

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE WALL

A man bought his wife a nice new car, and he told her that if she was ever in an accident, that he had put the insurance info in the glove box. Well she had an accident. She picked up the phone and was about to call her husband but she was terrified to tell him she had wrecked the new car he bought her. She was shaking and so flustered. She remembered to look in the glove box, and as she opened the insurance binder a note fell out...it was from her husband. It said, if you are reading this, it's probably because you wrecked the car. I'm just glad you're doing well enough to read. I want you to remember, it's just a car, don't worry about it. You are all that is important.

It is important sometimes to put things into perspective isn't it? To remember what is really important. As we have talked about the idea of a building campaign in the past few weeks, I just want to say again that the building being proposed is just a tool. It is what the building allows us to do that is important.

Today we are concluding our series on the book of Nehemiah. We have seen how Nehemiah clarified and communicated his vision to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. We have seen that everyone was together and worked side by side. We have seen how there was trouble from those who were enemies of Israel and how there was trouble from those who were part of the nation of Israel. Today I want to finish by asking the question "so what?" What really was the fruit of all this hard work?

Nehemiah 8:1-12 all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel. 2 So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. 3 He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. 4 Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion... 5 Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. 6 Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. 7 The Levites ... instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. 8 They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read. 9 Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. 10 Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." 11 The Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve." 12 Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

Once the wall was finished the people began to worship and revival broke out! They had an old fashioned, heaven sent, sin erasing, devil chasing, window shaking, life changing revival! It's not about the wall, it's about the word, the worship and the witness that went on inside the wall. So what did this revival look like?

1. READING the Word (vs. 1-2)

Nehemiah 8:1 all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel.

Just after the wall was finished the Israelites got together with the now protected city. They asked Ezra to bring out the book of the law (the first 5 books of the bible) and to read it. The completion of the task facilitated the meeting and motivated the response. It provided a place of safety for them to gather. More than that, it provided the motivation and momentum to say “if we can complete a task this great, what else can we accomplish if we all come together?”

When this building was completed 30 years ago it was a time of celebration. The construction was a challenging time for the church, but when it was done it was a time of great blessing. I have said this before, but think about all the services, outreach events, concerts and conferences that have taken place within these walls over the years. How many of those events would not have happened if this building had not been constructed?

A building is just a tool. It is not the building but what the building allows you to do that is important. A few weeks ago our kitchen faucet started leaking. It got worse and worse until it was unusable. I went out and bought a new faucet and brought it home, but the way the old faucet was screwed in under the counter, there was just no way to get a wrench up to loosen the connection. It was then that I noticed on the instructions for the new faucet something called a basin wrench. I had never even heard of that before. I had to google it! Turns out they have this tool that is able to reach up into tight places and loosen and tighten faucets. I went out and bought one and it works perfect.

Having the right tools for the right job is important. So are buildings. They either help or hinder your ministry. The pastors, elders and directors are recommending this new addition to our building so that the church can continue to grow. For the last 30 years this church has gone up and down in attendance. We always seem to reach a certain point and then plateau and decrease.

Over the last weeks I have presented the new building to a number of groups. After the service today we are having our second town hall meeting and I will be presenting it again. Often the same questions will come up. One question is about missions. If we raise a lot of money for a building will it hurt our missions giving. The answer is that the bigger the church grows, the more money we can raise for missions. If we have not bought this property or built this building, think of all the missionaries and projects we would not have been able to support for the past 30 years.

Another question I hear is what happens if an unexpected expense should come up in the future. We have a parking lot outside that will eventually need to be repaved. I would rather raise the money to repave the parking lot as a church of 2000 than a church of 1000!

Again, it's not about the wall, it's about the word, the worship and the witness that went on inside the wall. What did this revival that took place in Jerusalem after the wall was completed look like?

2. RESPECTING the Word (vs. 3-10)

It is important to see here that the people were not simply asking that the law be read as part of some empty religious tradition, like saying a prayer before a dinner party. They were hungry for what it said. Their hunger for God's word was shown in many different ways.

APPETITE (vs. 3a)

Nehemiah 8:3a He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand...

The people were hungry for God's word. They did not come that day out of tradition, because they felt that it was something they should do or had to do. They wanted to be there. They arrived at daybreak (which shows motivation) and stayed there until noon – that was about 6 hours.

A little boy went to big church for the first time. He was usually in Sunday School. He had so many questions at everything he saw. He would look at his father and ask, "What does that mean?" When the choir got up to sing he asked "what does that mean?" When the ushers came forward to take up the offering he asked "what does that mean?" When the service leader got up to do the announcements he asked "what does that mean?" Then the pastor got up and stood behind the pulpit and took off his watch and set it in front of him the boy again asked "what does that mean?" The father, who had slouched down in the pew and closed his eyes turned to his son and said "Oh, that don't mean a thing, son. That don't mean a thing!"

Are you hungry for God's word? I am not going to ask you this morning to sit here for 6 hours. In fact, when I started here at this church I pushed hard to have the service time reduced and not increased. I try not to be long winded or take advantage of your time. I'd prefer to get finished before you get finished! My goal is to leave you wanting more. That is appetite. I pray that God would continue to give us an appetite for His word.

ATTENTIVENESS (vs. 3b)

Nehemiah 8:3b ...And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

We also see in this text that not only did they stay for 6 hours, they were attentive during that time. They were actively listening. They weren't busy planning lunch or playing on their phones, they were paying attention to what was being read.

A paramedic was asked on a local Dallas TV talk-show program what was the most unusual and challenging 911 call he had ever received. The paramedic said that once they had got a call from a local church. A frantic usher was very concerned that during their worship service an elderly man had passed out in a pew and appeared to be dead. The usher could find no pulse and it looked like the man was not breathing. The talk-show host did not understand why this was so unusual and so he asked the paramedic what was so unusual and demanding about that particular call. The paramedic said, "well, the problem was we had to carry out four or five guys before we found the one who was dead."

Have you ever found yourself just phasing out when the sermon starts? That was me as a kid. All the youth would sit up in the balcony of this old church and when the sermon started I would just close my eyes and have a nap. Part of it is just attitude. Are we coming to church expecting to meet with God. I pray that God would continue to give us all a hunger for His word.

APPRECIATION (vs. 6)

Nehemiah 8:6b ...all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Not only did they stay and listen to what was being read, they allowed their hearts to be touched by it.

A little boy brought his father the family Bible from the coffee table. "What is this daddy?" "It's the Bible, it's God's book." his dad replied. "Then should we give it back to Him since we don't use it?"

How about your Bible? Does it collect dust on a table or shelf or are you using it during the week? Do you have a daily time for personal study? Do you look forward to it or just dread it?

ATTITUDE (vs. 9)

Nehemiah 8:9b ...all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

The people were not only touched by what God's word said, they were convicted by it. Are you allowing the bible to touch your heart and convict you of areas in your life that are not right?

Rick Warren, in his book *The Purpose Driven Life* says - "No other habit can do more to transform your life and make you more like Jesus than daily reflection on Scripture. As we take the time to contemplate God's truth, seriously reflecting on the example of Christ, we are transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory."

APPLICATION (vs. 10)

Nehemiah 8:10b ...This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

The reading of the word first makes you mad, then makes you sad but hopefully in the end makes you glad.

Scripture is like a pair of spectacles which dispels the darkness and give us a clear view of God --
John Calvin

The people were convicted because they had not been following the instructions that God had given through Moses to the people. In hearing God's word they were convicted of their own sins. Notice here how Nehemiah responds to this. He tells the people not to grieve. Why?

Basically he is telling the people here to quit crying and move forward. Yes, you have sinned. Yes, you are guilty. But God is not just the Lord of justice, He is also the God of love. He wants us to experience forgiveness that leads to joy! So, throw a party! And make sure that the poor have enough to throw a party, too!

We often confuse sacred with solemn and somber. We sometimes think that to be holy is to be quiet and serious, but the Bible equates holiness with joy. The true worship of God is done with rejoicing and celebration. The most sacred times in our lives are filled with joy: our wedding, the birth of a child, Christmas and Easter. God does not delight in sorrow but in joy. God is happiest with us when we are happiest with Him.

There is an ancient Jewish custom that when a young boy begins his first lesson in Torah (the Law of Moses), that a golden drop of honey is dripped onto the first page of the Torah reminding the student of the sweetness of God's Word.

3. RESPONDING to the Word (vs. 11-12)

Nehemiah 8:12 Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

The people had heard God's Word and took the words that Nehemiah had spoken and they went off and put it into practice. They practically lived out the principle they had learned. This is the goal of discipleship. It is the goal of preaching. We study the bible not just so that we KNOW what it says but so that we can DO what it says. The end result is life change.

That is my prayer for us as a church. I want us to see lives transformed. Marriages healed. Relationships restored. Hearts changed.

After a long, hard struggle for the abolition of slavery, William Wilberforce finally won the victory in 1807. On the evening of the 22nd February 1807, news was brought to him of the victory. Wilberforce turned to his old friend Henry Thornton and said "Well Henry, what shall we abolish next".

The joy must have been much the same for Nehemiah, the Governor of Jerusalem, when he finally rebuilt the walls. He had come to Jerusalem with this one aim. He was single-minded in his pursuit of the goal before him. The result of completing the task was more than he could have imagined.

It's not about the wall, It about the Word and about Worship and about Witness.