

40.day2021

JUL 23

WEEK 4 | BUILT TO LAST

SOLEMN JOY

NEHEMIAH 8:9-12 | 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 as they heard the words of the Law.¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."¹¹ So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved."¹² And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

It's a day of rejoicing. But the church is crying. They've just heard the Word of God preached like never before. Not the letter that kills. But the Living Word that cuts like a scalpel, dissecting soul and spirit, discerning thoughts and motives, disclosing all that lurks within (HEB 4:12-13). The returned exiles have just had their hearts lacerated in this way for the first time. All are weeping under the weight of sin in the light of God's Law.

There is a time to weep. Tears are a language God understands (GORDON JENSEN). A crushed and contrite heart, he will not despise (PS 51:17). Biblical preaching is both pastoral and prophetic. It not only comforts and consoles. It also confronts and convicts (ACTS 2:37). If we never weep before the Word, something is wrong. Maybe our hearts are cold. Or the Word is handled in a superficial or one-sided way: *Be happy, healthy, wealthy, and wise, and go to heaven when you die.*

There is a time to rejoice. The Word well-preached engages the whole range of human emotions. From grief to gladness. From fear to fortitude. *Knowledge that does not engage the heart is barren and therefore harmful... it is without warmth and fosters no life* (TITO COLLIANDEY). God's

Word on Ezra's lips warmed the hearts of all who heard it, reducing them to tears. But the sermon ends with an invitation to joy: *Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.* The liturgical calendar called for rejoicing. Godly grief gives way to gladness—when we repent.

Nehemiah 8 sets a timeless and universal standard for wholistic biblical preaching. Every sermon should do three things: One, enlighten the mind (:7-9, 12). Two, engage the emotions (:8,12). And three, energise the will (:9-11). In other words, there is something to *know*, something to *feel*, and something to *do*. *Information plus inspiration plus imperative.*

Now for the imperative: *Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength* (:10-11). Solemn joy is a sacred duty. *Oh, Happy Day!*

WALL OF DUTY

Throughout Church history, the Holy Spirit has moved in astounding ways at specific times to bring great awakenings to his covenant community. Let us draw precious lessons from the Water Gate Revival in 444 BC. Ponder and pray:

■ Lesson One: It was a movement from the ground up. The cry for spiritual truth came from hungry, thirsty souls that had been in exile for many years. They asked for the Word. Imagine something like this happening in your church. Arising from the pews, a collective groan for more Word. Reading of the Word. Exposition of the Word. Teaching of the Word. Not motivational speeches. Not entertaining talk shows. But solid exegesis of the Word that exalts Christ and transforms lives. Dare to believe. God is ready. Ask. Mean it with all your heart. Expect God.

■ Lesson Two: It was set in motion from above. Ezra was a man of the Book. God had prepared him over many years for this moment. *For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel* (EZRA 7:10). Imagine this happening in every church and denomination. Who

are the Ezras that God is raising up among us? Plead with God for a new generation of godly men and women of the Word, well-honed by God, always ready, in season and out of season (2 TIM 4:2). Not waiting for a 'new season' but starting one from the ground up. Diligent students, gifted teachers, living epistles, known and read by all (2 COR 3:2).

■ Lesson Three: When the ground is soft, when hearts are hungry, when God's Ezras are ready, he moves in remarkable ways. *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account* (HEB 4:12-13 NIV). Imagine this divine encounter whenever and wherever the Word is read, preached, or taught in our city. Minds illuminated. Hearts exposed. Hearers visibly moved. Tears freely flowing. Believers repent under the weight of sin in the light of God's Word. The crushed in spirit and the contrite in heart receive cleansing from every stain (PS 51:17).

■ Lesson Four: We are rebels. But God is a redeemer. The better we understand from the Word who he is, what he requires, and what he has done to redeem us, the stronger our love for him. Imagine this spiritual breakthrough unfolding in our lives: We can't help but weep in shame over our sins. We can't help but shout for joy over his forgiveness. Amid the Covid gloom and doom, we shine as a people of everlasting joy. A community of faith whose joy is not contingent on circumstances. A community of hope whose joy is not drawn from sensual gratifications of fun, food, and fads. A community of love whose joy is not defined by human personality or temperament. Imagine our collective impact on family, neighbour, and friend when all can see that God himself is our joy! Believe. Pray.