

## Sunday Morning Message

May 27, 2018

### *A Pattern for a Preaching Service*

Text – Nehemiah 8

Congregational Reading – Nehemiah 8:5 – 6; skip down to 8

### Introduction

The Book of Nehemiah is a post exilic writing, meaning that it was written after the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon and Persia. The first group of exiles returned to Jerusalem in 538 BC under the direction of Zerubbabel; and, through the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah the Temple was finally finished some twenty years later in 515 BC. Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem in 444 BC, almost one hundred years after the Jews were first granted permission to return. The condition of the city was described in Nehemiah 1:1 – 4; 2:11 - 18.

The beginning chapters of the Book of Nehemiah focus on the re-building of the walls and gates of Jerusalem, and the fortification of the city. In chapter seven, the reconstruction project lead by Nehemiah is complete, and the city is secure. However, there is still a lot of rebuilding and renovation that must be done within the walls of the city. Nehemiah who is known as the “Tirshatha”, or governor, along with Ezra the priest will continue rebuilding Jerusalem.

When we get to chapters eight through ten, the focus shifts from structural rebuilding to spiritual revival, and this revival seems to have been driven by the people, not the priests. (Nehemiah 8:1) In these chapters, we find one of the greatest revivals that God’s people have ever experienced. In these three chapters, we see all of the necessary ingredients for revival.

In chapter eight, there is a heavy emphasis on the Word of God, which will be the focus of our message this morning.

In chapter nine, there is an emphasis on prayer. The people are corporately confessing their sins, and then praising God for having mercy on them. (See Nehemiah 9:1 – 3)

In chapter ten, the people make commitments to God: (See Nehemiah 10:28 – 29)

They would live separated lives and would not intermarry with people who were not saved. (Nehemiah 10:30)

*"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14)*

They will keep the Sabbath. (See Nehemiah 10:31)

*"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." (Exodus 20:8-11)*

They will tithe and make sure the priests and Levites were taken care of. (See Nehemiah 10:32 – 38)

They committed to not forsake the House of God. (See Nehemiah 10:39)

*"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." (Hebrews 10:23-25)*

All of these things are ingredients that can be seen during times of revival. Whether it is a personal revival, a church revival, or a regional revival, it does not matter. When a person or group of people are revived spiritually, all of these ingredients will be present. The people will have a desire for the Word of God, for prayer, praise and worship. People will be humble and contrite before God, confessing all known sins to Him. People will be obedient to what they know God wants them to do: they will live separated lives; they will set apart Sunday as a special day; they will tithe; and they won't forsake God or His house, which today is the local church.

Transition – This morning, I want to circle back to chapter eight and examine it in light of this time of revival, and see that what took place in chapter eight serves as almost a pattern for what should be going on in our preaching services today.

### **I A Pulpit, a Preacher, and God's People (vs. 1 – 8)**

The people were gathered together outside the eastern part of the temple near the water gate. Notice that the people call Ezra the scribe, and ask him to bring the Book of the Law of Moses. I said before that this revival seems to have been driven by lay people, much like the revival that started on Fulton Street in New York back in 1857. It was started by Jeremiah Lanphier, a 48-year old businessman turned lay-missionary. The revival was known as "the layman's revival" or businessmen's revival". It started with just a few people praying on their lunch break, and as it continued there were eventually hundreds of thousands of people praying at noon every day, all over the country.

Notice also in verse one that these people were "as one man." They had unity; they were of one mind, one heart, one spirit; they were striving together in one accord.

The church at Jerusalem was in one accord also, and in the environment of unity another great revival took place with thousands getting saved:

*"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:46-47)*

*"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;" (Philippians 1:27)*

When we gather together for worship, let's forget our differences and let's focus on God and His Word.

Notice in v. 2 that this was on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the seventh month, the month Tisri on the Jewish calendar, which corresponds to our September/October, which is also actually New Years Day for the Jews. (See Leviticus 23:24)

Notice also in v. 2 and 3, that they must have had a nursery. Only the people who were old enough to understand were gathered.

V. 5 - The people stood when the Bible was opened. They have a reverence for the Word of God.

Vs. 4 & 5 – Ezra and thirteen other men were up on the pulpit (or platform), which was elevated. Note – we center and elevate the pulpit here not because of the person preaching, but because this is the sacred desk that contains the Word of God.

V. 3 – Ezra read from morning until mid-day, which was several hours, and the people were attentive. They were not looking at their watches or turning around to see the clock after thirty minutes.

V. 6 – The people said “Amen” and they lifted up their hands. They also bowed their heads with their faces to the ground publicly. They were not afraid to publicly be seen praying and bowing before God. Note – don't be afraid to use the altar.

Vs. 7 – 8 – There were some men there who helped the people understand the Word of God. Ezra, or perhaps one of the other men on the platform would read portions of the Bible, and then there were some men in the crowd that helped the people understand what was being read. When we preach, we read the Word, and then we try to give the understanding. We also have Sunday School classes and discipleship classes where people other than the preacher give the understanding as well.

Notice again that there was a heavy emphasis on the Word of God.

*"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine." (2 Timothy 4:2)*

Our Baptist churches are Bible heavy, and they ought to be.

## **II A Passion for the Pure Word of God (vs. 9 – 12)**

David said:

*"The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever." (Psalm 12:6-7)*

The results of the reading and preaching brought, at first, remorse. Why? Probably because they were under conviction. In other words, they had missed the mark. Preaching ought to make us feel guilty at times. The preaching of the Word of God shows us where we have

strayed off of the path, and hopefully will encourage and admonish us to get back on the right path.

The Levites, however, encouraged the people to rejoice. (v. 10 – *“the joy of the Lord is your strength”*) Why? Because God was pleased with them and He had mercy on them and showed them what they needed to do; and, *“they had understood the words that were declared unto them.”* Understanding the Word of God brings me great joy. Studying the Word of God brings me great joy. Teaching the Word of God brings me great joy. Obeying the Word of God brings God great joy. The Apostle John said: *“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”* (3 John 1:4)

After the service, the people enjoyed food and fellowship. They had “dinner on the grounds”

### III A Proclamation of an Old Practice (vs. 13 – 18)

Here, some of the Levites go back to Ezra for a Bible Study; for further clarification on something they had read. The people of God wanted to put into practice what they previously learned in the Scripture. They wanted to obey the Bible. They wanted to observe the Feast of Tabernacles or feast of Booths as it is sometimes called. According to verse 17, Israel had not done this since the time of Joshua. It lasted from the second day of the month until the eighth day of the month.

Instructions for the Feast of Tabernacles were given in Leviticus 23:34 – 36. Interestingly, Leviticus instructs that Tabernacles was to begin on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month, but for some reason, these Jews of Nehemiah and Ezra’s day may have observed it early, or perhaps it just took them a couple of weeks to make the preparations.

### Conclusion

What we see here in chapter eight of Nehemiah is what we should see every week here at Jersey Shore Baptist Church. Every Sunday and Wednesday there should be a whole congregation of people gathered together, hungry for the Word of God. And, when God’s word is preached, it should bring both conviction and joy. Conviction, because we all need to be shown and reminded of areas where we are missing the mark and getting away from God. Preaching should also bring joy because God provided a means for us to know His will.

*“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. ... Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?”* (1 Corinthians 1:18, 20)

It doesn’t stop there. God wants us to then go out and live out the principles that He taught us in His Word. It’s an awesome system that God has established, but you have to be here and be attentive, and be willing to be obedient if you are going to be blessed by it. And, when we add to it the prayer and praise found in chapter nine, and the sincere commitment to God found in chapter ten, God may just bring a real revival to Jersey Shore Baptist Church.