

## The Heart of the Matter

Nehemiah 8:1-18



## Building Our Lives

- Last week – rebuilding the city's walls
- This week – a spiritual rebuilding of the people



## Jerusalem's Walls

- Restored in 52 days (6:15) in spite of external resistance (2:10,19)
- Unjust practices amongst the classes within Jerusalem (5:1-5) including excessive levies, slavery, extortion, oppression



## A Spiritual Formation Response

- Nehemiah & Ezra want to get to the heart of the matter
- Not just about walls but spiritual relationships



## The Word

Nehemiah 8:1-2



...all the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had given to Israel.



Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month.

Nehemiah 8:1-2

## Receptive

- The people are 'eager' to hear God's word (v1)
- The people take the initiative – they want to hear God's word
- A desire for the text – receive the light of the scriptures

## Attentive

- “the people were attentive to the book of the law” (v3b)
- Focused not distracted – alert, watchful
- Really wanting to hear/receive the word

## Worshipful

Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, 'Amen, Amen', lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. (v6)

- The people were respectful of the word
- A physical response of reverence, awe, sincerity
- Not a ho-hum, apathetic response
- A keenness to grow

## Understanding

- Not only receptivity but a desire to understand the word (4x – v2,3,7,8)
- To perceive the truth
- To stand-under God's word – have it be the rule of our lives

## Spiritual Understanding

- Not simply about information but spiritual formation
- Reading with understanding/interpretation

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

Colossians 3:16

## A Counter-Cultural View

- The mores of our culture are not supreme
- Our experience is not supreme
- Rather grow our roots into the soil of God's word
- Let God's word fund your life

## Celebration

Nehemiah 8:9b-10

For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, 'Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.'

## A Holy Day to be Celebrated

- A day set apart for God – actually new years day in the Jewish calendar
- Holy 3x – v9,10,11
- Means pure, lovely, just, awesome

## Joy

- ‘the joy of the Lord is your strength’ (v10)
- Holiness is associated with Joy not grief – place yourself in the broader care of residing in God’s hand



- Our invitation is to joy not sadness
- Not allowing our circumstances to drive our fundamental heartbeat



So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, ‘Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.’

Nehemiah 8:11



## Celebration Leads to Stillness

- Celebration leads to internal stillness – peace/quiet/tranquility – calm, smooth, a pond at rest
- A quiet heart rather than a distracted heart
- Celebration = resting in God’s hand



## Gratitude

Nehemiah 8:16-18



So the people went out and brought them, and made booths for themselves, each on the roofs of their houses, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim.



And there was very great rejoicing. And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the book of the law of God. They kept the festival for seven days; and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the ordinance.

Nehemiah 8:16, 17b-18

## Sukkot

- People living in tents - a focus on thanksgiving
- A celebration of God's providence & care in the wilderness
- A freedom from anxiety & worry, trusting in God's protection

## Tents

- In reality a graphic object lesson for the people
- In spite of walls being re-built our trust needs to be in God's hand

## Going Forward

### Spiritual Formation Rests on:

1. God's instructive word
  2. Celebration of God's goodness
  3. Gratitude for God's provision
- Not allowing life's joy-killers to interrupt our dependence and peace in God