

Nehemiah 8 Open the Book

CCH sermon 15/3/20

V5.

- Here's **Nehemiah**
 - Been enjoying his book for some weeks.
 - He's the builder in the Bible- **rebuilding** walls.
 - 444 BC. After the captivity in Babylon.
 - A surprising place to turn? Hugely relevant for us.
- But come to a turning point in the book. **7:73b**
 - Last week saw walls completed (6:15)- quite a feat!
 - important for distinctiveness of Jerusalem, just like our godliness shows us to be "shiningly different from the world around" to show how good God is!
- But book of N about 2 kinds of building. Look carefully at Neh in the picture!
 - Phase 1 rebuilding of the walls **Brick** (ch1-7)
 - Phase 2 about rebuilding of the people. **Heart**. (ch8-13)
 - What good would it be to have a separate people
 - Living in different space, but living just the same lives
 - How would that show how great God is?
- So this second half of book almost more important as we learn about **spiritual rebuilding** in the church, not just **practical building**.
- So where does it all begin?
 - How does God renew his people?
- **This is a key question for us as a church.**
 - Perhaps you've been a Christian for many years, but your Christian life has gone a bit stale:
 - Sin has crept in
 - The joy of forgiveness has faded a little bit
 - If you are honest you are just not as excited about Jesus as you once were.
 - Or maybe, you are not a Christian, and you know that you want a fresh start with God.
 - Where does it all begin?
- Answer v5 "Ezra opened the book".
- We are going to see today that:
THE REBUILDING OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD BEGINS WITH THE READING OF THE WORD OF GOD
- Simple but profoundly important lesson. X2.
- Dovetails v nicely w series on Bible.

- Let's work through the chapter together.
- First a time line.
- Last time **6:15**- wall rebuilt in 52 days. That's on 25th 6th month. 444BC.
 - (slightly different months from us equivalent to around early Sept).
- Only a few days later and Neh is starting phase 2
 - He doesn't sit still for long does he? This is what he's building up to.
 - 1st of the month. 5 days later.
 - V2-12 all day 1.
 - It's a gathering of the people.
 - V1-3 summary, and then v4onwards details.
- **V1-3**
- Do you see the people are **hungry**.
 - It's not Nehemiah forcing the people here into church! (yes he's had a tower built in readiness) but the people.
 - "We want the book, we want the book".
- **Ezra** becomes the key figure in this chapter.
 - Now he's been here all along (read his book just before this one)
 - But he's been in the shadows.
 - Nehemiah who is a builder, knows he doesn't have all the gifts, so like all good leaders he delegates to Ezra to take the lead here (though he has a role in v9).
- In their day it's **Law** of Moses- prob 1st 5 books of the Bible.
 - We are so privileged we have 66 books in our bible.
- What happens?
- **V2-3**
- **6 hours!!**
 - And the people listen attentively!
 - What a joy for any preacher!
 - Preachers can see who's listening!
- God is doing a remarkable work in the people of God.
- **He's making them hungry for the Word of God.**
 - They need to be reformed.
 - Lives need to change
- **▲** This has happened on many occasions in history.
 - Reformation.
 - Emma and I went to Wittenberg to LUtherhaus to see where Luther started reading the book. Kick started a revolution called the Reformation reformed the church and renewed the people.

- Evangelical Awakening.
 - Amazing the story of Wesley brothers, Whitefield.
 - Coalminers crying in the streets with white streaks marking their faces as the book is opened and they hear the good news that they can be forgiven.
- But can happen on a much smaller scale.
 - Had privilege of serving a small working-class church in London before college.
 - Quite little hunger for God's Word
 - Tough at times for the minister.
 - My job was youth work, while Cornhill training course.
 - We opened the book with the teens: Gen, Luke, 2W2L.
 - At first not much fruit.
- Went back year later.
 - 5 teenagers doing hour long bible study in Exodus.
 - Those teens are now in their 30s and still going on strong with the Lord, one of them a full time minister.
- OPEN THE BOOK!
 - That's the message of this chapter.
 - Pray that God will work in power.
 - Isn't this what we need to do?!
 - This is my life goal for next 10 years.
 - **Open the book in Huntingdon**
 - Let the Spirit of God speak! Open the Book!
 - On the radio, in the church, in the café, knocking on doors. Get the Bible (even if it's one verse on a business card) in people's hands.
- Open the book.
 - Are you reading it for yourself? OPEN THE BOOK.
 - With your family? OPEN THE BOOK.
 - Could you give a gospel to a friend? OPEN THE BOOK.
- How do you think we are going to see Huntingdon transformed?
 - Not everyone a reader.
 - That's OK. Just tell the stories !
 - Introduce people to Jesus.
 - OPEN THE BOOK!

Well if fire alarm, sermon over! But as we have a few more minutes let's look at a few more details. Because what happens on this first day of the new month in v1-3 is expanded in v4-12. Timetable.

1) REVERENT WORSHIP

V5- especially v6

- A hunger for God's word goes hand in hand with a corporate
- Only 1 scroll! We have one in our hands. Newcomer commented last week. Great to see the Bibles out, not just on the screen.
- But look at the attitude of Ezra and
- Wow- such reverence.
- It's not just a book.
- It's the living God speaking.
- Not worshiping the book. Worshipping their God.
 - Note the body language. Stand. Raise hands. Bow down. Faces ground.
- When we hear his voice, God is present with us! Wow. Awesome.

2) CLEAR EXPLANATION

V7,8

- Not entirely clear here quite who is doing what.
- 13 people on the stage with Ezra. Perhaps they helped read- 6 hours in a time without the PA desk, voices would have got tired!
- Trying to work out on my CDs of Bible how far get.
- Perhaps read selections from first 5 books, perhaps worked through whole books at a time.
- But 13 others involved on top of this: Levites v7.
 - And they seem to be in amongst the people doing a more localised. Reading would have been in Biblical Hebrew from several hundred years earlier.
 - The language of the people had moved onto Aramaic, so perhaps they translated, expounded, brought into
- My job is to help make the Word of God clear to you.
 - And the life group leaders and the GSMA/TROGS.
 - Make it clear.
- Word difficult at times. But it's not for specialists. It's for all.
- I love concept of BBC. Talk about it. It's not my book! Get it open one to one. Share a discovery you made with someone else!
- OPEN THE BOOK- get it out!

Then something strange happens...

People begin to weep v9

3) HEART CONVICTION

- God at work in the human heart.
- Seen his standards in the law.
- How far fall.
- How sinful.
- How selfish.
- But a surprising thing. V10.
- Not confession time. That will come in next week's passage.
- But God's blessing not dependent on our feeling awful.
- Go and enjoy yourself... So....

4) OVERFLOWING JOY (v12)

- Keynote throughout the chapter
 - V10 enjoy, joy
 - V12 Joy is your strength
 - V17 joy very great
- Bible study shouldn't be a miserable thing.
- Knowing God is humbling, sobering, starts with realisation of sin.
- But very soon you learn that
 - You are forgiven
 - You are included
- Jesus died and rose!
- Rejoice in the Lord always.
- Not a plastic smile.
- Knowing God.
 - What a witness in Coronavirus.
 - We know where we are going.
 - We have a shepherd who walks with us.
 - Fascinating listening to Glen Scrivener's Podcast on Pestilence, Plagues and
 - How in church history Christians are so different in times of pandemic.
 - In

5) DETAILED OBEDIENCE (v13-18)

- We now move on a day. [Timeline](#).
- People exhausted, so it's right only the family heads.
- Lovely scene.
- Figure out a particular thing.

- Month of the year for Feast of Tabernacles.
- Time for feasting celebration.
- They come together for a life group leader meeting or dad's to dig into the Scriptures.
- And Dads you have a special responsibility. Not because women can't read word of God. All of us. Spiritually responsible before God.
- And what a great
- Feast of Tabernacles
 - LEV- leafy branches to remind of past rescue
 - NUM- sacrifices associated (done in Ezras day too)
 - DEUT- emphasis on Joy
- Whole family go together on a camping trip to get sticks and make a tent on the roof of the house. To remember God's provision in the harvest, and God's rescue in the past.
- So they did it. And the
- Finally (v18) in days 15-22 of the month (see [timeline](#)), as directed, they put the party into practice.
- The Bible is not just theory. Let's get together and figure out what it means for us to do! And what fun we will have figuring out
 - How to celebrate Easter.
 - How to share the good news during a time of lockdown.
 -

So as we conclude, that's the message for today: OPEN THE BOOK!

1. What a privilege to be part of such a hungry church. Let's keep it that way, and keep digging into the Bible. Let's not crowd out the Word of God with all sorts of other worthy things. Let's make sure it fuels our worship (in church and outside) and our obedience (in church and outside). So that at this time of uncertainty and fear we are a church marked by joy!
2. And if you are new today. Perhaps the news has made you all the more aware of your frailty and mortality. Maybe you are Can I give you a prescription? Open the book. That's where it all begins. Why not start with Mark's gospel. There are some sermons on our website to help you understand it. Or contact us. Even if we can't meet in person, we can talk about it on the phone!

Let's pray!