

Session 6

August 26, 2018

PRAISE

Nehemiah 8:9-12; 12:27-31

I enjoy a good road trip. I like to travel light, plug in my classic 80s playlist (oops...did I just say that?) toss some snacks in the console, and drive. Obviously, the quickest way to anywhere is the interstate, but in Florida, that means long, straight, flat and...boring. It's a journey of mile markers and rest areas.

Celebrations are like mile markers along life's journey. We celebrate birthdays and anniversaries and even assign numbers to mark our progress. But if celebrations are like mile markers, holidays are more like rest areas; they remind us to stop long enough to get out, stretch our legs, reflect on our journey so far, and refresh ourselves in preparation for the next stretch of highway.

With the rebuilt temple now surrounded by a rebuilt wall, and the city of Jerusalem repopulated by God's people, it was time for a holiday. And this holiday had all the important ingredients to make it memorable.

This holiday was marked by emotion (8:9-11). With the major task of rebuilding done, and the re-emphasis on God's word, the people had everything they needed for a safe, happy, and prosperous life. So why all the sorrow? Verse 9 tells us "all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law." The terms used—mourn, weep, grieve—all point to the sense of guilt and conviction they felt at hearing the truth of God's word. This indicates three things: first, it shows that the people were woefully neglected in the ongoing teaching of God's word. Second, it demonstrates the convicting power of God's word (see Heb. 4:12). Third, it shows the willingness of God's people to repent and embrace His instruction. Thankfully, joy follows sorrow, and the religious leaders moved the people out of their darkness and into the light by reminding them of the joy found in their Lord (v. 10). The holiday was then marked by all the frivolity befitting their fresh start.

This holiday was marked by reflection (8:12). How could the same word of God that brought such intense conviction in verse 9 also produce the jubilation in verse 12? It is because of the nature of God reflected in the word of God. God's law was never meant to punish, but to correct. Conviction of sin should lead to godly sorrow over that sin; then confession, repentance, and restoration (see 2 Cor. 7:10). This all comes by honest reflection and honest assessment. It should be noted as well that the priests—who no doubt shared the blame for the people's backsliding—are now back where they belong: front and center, helping the people move through the process of reconciliation to God.

This holiday was marked by consecration (12:27-31). The English word "holiday" is derived from the phrase "holy day." Here, Nehemiah illustrates that a clear understanding of God's goodness ultimately leads to celebration. The "holiday" atmosphere was the result of the "holy day" observance. Four key activities are highlighted in these final verses. First, there is *celebration* (v. 27) as the people moved through the process of repentance and embraced the fresh start God had given them. Second, there was *dedication*, as the city and her renewed

population were dedicated to God (v. 27). Third, there was *purification* (v. 30), as the religious leaders returned to the teachings of God's word concerning the Levites (priests) and the various ceremonies related to them. Finally, there was *appreciation* (vv. 27, 31), as the religious leaders helped the people not only embrace the fresh start God was granting to the city and His people, but also in demonstrating gratitude back to God for His faithfulness.