



GO! Worship

Session 3 – Worship That Stirs the Heart
Nehemiah 8:1-18

Key Verse: *And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Nehemiah 8:9 (New Revised Standard Version, NRSV).*

Introduction

One of the stops on my recent trip to New England and Niagara Falls included Boston’s Old North Church, made famous by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*. You may recall that in April 1775 the American Revolutionaries were anticipating an assault by the British military. The appropriate number of lanterns would be hung in the belfry, “one if by land and two if by sea....” The stately church looked every bit its age, built in 1723, befitting its listing on the US National Register of Historic Places. There was even a plaque on the wall commemorating Charles Wesley’s preaching at the Old North Church in 1736. The church, which holds Sunday worship services, is distinctive with its pew boxes and elevated pulpit. I was amazed that nearly 500,000 people visit the site each year. As a fellow traveler snapped a photograph of me at the podium, I couldn’t help but look out at the tourists, many like me who were in a sacred space for a lesson on history and maybe to get a sense of the holy. Leaving the church that Sunday afternoon, watching scores of people going in and out of the sanctuary I wondered, “What would it take for this church to be known more for the presence of God today than for its role in American history?” Perhaps that is the question for so many of our churches today: “What will it take for my church, the church in my community to be known for the presence of God today?”

The story of Nehemiah invites us to consider that a place rich in history can also be the place of great revival and renewal. Nehemiah had been the cupbearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes before securing permission to rebuild the wall at Jerusalem. The people of Jerusalem had done the arduous work of rebuilding the city’s wall in just fifty-two days. They had done so out of love of God and as a means of preserving their identity as God’s covenant people. But there was something lacking. They needed to have God in their lives in a way that was meaningful for them. The people wanted to hear from God.

READ Nehemiah 8:1-3

- What do we notice about this assembly? (It isn’t in the temple but in a public setting where women and children are able to participate.)
- What are the people willing to do in order to hear the word of God? (They are attentive and respectful.)

READ Nehemiah 8:4-8

Ezra is a leader. Ezra 7:10 records, “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach he statutes and ordinances in Israel,” (NRSV). However, he wasn’t able to do the work alone. God gave him more than two dozen other men of learning and understanding to help in his work that day. We may rush through their names, which seem so foreign, but each name represents someone of value to God, someone who was working to help God’s people. For example, **Pedaiah** means “*Yahweh is wonderful*”; **Michael**, “*Who is what God is?*” and **Azariah**, “*Yahweh has helped.*” Each person who stood beside Ezra took it upon themselves to know the word and its power. Paul in his letter to Timothy would say, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of God,” (2 Timothy 2:15, NRSV).

- What steps do you take to be a good student, someone who can explain your faith to others?

READ Nehemiah 8:9-12

- Why did the hearing of the law produce tears and mourning? (Awareness of sin.) **READ** Hebrews 4:12-13.
- What consolation did they receive? (God’s mercy and grace.) **READ** Romans 5:1-11.
- What consolation do we receive from God’s word? (God’s desire to be with us through our relationship with Jesus, the Son of God.)

READ Nehemiah 8:13-18

- How would you describe the actions of the people? (In hearing the law, they wanted to be obedient and as God’s timing is perfect they were entering into the season of the Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23:3-43). They celebrated the feast with great passion and joy.)
- What spiritual lessons do we take from this lesson? (There is a role for individuals to study and to assist others in learning the truths of Scripture. When the word of God is presented it will bring about a response and in those who feel the Spirit’s convincing and convicting power people will repent of sin and seek to honor God.)
- What else might you add?

PRAYER: Most Holy God, we thank you for your written word and Jesus the Living Word. Excite our spirits as we hear your word. Bring revelation of truth, open our eyes to our sinfulness, and let us bathe in the cleansing blood of Christ. We are confident that your presence is what we need for revival in our lives and for your work. Tabernacle with us, gracious Savior. Amen.