than we did before.
 - f. They were to leave celebrating as God had done for them and being generous to those less fortunate.

- g. We are also to leave our worship service having repented of our sins and go home celebrating and living generously.
- h. Meals at the Mills house in Havelock.

CONCLUSION:

- Do I routinely attend to the teaching of the word? Or do I look for any excuse to not attend to the teaching of the word?
- How do I respond to the teaching of the word? Do I expect to be entertained, or do I let the word perform surgery on my heart?
- When I leave the teaching of the word, do I live any differently? Do I live more generously?

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