



Series: Nehemiah, Healthy Walls	Reference: Nehemiah 8	Title: Chapter 8 Continued	Date: 7.2.17
<p style="text-align: center;">Website Writeup:</p> <p>We continue our discussion of Nehemiah 8. Last week we saw how the people gathered at the Water Gate to hear the reading of God's Word. They continue in this hunger, and find also some prescriptive practices which they seek to fulfill once again which add richness to their lives. Re-instructing themselves in the practices of faith in order to remember who God is, and where he has and is taking them.</p>			

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

UPG Prayer of the Day...

The Dyula, a people group of 4.8 million, live in clans which are the most important aspect of their lives. They're fiercely loyal to their clan, defending them proudly. They express their history & devotion through the oral traditions of dance & storytelling. They have great respect for the elderly, especially if a man is an Islamic scholar. The moral principles of the Dyula are based on obedience, honesty & dedication to their people. Such precepts are motivated by a driving sense of human dignity.

Sermon...

Part of my daily routine is to wake up & sit in bed doing emails & quiet time for a while. If I'm doing emails, I usually have the news on, as sort of background clamor, occasionally hearing some argument or disheartening story. We watch to stay informed, but news has changed since I was a child. It used to be one guy sitting in front of a camera telling me what has happened in the world that day, not what I should think about it. That guy was Walter Cronkite, that's how old I am. Now it is panels of people discussing & arguing towards their point - occasionally the opposing side's brought in, but usually it's just a panel of people agreeing on something; telling us we should as well. News has polarized, stations have taken sides, instead of just giving the story. There's an effort to convince me to a side & little to no unity.

What I feed myself with dictates my demeanor or mood. It's good to stay informed, but it's good to turn it off as well. If I watch the news without feeding myself with God's Word, I end up feeling very confused, hopeless, or, even self-righteous. I become increasingly frustrated, or even angry at what's going on around me - since I see no hope in the story of life presented. I end up saying, "*Why vote, I can't trust anyone anyway!*" Or, becoming sort of depressive, realizing this is the world I live in, as soon as one crisis passes 4 more take its place - never ending; little hope, if any.

But then, I crack the Bible & read. I pray. I listen. And, you guys come to mind. All the good I see God doing in you. All your growth & desperation to know the Lord. I see a God who pursues his people although we are such a mess. And I'm encouraged. So, which is my reality? God's words to me, or the societal message bombarding me via the news? I guess it depends on what I choose to listen to, focus on, or even believe. Not that



I don't believe the stories in the news have happened, but whether they are the only real narrative - is there a more hopeful narrative?

One journalist wrote this years ago: "More than anything else, this ugly social breakdown threatens to desensitize us as a nation. Wild West shoot-outs that kill innocent bystanders have become commonplace. Drug dealers and gang members have taken to using children as murderers. Executions of entire families by drug dealers are not unknown. Sweeps of whole communities by police bent on stopping the killing are now routine in Los Angeles.

Numbed by it all, we as a people, shrug our shoulders. Something is disastrously amiss. This is not the America most of us grew up to revere... We are demeaned as a people by this retrogression. We are less and less civilized."

But I must remember, this is not my reality as a child of God. An old hymn says: This world is not my home. I'm just a-passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door, and I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

Christians live in a constant state of angst countered by the hope of the Gospel. We're the ones painfully aware the news isn't as it should be, there's a more hopeful narrative. Occasionally we get a glimpse of that hope. I saw one this week with a woman who was in court over a bunch of parking tickets adding up to over \$400. Her son had been murdered the year before, she was on welfare, had lost her apartment & was basically struggling. The judge listened, then wiped away her debt.

But most of the stories out there are a narrative of violence, death & hurtfulness, does that mean I avoid my world, no. But it does mean I have to temper or manage the story (Romans 12:1-2). Better said, I need to choose Gospel hope as my reality...

Pontius Pilate once asked, "What is Truth?" not realizing it was found in the person standing in front of him (Jesus). So, what do I choose, Truth & hope found in Jesus, the Living Word of God, or the hopelessness of the stories surrounding me?

One pastor wrote this about the effect God's Word has on him: 'The truth isn't always easy for me to hear. Sometimes it pierces me & convicts me. Sometimes I wish I could evade it. And then, I'm reminded it was sent to heal me. Often it encourages me & heartens me. Sometimes it restores me when nothing else can do so. It confronts me with paradoxes of revelation which intrigue me & challenge me. It exposes the secular illusions of the day & reveals the destructive ends to which they lead. It deals honestly with uncomfortable concepts & opposes the strongholds of tradition, correcting them with the authority of God.

I've learned to appreciate the Bible most because it brings me face to face with my God! That's the reason for Scripture. It's to reveal God to us. The relationship is so real



& personal it seems to be a face-to-face encounter. My heavenly Father becomes more real & close than any earthly father. I can all but see my Lord & Savior standing beside me & talking to me as I read his words in the gospels. Sometimes the words of Scripture become so vivid & luminous I feel like kneeling or even falling on my face before the majesty of God. No other book has such power to transport me beyond earth to heavenly places."

The Joy of the Lord IS Our Strength! Today, we want to continue in Chapter 8 of Nehemiah. Remembering, construction's finished, re-instruction commences; they're starting again to listen intently to God; weeping & celebrating at seeing that God's about restoration & reconciliation! They'd stumbled onto God's Word again & are breaking the bad habit of not listening. And now, as a result they stumble onto another age old practice found in the Word which had fallen to the wayside. Another practice which had been put in place to remind them of who they were as God's people & what their ultimate reality is in him.

Let's read in chapter 8 starting in verse 13. ¹³ On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the scribe to give attention to the words of the Law. ¹⁴ They found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month ¹⁵ and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: "Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make booths"-as it is written.

¹⁶ So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves booths on their own roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God and in the square by the Water Gate and the one by the Gate of Ephraim. ¹⁷ The whole company that had returned from exile built booths and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great.

This is the feast of Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths. Driving around the Main Line in late September or October you will notice outside synagogues, and in the back yards of your Jewish neighbors, these little booths set up (may look like a tent). This reminds them of the Passover & leaving Egypt as we see in Exodus 12. Of being in the desert, living in booths, being ready to pull up stakes & follow God on a nod. They even ate the Passover meal standing up, with staff in hand, and traveling clothes as a reminder to be ready to follow God at the spur of the moment. If you look at the Matzoh (hold one up) you will remember the story, because they left in such haste they couldn't use yeast, so they made unleavened bread. Every little thing that we do is a reminder of how God saves; how he restores. It reminds us we're sojourners here to follow God wherever he may lead. Not to buy into all the arguments & hopelessness, but to remember a God who saves & restores!



The only thing I can geographically equate Egypt with is Las Vegas, a city surrounded by desert. People in bondage, but God calls them out into the desert, away from the safety of civilization. A lesson in learning how to rely on him for sure! Who in the world would want to leave civilization not knowing where you're going looking only into the heat of a desert! But usually the path to freedom sometimes looks desolate at first, sin seems so safe & enticing. "Let's just stay," is the temptation.

Is God calling you out of bondage, and back into practicing your faith in him again - into trust? Have we been too long under the comfort of our bondage to develop intimacy with Jesus? Maybe he's calling us out into trust in him once again... Sometimes we slip ourselves back into the narrative of Genesis 3:8-10 where Adam & Eve have eaten the apple & God's walking in the forest. He calls out to them, "Where are you?" They answer, "I heard you in the garden & I was afraid, because I was naked; so I hid." Even in the midst of church life we can hide from God. Or, we can live out of this dichotomy thinking we can live as we want & still have all the benefits of the Christian life. And God calls us out of our hiding in the woods once more.

Yearly NYC has competitions for building these booths; it's called Sukkah City. So, now if you go to NYC you'll know what it's about, and realize you're tied to this as spiritual descendants of Abraham. God was calling them back to remembrance & us as well - they'd not practiced these things for a long time, they'd lost some of this spiritual heritage. But again, these aren't just dead religious rites, or practices, but they communicate a story - the story of a God who pursues his people, calling them back into relationship over & over again - no matter how far they've fallen away. A god who saves & restores his people.

As I studied the temple & the sacrificial rites surrounding Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), it was evident, everything from the Law of Moses on the Tablets in the Ark, to the budding rod of Aaron, to the Mercy Seat, to the clothing of the Priest, to the set up of the Temple with the Veil, and everything else, drives us back to the Living Word - back to Jesus. We study & remember these things, not just because we're religious people, but because we love Jesus & his story! It's our present & future reality. God has put these things in place to remind us & call us back to this wonderful relationship of grace & forgiveness we have with him!

It's a story they didn't keep to themselves, but one they shared; *"that they should proclaim this word & spread it throughout their towns & in Jerusalem!"* We also seek to proclaim this hopeful story to others. Building trust with the local community through our Kingdom Opportunities. We don't engage to gain something for ourselves, but to bless & be able to share this story of a god of restoration & forgiveness.

We may no longer build Sukkahs, or Booths, and camp out in them, although that may be fun to do. But we build our Sukkahs through relationship. There's our Sukkah of Linwood Park. The Sukkah of SABA & the 4th of July Celebration this week. The Sukkah of PALM. The Sukkah of the Ardmore Initiative. All these various booths, or containers



of relationship, in which we celebrate with others & through which we share the story of Jesus with them. These are the booths we set up in community & camp out in. That's exciting to me & hope it is for you too.

Let's continue: ¹⁸ *Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the feast for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.*

Their hunger is yet to be satiated. Day after day, from morning until noon they stood in the open, hearing again & again the Word read to them - we share also in this daily need for immersion in God's Word, strengthening us against the lies which constantly bombard us!

I handed out Lectio Divina Journals last week. We ordered a few more, if you didn't get one take it today! I hope you're encouraged & able to use them for your quiet times. I hope you've found yourselves hungry & worshipful this week & have fed that hunger with the Word of God. I think the more & more we do so, we'll see a healthy maturation & joy growing in us. God is our reality, we are sojourners living in tents, ready to follow at a moments notice anywhere he calls us.

And at the end of this time they assembled together. Why do we do church? Because we need it. Why do we gather, work so hard to greet people, take care of kids, preach, worship & hang out - because God is community, and in community we're drawn back to faith & strengthened for ministry in the world. So, how important are you here? You're vital. How important is it to worship & study together, vital! How important is it to make it here on time & worship, pray & hear God's Word together - vital!

So, let's gather to worship at the Water Gate together with regularity. Let's feed our hunger & feed each other with Truth - let's rejoice in the old story of a God who doesn't leave his people, but continually pursues, reconciling himself to them throughout history! Let's mourn so we can rejoice. Let's cry, so we can see the grace of Christ in our lives - let's live the story before our community & out into all people groups of the world.

I'd like to end this today with a communal reading & response. I will read the first lines in all capital letters & you can respond with the second line in unison.

COME WORSHIP AT THE WATER GATE!

Response: Amen Lord! Feed us with your Word!

SPEAK LORD, YOUR CHILDREN ARE HUNGRY!

Response: Jesus, Living Water, we are HUNGRY, feed us!

HEAL US JESUS BY YOUR WORD!

Response: We want the healing touch of your Word!



WHAT IS OUR REALITY?

Response: We are children of God. Saved by grace through faith. Sojourners in this world, living by hope, calling others into relationship with Jesus!

Seeing as Community Groups aren't meeting this week. I have a challenge for you all...a challenge I would've normally had Community Group leaders do in their groups. I challenge you all to reach down & find your inner artist, then go home & make your own Sukkah using any material you like. It can be as small or as large as you like, as long as you can bring it in here next week to show us. You can do it as an individual, a family, or you can gather a group & make a party of it - a Sukkah Celebration of your own. I've printed up directions we will be handing out as you leave.

Sukkah Celebration Directions

Let's make some Sukkahs!

1. Have fun doing this!
 1. you can do it alone, or with a spouse, or with the family
 2. you can gather others together to do it as a group - maybe have a Sukkah making dinner party?
 3. Community Groups may want to make one together
2. Use any materials you like (cloth, branches, glue, string, leaves, toothpicks, playing cards, paint, magic marker, broken glass, an old tent, etc...)
3. Make it as large or small as you like, as long as it will fit into church, and can be displayed there - we will make room!
 1. if you should do this, let Jason know & the approximate size of your sukkah, and he will have a space ready for you next Sunday (jason@sixeight.org).
4. Think about putting meaningful objects in, or on it, such as...
 1. thoughts from your quiet times in the Lectio Divina Journal we provided last week.
 2. an object(s) which means something in your spiritual journey, or the rebuilding of your spiritual walls & gates.
 3. Verses which are meaningful to your spiritual journey
 4. Be creative...
5. Include a short writeup about it including who was involved in making it, significance of any items, and any other information you would like to include to be displayed next to it.