

Solid Rock Christian Church Manassas, Virginia

Bible Study – July 14, 2022

Prepared & Presented by: Pastor James G. Austin, Jr., PhD., D.Min.

Title: “Ten Steps to Spiritual Renewal” – Part I

Scripture reference: Nehemiah 8:1-12

I. Introduction/Background/Context

A. What if you were given the task of rebuilding a stone wall around a city that lay in ruins, and you discovered that the mortar holding the stones together had been improperly mixed?

B. The wall would crumble, and all of the time, energy, and money invested in building the wall would have been in vain.

C. In a similar way, when Nehemiah returned from Persia to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls around the demolished city, he discovered a faulty part of the resources: the faith of the Jewish remnant.

D. The wall was securely built-in record time, and the people were physically safe for the first time in decades. But their faith wasn't strong enough to take them into the future.

Comment: No physical wall is strong enough to protect a people whose faith in God is weak.

E. As a result, Nehemiah, along with Ezra, accepted the challenge of renewing the faith of the Jews in Jerusalem.

F. By walking the Jewish people through **Ten Steps to Spiritual Renewal**, they were transformed from a faithless remnant, into a faithful, restored nation. In this lesson, we shall cover Step One and in follow-on lessons, we will cover Steps Two through Ten.

II. Introduction/Background/Context (Continued)

A. More than 1000 miles from where you currently live, is the city of your forefathers - Jerusalem. You have heard the stories about the former glory of the city.

B. You were born in a foreign land where your people have been held captive for seventy years. You learn that the ancient city now lay in ruins.

C. The walls are broken down, the gates are burned, and now it is the home to only the poor and displaced people who have made a living doing the best they could among the ruins.

D. You have in your mind the image of the city's former beauty and you want to go to the city to rebuild the walls. But how? You are the captive servant of the most powerful earthly king in the world, who owns you. What hope do you have?

E. Well, you take your burden to the God of your fathers, and you ask Him to make a way. You pray and you wait patiently. Four months after hearing the news about the city, one day when the news about the city was weighing heavily on your heart, the king asked you why you were looking so sad.

F. After you explain to the king that the city of your fathers is in ruins, the God of heaven and earth, and His favor becomes quite clear in your life. The king grants you a leave of absence to return and rebuild the walls around the city.

G. The king also gives you letters of passage and the resources you need to rebuild the walls. By God's grace, the walls are miraculously completed in fifty-two days.

H. But then, you realize that the walls are not the only source of

protection that needs rebuilding. The spiritual defenses of the people of the city are as weak as the walls.

I. The walls of faith and obedience to God must be rebuilt in the hearts of the people. This was the challenge faced by the man of God, the prophet Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king of Persia. He was responsible for first tasting any drink offered to the king.

J. Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to convince a disheartened, faithless remnant of Jewish refugees, that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob loved them. They needed to renew their faith and walk in agreement with God.

K. By following Nehemiah's Ten Steps to Spiritual Renewal, any follower of Jesus Christ can have their faith restored.

Objective and Goal

- Through our study of this lesson, we will learn why obedience to the Word of God is the foundation for spiritual renewal.
- **Comment:** Like rebuilding a wall, stones of faith are laid one at a time.

III. Step 1 - Getting Back to The Book (Nehemiah 8:1-12)

Comments:

- 1) I believe that most Christians want to grow spiritually to become a more "mature" believer in Christ. But not all Christians are equally eager to do what is required to reach that goal.
- 2) An unrelenting commitment to the authority of Scripture, coupled with knowing and obeying the Holy Bible is the key!

A. How the People Prepared to Hear the Word of God

1. They asked for the Word of God

- a. By the end of Nehemiah Chapter 7, something is wrong in Jerusalem: the Word of God had not been the center of the spiritual community.
- b. The people were rebuilding their city, but they were not rebuilding their hearts. In the thirteen years that the people had been back in Jerusalem, there is no mention of the centrality of Scripture - Until we get to Nehemiah Chapter 8.

2. How The People Prepared to Hear the Word of God

- a. Beginning in Nehemiah 8:1, we are told that "all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; ..."
- b. All the people - "men and women (v2) came together in unity to hear the Word of God."
- c. In verse 4 we are given the names of the leaders who stood on Ezra's right and left sides on the platform created for the reading of the Word. Even some children gathered with their parents. They were included in the "all who could hear with understanding" (Verse 2).

B. Now notice these additional specific things that the people did:

1. They stayed for hours - (Vs 3)
2. They stood up from morning until midday (Vs 3)
3. They were attentive unto the book of the law (Vs 3)

For Your Consideration - Something to Think About

- There is something in every church service to get excited about - if we look for it. That is, if we show up with an attitude of expectation and attention, just like the people in Jerusalem that day.
- There was a time when people prepared their hearts on Saturday night for church on Sunday. Sadly, to a great extent, this pattern has been lost. [This may be one reason believers are disappointed with church!]

3. How The Word of God Was Presented (Vv 4-8) - From the Pulpit

- a. This was a "platform of wood" (v 4) that was built for Ezra and the other leaders, similar to a modern-day pulpit in terms of purpose but not necessarily in design.
- b. The platform or "pulpit" was made "for the purpose" (v4) of giving honor to the Word of God; a place to draw the focus of the gathered congregation. It represents the central place of the Word in the life of God's people.

4. In the Sight of All the People (V 5)

- a. There was only one copy of the Book of the Law. Ezra did not say, "Please take your Bibles and turn to page" The Word of God was positioned "in the sight of all the people" so that they might hear and see clearly.

5. The Word of God was Read Distinctly (V 8)

- a. Verse 8 is the most important verse in this passage because it provides a model for communicating the Word of God: "So they read in the book in the law of

God distinctly ((from the Hebrew into Aramaic, the only language some of the people may have understood)), and gave sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

- b. Ezra would read a portion of the Word, then give an explanation to the people of what Moses had written.

Comment: Giving "the sense" of a passage involves three things":

- 1) Seeing what the text says (**Observation**)
- 2) Seeing what it meant in its original context (**Interpretation**), and
- 3) Understanding what it means to today's audience (**Application**).

- c. Ezra's goal was to present the Word of God so that it would bring a change into the lives of the people. He wanted the returned remnant from Babylon to be different from the generation that had been exiled as a result of ignoring God's Word.

Point: Teaching and preaching God's Word must result in a change in the lives of the people. Teaching and preaching is not just talking; it is communicating so that lives are changed!

6. The Three Things That Happened As a Result

a. They Worshipped

1. When the Word of God is proclaimed faithfully and accurately, action is the result.
2. Even before Ezra began to read, as a result of him blessing the Lord, the people responded, "Amen, Amen"! While lifting up their hands and they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground (v 6).

Comment: This is the passage used by the late Andre Crouch when we composed and sang "**Let the Church Say Amen.**" Marvin Winans would later sing this song and it became even more popular.

3. When Ezra read about the Feast of Tabernacles, the people realized that they had been negligent in keeping that feast - so they immediately set about to correct their omission.

b. They Wept

1. When the people heard the Word of God, they wept (v 9)! They fell under conviction due to their failure to live according to its precepts (i.e., principles).

Comment: If we truly hear and understand the Word of God, how can we not be convicted by it?

2. The Israelites felt remorse, shame, and guilt over the years they had spent in captivity as a result of their fathers and forefathers failing to obey God's Word.
3. The people had been without the Word for so long that they began to weep when they heard it; it was tears of joy mixed with tears of shame.

c. They Went

1. Now we see a series of action words. Nehemiah told the people to go, eat, drink, and send food to others (v 10).
2. Instead of standing there weeping in their guilt and humiliation, they were commanded to go and celebrate the goodness of the Lord.

Question: Will you remain disobedient to the Word of God so that you remain under its judgment, or will you rise up in the forgiving freedom God offers and live out its instructions?

Point: There can be no spiritual renewal in anyone's life without a commitment to obeying the Word of God.

Comment: If we want God's blessings, we have to live with the attitude expressed in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself: "**And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?**"

(Luke 6:46)

IV. Summary

- A. The first step toward spiritual maturity for any follower of Jesus Christ is to get back to the Book (The Holy Bible).
- B. It is in the Book that we will discover the will of God - those fundamentals that must characterize the life of every Christian.
- C. Without knowing, and obeying the Lord, there can be no further progress toward maturity.

It is once again interactive time. Please complete the passages below by filling in the blank spaces. As always, each passage was taken from the King James Version (KJV) of the Holy Bible.

"For as the _____ cometh down, and the _____ from heaven, and _____ not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and _____, that it may give _____ to the _____, and bread

to the _____: So shall my _____ be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not _____ unto me _____, but it shall _____ that which I please, and it shall _____ in the thing whereto I sent it."

[Isaiah 55:10-11]

"All _____ is given by _____ of God, and is _____ for doctrine, for _____, for correction, for instruction in _____."

[2 Timothy 3:16]

"And he said, Go, and _____ this people, _____ ye indeed, but _____ not; and see ye _____, but perceive not. Make the _____ of this people fat, and make their _____ heavy, and shut their _____; lest they see with their eyes, and _____ with their _____, and _____ with their heart, and _____, and be healed."

[Isaiah 6:9-10]

"When any one _____ the word of the kingdom, and _____ it not, then cometh the _____ one, and _____ away that which was sown in his _____. This is he which _____ seed by the way side. But he that _____ the seed into _____ places, the same is he that _____ the word, and anon with joy _____ it. Yet hath he not _____ in himself, but dureth for a _____: for when _____ or persecution ariseth because of the _____, by and by he is _____. He also that received _____ among the thorns is he that _____ the word; and the

_____ of this world, and the _____ of riches, choke the word, and he becometh _____. But he that _____ seed into the good _____ is he that heareth the word, and _____ it, which also _____ fruit, and bringeth forth, some an _____, some _____, some _____."

[Matthew 13:19-23]

"For the _____ of God is _____, and _____, and shaper than any _____ sword, piercing even to the _____ asunder of soul and _____, and of the joints and _____, and is a _____ of the thoughts and _____ of the heart."

[Hebrews 4:12]

Thank you for participating in another Bible Study session and I pray that you have been blessed.

Jude 3

Pastor Austin