

## Sermon Outline

### “The People Confess Their Sin”

Nehemiah series, part 6 – Nehemiah 8– Joshua Harris – March 6, 2011

**Main Idea:** Spiritual reformation begins with humble submission to the Word of God.

#### Introduction

1. Nehemiah 6:15-16 states that the work on the wall was done. In less than two months (52 days), the gates were set and the massive mile-long wall around Jerusalem was rebuilt. The enemies of Israel stood in fear, seeing that the hand of the Lord enabled Israel to complete this massive project in such a short time. So why not end the story here? Isn't the job done?
2. The story doesn't end here because the most important part of God's rebuilding program is *still to come*. Nehemiah's vision and God's purpose were to rebuild his people *spiritually*. His purpose was to reestablish them as his holy people—set apart from the world, submitted to his law, recommitted to his covenant and living for his praise. And so, beginning in Chapter 7 and running through the rest of the book, Nehemiah wrote about the *spiritual restoration* of God's people.

#### When God revives his people ... they receive God's Word with reverence and joy

(vv. 1-12)

1. God revived his people, and they asked for the reading of his Word. And when they gathered to hear it read, they did so with *eagerness* and *anticipation* (v. 1).
2. As Ezra opened the Law, “all the people stood” (v. 5). In other words, the people gave due *respect, honor* and *reverence* to the Word of God.
3. When Ezra led in a prayer of worship and blessing, all the people lifted up their hands and their voices and answered, “Amen, Amen” (v. 6). Then they bowed themselves to the ground and worshipped. Spiritual reality leads to physical expressions in worship. What a beautiful picture of heartfelt *praise* and *adoration* towards God's Word: they stood; they lifted their hands; they bowed.
4. When God's people “understood the reading” (v. 8) as it was translated and explained by the Levites, they burst into tears. In other words, God's Word pierced their hearts with *conviction*. It was supposed to be day of celebration and rejoicing. But they wept when they realized how much they had disobeyed and dishonored God.
  - a. But Nehemiah and the other leaders redirected their focus. They knew that to honor God's purpose for the day and for the people's well being, they needed to lift their gaze and see the grace of God. There was a greater reality than their sin and mistakes!

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God was a Redeemer! God had gathered them and was restoring and reviving them. All this was cause for *joy* and *celebration*!

### **When God revives his people ... they are reformed by God's Word** (vv. 13-18)

1. To be reformed by God's Word means to change your life in response to what Scripture teaches. Very simply, it means taking the Bible seriously—believing and obeying what it says.
2. We see this kind of humble, joyful obedience in the people of Israel. In verse 13 on the second day, a smaller group of leaders gathered to study the Bible together. As they read, they realized that Leviticus 23 instructed them to celebrate something called the Feast of Booths that had been neglected for decades. After they read this, there was an immediate, joyful, almost childlike response, "We need to do this! The Word says, 'Live in tents for a week!' So let's do it!"
3. Shouldn't this be the spirit of Word-driven reformation in the church? Psalm 119:32 states, "I will run in the way of your commandments for you set my heart free!" When God's Spirit moves on the hearts of his people, they don't just walk, they run in his path. It's not drudgery and hardship to change and obey. They gladly reshape their lives to honor him.

### **Conclusion**

1. Nehemiah 8 is a significant story. It is the story of God coming to his people and giving them a heart to know and love his Word. It is the story of God's reviving grace toward a people who sinned and failed again and again. It is a story of God keeping his promises to restore, revive and do good to his people (see Jeremiah 32:37-40). It is our story, too.
2. But Nehemiah 8 isn't the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise. It is a signpost that points ahead to the person and work of Jesus Christ: the greatest expression of God's mercy and the greatest expression of God keeping his promises. In Jesus, God buys us back from spiritual exile through the death of his Son in our place. And for those who trust in Jesus, God never turns away from doing us good!
3. Let us be people of the Book. Let's ask God to give us hearts that receive his Word with joy. Let's ask him to revive us and reform us with his Word. And let's rejoice that God has kept his promises and made us his own through Jesus Christ.

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### **Fellowship Starters**

1. Take time to read Nehemiah 8 as a Care Group.
2. In Nehemiah 8:1-12, how did God's people receive the reading and instruction of God's Word? Do you receive it similarly when God's Word is read, preached or taught?
3. How would you describe your intake of God's Word (reading, memorizing, meditating, hearing) this past month? Where are you encouraged? Where do you desire to grow?
4. In Nehemiah 8:13-18, how did God's people respond to the commands of God's Word? Is your response similar?
5. Josh shared that "to be reformed by God's Word means to change your life in response to what Scripture teaches ... believing and obeying what it says." Where is it easy for you to obey Scripture? Where do you find it difficult to obey?
6. Psalm 119:32 states, "I will run in the way of your commandments for you set my heart free!" In what ways have you experienced the freedom and joy of obeying God's Word?
7. Take time to pray together: that the Lord would give our church a heart to receive his Word with joy and to revive and reform us with his Word.

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