

for the reading of the Word of God. Its important that this took place before the Water Gate because the Word of God is often referred to as "water" or the "water of life".

b. I want you secondly to see that they were united (as one man) in their hunger for the Word of God. Let me tell you something – things happen when we get in One mind. (Acts. 2:1)

c. Even though most of these people had never heard the Law read (remember most of these people were born in captivity – they had only heard about the Word of God – they had never heard it for themselves.

2. Chpt. 8:2-3 - "**Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all the could understand**" - this was a family affair – there was no sending the kids off for kids church, and youth meetings where they could be entertained – they ALL were there to hear the Word.

a. **and the ears of the people were attentive unto the book of the Law.** Their ears were turned toward the Word. There was no – "Oh, Lord, I hope this is a short sermon, we've really got to get to the slopes."

3. Chpt. 8:4 - "And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose". **This pulpit was made for the proclamation of God's Word** – it was not for entertainment, or psychotherapy, or sociological advancement....it wasn't a dispensary of the philosophies of this world or the opinions of man. This PULPIT was constructed for the proclamation of the Word of God and for no other reason.

a. Standing beside Ezra were 13 men (6 on his right hand and 7 on his left hand). We understand fro the context of this chapter that Ezra had put together a team that would move through the congregation to make sure the people understood what was being said.

5. Chpt. 8:5 – and when Ezra Opened the Book of the law in the sight of all the people – *they all stood up.* **There was a REVERENCE for the Word of God here.**

6. Chpt. 8:6 – And Ezra Blessed the Lord, the great God and all the people answered Amen, with lifting up their hands and they bowed their faces and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. - **There was a reverence for the Word of God, because there was a reverence for the God of the Word.**

7. Chpt. 8:7-8 – these men, now begin to move through the congregation and cause the people to understand the law. (we know this, because the congregation stood in their places, so that the men must have gone to them.) There was clear teaching of the Word of God because it was "read distinctly," and "gave the sense, (or meaning)" - and caused them to understand for themselves the meaning of the Word.

It was important that the word was taught clearly, given with a distinct and not unclear sound.

8. Chpt. 8:9-10 – **There was a spirit of repentance in this crowd** because we see that the people began to "weep" when they heard the words of the Law. Now, I want you to see this – I said earlier, "**Sin ALWAYS leads to captivity, but repentance ALWAYS leads to deliverance.**" As the people begin to weep at the reading of God's Word, their hearts were broken as they realized how their fathers had turned away from the law and brought them into captivity. As the moment their hearts are saddened by the enormity of the sin – JOY CAME!

They were standing in the middle of a RESTORED CITY, surrounded by RESTORED walls and gates, in the shadow of a RESTORED HOUSE OF GOD – They stood there a RESTORED PEOPLE, and the Levites cried out, "You do not have to weep anymore, this is a holy, a sanctified, a special day – because your God has restored all that was lost – rejoice and be glad – for the JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH.

We are almost, but not quite done for today because I want you to see something to prepare us as we continue to move into that place of living in birthright and blessing.

Chpt. 8:13-14 – Read this passage)

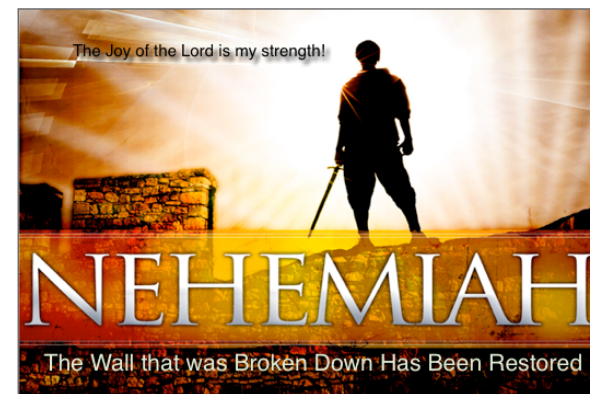
The reason this is so important is this. We see on the first day that the law was read, the people wept because of the sin which had led them into captivity. As they read the law, they saw their sin and their hearts were heavy with the burden of that sin. When their hearts were heavy with repentance- Joy came! But the work was not yet done for now (as we pick it up in verse 13 thru 18) they had to put legs on their repentance.....they realized as the law was clearly taught that they were close to the onset of the Feast of Booths, which had been commanded by God through Moses in the wilderness – and had not been kept since the Days of Joshua.

What had happened was they had slowly begun to turn from the commandments of God toward the customs of the people around them, forgetting the things of God as they lusted after the things of the world – slowly slipping away from God, from the Blessing of God and from the things that were a part of their birthright – and this had led them to captivity.

They also understood that that simply weeping was not enough, they had to once again turn to the principles of the Law, and again do the things that God had commanded them to do as well as to stop doing the things there were doing that God had forbidden. Jesus said to the Church at Ephesus in Revelation chpt. 2 – remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee suddenly and remove thy candlestick out of its place unless thou repent. Here Jesus clearly ties repentance. Repent and then RETURN to the place from whence you are fallen.

AGAPE

PULPIT SERIES



Part I

Restoring the Walls that Are Broken

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Sin ALWAYS leads to bondage
Repentance from sin ALWAYS sets you free.

If you choose to turn from the commandments of God and follow after a life style or choice that is in rebellion to His Word – you will at some point find yourself in captivity. The Word of God says that we should not be drunk with wine (or strong drink). A refusal to heed this commandment will eventually lead to bondage. The same is true with cocaine or heroin, or any number of drugs – they lead to a captivity, a bondage. There are men (and I suspect a few women) who are in bondage to images they can see on their computer screen. You can be in bondage to pornography. Oh, there are so many things that could be placed in this list today – but let it suffice to say – the purpose of your enemy in temptation is not to satisfy you, but to enslave you.

Someone has said, Sin will always take you farther than you intended to go, cost you more than you ever intended to pay, and keep you longer than you intended to stay.

On the other hand, the Bible says (1 John 1:9) that if we are faithful to confess our sins, then He (Jesus) will be faithful to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all of our iniquity – in fact, to set us free from the powerful chains that our sin has thrown about us. Jesus says, “I have come to set you free. And if the Son of Man sets you free, you shall be free indeed.”

I have been drawn to study in the book of Nehemiah lately. It seemed odd to me that the Lord would lay this on my heart because at first it seemed that it had nothing to do with what God has been speaking to us. Pastor Bryan and I have talked together a lot about what it is the Lord is doing in our midst and I have been truly blessed by the teaching that Pastor Bryan has been doing in this current series, “The Birthright of Kings.” However, I knew that God was speaking to my heart and so I just kept reading and meditating on this book and I believe God has a Word for us today – and especially for those of us who may be struggling with getting free, so that you can live in your birthright and blessings afforded by Jesus death on the Cross.

First, allow me to give you a little history lesson surrounding Nehemiah so that you can understand the context in which this book was written, for it is tied up in an amazing 100 years or so of Israel's history.

The story of Nehemiah comes at the end of a terrible chapter in Israel's history when the people of God are returning from an 80 year captivity that began with the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and extended through the grandeur and collapse of the Babylonian empire the rise of the Medes and the Persians under Artaxerxes the Great of Persia.

The captivity was prophesied by Jeremiah and Ezekiel (among others), so that when you read these books and they speak of coming captivity because of Israel's sin – you'll know that it is Nebuchadnezzar of whom they speak. Daniel, and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) were among the first and the finest carried away into Babylon. Ezekiel prophesied from Babylon, and Esther eventually ended up on the throne in Persia as Queen with her Persian husband Xerxes.

Xerxes son, Artaxerxes ascended the throne and it was he who commissioned the return of the Jews in a series of carefully calculated stages to their homeland. It was Artaxerxes who provided Nehemiah with the permission and resources to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. Contemporaries to Nehemiah are names many of you will recognize: Ezra (commissioned to oversee the restoration of the temple), Zerubbabel who was the construction overseer of the actual rebuilding of the temple. Zachariah, a young prophet was among those who returned to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

This time in history reflects the return of a people who had been carried away into captivity because of their sin, because of their rejection of God's law and turning to the false God's of the inhabitants of their land – Israel had been judged and chastened. It was a sad sight as they returned to Jerusalem – a broken people returning to a broken land, now inhabited by their sworn enemies.

This is a time of brokenness being restored: The rebuilding of the city of God, the rebuilding of the house of God, and the rebuilding of the people of God.

Now, for a few minutes I want to share some things that should be important to anyone who is here today broken and in captivity. **Sin always leads to bondage.** When we come to Christ, we are set free from the bondage of this world. We are free to live an abundant life through our relationship to God through Christ. However, if we choose to turn from the principles of the Word of God, to disobey the commandments of God – and pursue the lewd pleasures of this world – we will be led captive by them.

This is what had happened to Israel. They lived in the beautiful city of God (Jerusalem), surrounded by a great wall of safety, enjoying the blessings of God and instead of pursuing the life that God desired for them, they began to turn away and to hunger after the things of other peoples in other cities – they turned from God and began to worship false idols, and began to intermarry among the heathen peoples around them – they became polluted. Now, in the book of Nehemiah we find the city in ruins, the wall and gates broken down and a people utterly broken and scattered throughout the world.

What we see are a continuous chain of events, orchestrated by God to deal with his people. **Jeremiah and Ezekiel** prophesying the impending invasion and resulting captivity of the people, the destruction of the temple, the

breaking down of the walls, and ruin of their beautiful capital city.

Nebuchadnezzar does invade, he carries off the people to Babylon in captivity. In that number are **Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.** In a subsequent captivity, Esther is carried away to become a part of the King's harem. During this time, Daniel and others intercede with God on behalf of the people of God, making prophecies regarding the eventual return to their land, all the while working within the government, influencing the leaders seeking to gain favor with the King. **Esther comes by divine providence** to place of incredible influence in the kingdom, rising to a place where she can actually rescue the people of God from genocide at the hands of Naman – and because the King has a great love for Esther, comes to love her people as well.

Eventually, Nehemiah also comes to favor with the king and is permitted to return to Jerusalem, charged with the responsibility of restoring the wall and gates around the city. Ezra is permitted to return for the purpose of rebuilding the House of God – the temple.

All of this, orchestrated by a loving Heavenly Father who desires that His people would live rise to their birthright – living in covenant with Him as Kings and Priest unto God. That they would exist as a shining beacon before the gentiles of the grace and mercy of God. You see – God's discipline is always RESTORATIVE. God wants to restore the church to that place of blessing and power. God wants to **restore you to that place of birthright and kingship.**

If you are in a place of brokenness and captivity because of your sin – you need to hear this message – **SIN ALWAYS LEADS TO CAPTIVITY – BUT REPENTANCE ALWAYS LEADS TO DELIVERANCE!**

Turn with me now to Nehemiah 8 – the wall is rebuilt, the gates are rehung, the rehabilitation of the city is well underway – the construction of the house of God is well underway, but it is now that we get to the heart of the matter, the part that God is truly interested in – the rebuilding of the heart of his people. What I want to do this morning is show you the beginning of the restorative process – leading up to next weeks monthly communion service where we will pick up then where we leave off today.

I want to show you some powerful things where we will see the people of God truly released from their captivity and restored to the covenant relationship God wants for them. I just want to pick up some words and phrases as we move through this chapter for just a few minutes:

1. Chpt. 8:1 **“all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the Water Gate: and the called to Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had commanded to Israel.”**

a. I want you first to see what they wanted – they wanted to hear the Word of God. They weren't summoned – they called