

Living in the Moment (Nehemiah 8:13-18)

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[0 : 00] Nehemiah 8, 13-18 On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Israel the teacher to give attention to the words of the law.

They found written in the law, which the Lord had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month, and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem.

Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees to make temporary shelters, as it is written.

So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves temporary shelters on their own roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God, and in the square by the water gate, and the one by the gate of Ephraim.

The whole company that had returned from exile built temporary shelters and lived in them. From the days of Joshua, son of Nun, until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this, and their joy was very great.

[1 : 12] Day after day, from the first day to the last, Israel read from the book of the law of God. They celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.

Thank you, Eden and Pastor Barry. We hear from the word of God. Thank you. Thank you. And also munching on their melon seeds, and enjoying loba go and ling go, which is my favorite. Now, that's our custom. But these people, these folks, spent nearly six hours listening to God's word. And they weren't just passive listeners.

The Levites were there breaking it down, helping everyone to understand properly. Now, the story gets even more interesting on day two, which is today's scripture.

So, as they dive deeper into God's word, they have this aha moment. And you know how it is, right? When you haven't read the Bible for a while, everything seems fine.

[2 : 32] But once you started reading, it's like a mirror. Suddenly, you notice things that need fixing. Maybe your understanding of faith isn't quite right.

Or your relationship with God needs work. But better late than never, right? So, what did they discover? They'd be missing out on the festival of tabernacles.

Now, think of it as God's prescribed camping festival. Sounds brilliant, right? The kids would have loved it, right? Now, here's the thing.

They didn't just rush into it. Following God's instructions in Leviticus 23, they waited until the 15th of the month to start. That gave them about two weeks to prepare, gathering branches, and getting everything sorted.

Verse 18 tells us they celebrated for eight days straight. Imagine us having eight days of public holidays. Eight days of living in temporary shelters, right?

[3 : 41] Remembering what God did for them. The festival wrapped up with a special assembly day, which is a time to reflect, to pray, and to count their blessings.

And traditionally, they would even pray for rain for the rest of the year on this final day. Even today, right in the heart of Israel, amidst of the ongoing war, the festival of tabernacles continues to be a vibrant celebration.

And just recently, I watched a YouTube fascinating video of a Taiwanese family living in Jerusalem. And I actually contacted her.

And, oh, can I share your video in our sermons? And she said, yes, go ahead. So, yeah, that's what I would like us to see right now. It is in Chinese, but you'll see English subtitle.

Here we go. Thanks so much. All right. Now, what about the details of the temple today? We have taken those out of the public corner of the temple. The place behind the temple with the temple yet. ■■■ ■■■uta was designed to complete the temple. He said to mankind through the temple. Because il■■■ is the temple tunnel of the temple.

[4 : 54] He said to him to blinking them for Him in the martial arts and the temple. It is to enter them from the entra■ in the country. In the in■gelers, in fantastic distance. Him compared to the country ■■■d Hills, It is not in a single■■■ apologizing ami method.■■■, Because God Die wasastiuk Paradina, the temple pernah who was here to help■armen.

So in a months of these seven days that enabled them, I would like to scream to see Day. they will square that on joy loana beautiful outside windows four halls of chestsQueinated red hot until it's quick the city is only six days so it's done still safe well well that's when the company is built for and still n Federr this and the kitchen and Mrs.

This is■■■ podemos It's not a little room But at the gym it will be a little room At the front of the car You can see it on the floor There is a room It's a little room It's because They don't have a room So they don't have to They don't have a room So it's just Who's going to be able to Who's going to be able to It's because it's time for the time It's time for the time Who's going to be able to see The house is in which place This house is very cute It's in the inside It's a picture It's from the Jerusalem Jerusalem So they sit in the inside It's a picture of the Jerusalem The view This 7 days The house is in the house It's also reminding me This is just a place It's just a place

We're in the house This is very interesting It's a bit of a It's a little bit of It's a metal and a And here is a This is a house It's a little bit of It's a little bit of Then he'll just He'll just take a few And he'll just take a few And he'll just take a few And he'll just take a few Like these families They have a huge table So you can just take a■■■ Hello It's fascinating isn't it Yeah so yeah Maybe you can consider that in your backyard In your roof Next year In fact I think they have just passed their festival The day before yesterday Yeah So last week when I was preaching This sermon in the Canton service They were actually having The Feast of Tabernacles Yeah they've just passed it So Okay So while Nehemiah 8 shows us The Israelites marking their new year With both tears and joy Now today we're going to focus on the celebration side of things And I want to share with you something powerful Right think of it as A key That can open two doors First Joy comes from living out God's word It's like having a master key that unlocks two special doors Number two Joy comes from remembering God's deliverance So it is one of the door to the past Helping us see God's incredible rescue story Not just for Israel But for every one of us And number three When we turn this key to the other way

[9 : 01] It opens the door to our future Giving us a glimpse of God's perfect kingdom That is still to come So Joy comes from living out God's word God's word isn't just a key to the truth It is a key to joy When we put it into practice So how do we live out God's word?

Very simple Hear it, understand it, and live it The Bible uses just six verses To describe the festival of tabernacles Yet it keeps God's word front and center In verse 13 We see something brilliant All the leaders, both political and religious Gathering around Ezra For Bible study They are hungry to understand God's word deeper Now when we read the Bible We can't just skim it like we are scrolling through our social media And surely speed reading has its place It gives us the big picture But if we stay on the surface We are going to miss the treasure hiding underneath Now let me ask you something Does anyone here like jewelry?

Jewelry? Check this out Ooh How many diamond lovers here? Ladies And I mean, if you are not into diamond You will be thinking, hey, it is just another stone Right?

What is so special about it? Well, a true expert doesn't just, you know, care about its weight Right? They examine its color Its clarity And the cuts If it is a ring, they will study the craftsmanship The metal choice And everything around that precious stone Some things need a closer look to truly appreciate So, for example, the diamond's color Right?

Is it true A pure colorless grade? Or does it have any tiny hints of yellow? You might need special tools to spot those details And it is the same with God's word It's not just a book of stories or roles It is alive and precious It's God's greatest gift to us Under the Holy Spirit's light It is like a stunning gem We can admire from every angle And the best part?

[11 : 49] We get to wear it How? By living it out Now look at verse 18 During the entire festival Ezra read God's law daily to the people And picture this They are basically having a Bible study while camping Right?

Reminds you church retreats Right? Sometimes we go to different places to have a change of scenery To refresh ourselves in front of God In front of God As they dived into scripture daily New insights kept bubbling No wonder they are filled with joy And here is something important As soon as they understood what God wanted They jumped into action Verse 15 tells us They spread the word everywhere In Jerusalem and beyond And people headed to the mountains To gather branches For building shelters For two weeks They got their hands dirty Building those temporary shelters Why?

Because they knew the festival would make God very happy too Above all God's word was their priority This theme runs through the entire chapter God's word is at the center of everything they do Second point Joy comes from remembering God's deliverance When we discover the key of God's word Doors begin to open The first door leads to joy It is a door to the past That helps us seeing God's deliverance So what did the Israelites find in the scripture That showed them how to reflect on their past?

They studied the books of Moses They discovered God's instruction about the festival of tabernacles So it says On the 15th day of the 7th month When you have gathered the produce of the land Celebrates the festival of the Lord for 7 days The first day is the day of Sabbath rest And the 8th day is also a day of Sabbath rest And so on and so forth The last sentence is the most important All native born Israelites are to live in such shelters So your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in temporary shelters When I brought them out of Egypt I am the Lord your God This wasn't just camping for fun It was about remembering how God transformed their ancestors From slaves to free people During 40 years in the wilderness God even supernaturally provided for their every need And why did they set up those shelters?

I mean where? It's everywhere It's everywhere Rooftops In the gardens Even in the temple courtyards Imagine us camping outside In the car park Imagine us camping maybe in Botany Square I mean Botany Downs Mall And Sylvia Park Near the center of the city And interestingly And interestingly For our church family Some of them got to celebrate A festival of camping as well So this is a picture I think Dennis gave me It's the Vanuatu team They were staying in tents When they did their medical mission Anyway You know what strikes me there?

[15 : 48] Verse 17 Mentions the whole community That had returned from exile Built these temporary shelters And why highlights this identity?

The whole company that had returned from exile They were the people experiencing their own exodus story Moving from being a second class citizens In a foreign land Back to their home It's about reconnecting with their roots Rebuilding who they are As a people Then we read something remarkable The Israelites had not celebrated like this Since the days of Joshua son of Nun And their joy was overwhelming It was very great Now Hang on Does that mean they have never celebrated This festival over a thousand year time?

Probably not Because we know from Ezra chapter 3 They celebrated it about a hundred years ago It was before rebuilding the temple But here is the difference In the book of Ezra It's all about the sacrifices Here in Nehemiah It's all about joy Pure overwhelming joy And this moment perfectly fulfills Isaiah's prophecy From two centuries earlier It says And those the Lord has rescued will return They will enter Zion with singing Everlasting joy Will crown their heads Gladness and joy will overtake them And sorrow and sin will flee away And that was their first festival of tabernacles Behind the completed city walls And everything is finally in place The holy city The holy city The holy temple And the holy people And no wonder it was the most joyous celebration ever So what does that mean for us today?

As Christians We probably don't celebrate the festival of tabernacles But we will get to that at the end of the sermon Okay?

[18 : 13] Now point number three Joy comes from hoping in God's kingdom So once we have the master key of God's word We can open the door to the future What does the future do?

It gives us a glimpse of God's perfect redemption Now this passage alone Might not seem to be pointing to the future at the first glance The Jewish people back then Couldn't even imagine celebrating the feast of tabernacles in Jerusalem again And yet They were finally because of the second exodus And this tradition would now carry on for generations and centuries And here is where it gets interesting Fast forward 500 years later And during one particular festival A controversial figure shows up in Jerusalem And think of it as like a gate crashing Of their spiritual camping trip And the reactions It was a bit mixed To say the least Some Jewish people

Especially the leaders Can't stand this guy And call him a deceiver They wanted him to be arrested But Nobody dared to touch him But others saw something very different about this person They were saying He's a good man And even some wondered When the Messiah comes Will he perform more miraculous signs than this man?

And during the festival This person did exactly What Ezra had done Teaching in the temple courts And then On the festival's biggest day He stands up and makes this bold announcement Let anyone Who is thirsty Come to me and drink Whoever believes in me As scripture has said Rivers of living water Will flow from within them Now You definitely know I'm talking about Jesus Now here is the amazing thing When we believe in Jesus We get this incredible life force inside us It is not our own doing It's all the Holy Spirit's power And think of it like An endless river A rapid Constantly flowing Never running dry It's pure Powerful Unstoppable 500 years after Ezra

And Nehemiah Restored the festival of Tabernacles The true savior Would reveal God's ultimate plan of salvation there And this plan Simply believe in Jesus God's perfect sacrifice Who cleanses us from sin When we trust him He pours his life-giving stream Into us Connecting our finite lives With the infinite God As you fast forward to the ending Or ending chapter of Nehemiah You might notice something Hmm, that doesn't sound right What kind of ending is this?

[21 : 50] The Israelites keep breaking promises The poor Nehemiah Was left sorting out the mess at the end But here is the thing The author of the book Seems to want us to see that This isn't really the end The imperfect ending Points to something perfect Coming in eternity And this perfect ending Began with Jesus And will culminate When God celebrates The ultimate festival Of Tabernacles With us So the Revelation tells us And I heard a loud voice From the throne saying Look, God's dwelling place Is now among the people And he will dwell with them They will be his people And God himself And God himself will be with them And be their God He will wipe every tear from their eyes There will be no more death Or mourning Or crying or pain For the old order of things

Has passed away That's something fascinating The word dwelling place It actually means Tabernacle The tents Just like God once camped With the Israelites In the wilderness Do you get the connection?

And fast forward to the New Testament We see two amazing tents Moments First, Jesus himself celebrated The Feast of Tabernacles 20, I mean 2,000 years ago And second One day God will also set up A campaign site for us So that we can live together forever No more tears No more death No more sorrow And now that's what I call The perfect ending To God's story Salvation story So we come to the conclusion now The Israelites celebrated The Feast of Tabernacles For eight days each year Why?

To remember two amazing rescues First, when God led their ancestors Out of Egypt And second, when he brought them home From exile And here is the exciting part for us The feast points to something even bigger And Jesus coming to earth as our savior That was That was The third rescue The third great rescue And when we peek into Revelation We see the tents and tabernacle Language again Showing us God's ultimate plan Is to live with us Surely Life Sometimes isn't great Life throws us curveballs And there is sufferings But that's not the end of the story As John's gospel tells us Those who drink Jesus' living water Will have life flowing through them forever Right into eternity

Where God makes his home with us And that's what the festival Of tabernacles celebrates God living with us And no wonder It is such a joyful celebration Henry Nguyen Says this beautifully He says We have to choose joy And keep choosing it everyday It is a joy based on the knowledge That we belong to God And have found God In God our refuge And our safety And that nothing Not even death Can take God away from us Now what does that mean for us Christians today?

[25 : 47] Also as PCBC people I think The festival teaches us that Worship should be a family affair Young and old Celebrating together And let's be honest In our church I'm mainly talking about Sunday morning service Not you guys We often have to separate our worship You know, children doing their own thing over there Adults here In the main hall And our kids would miss Seeing how adults worship God wholeheartedly And we adults Miss out on how they learn to worship Through their body movements Singing and drawing And that's why I'm thrilled To share with you that This November On the Sunday worship We're going to do something Very different Huckan and Ting Ting Will lead us in a special

Intergenerational Family worship And there Children will join us In our singing And Pastor William Will be sharing a story With us, I think It's all about worshiping together As one family And let's create A space where Our children truly belong As Psalm 148 says Young men and women Old men and children Let them praise the name Of the Lord So This has always been God's heart All ages worshiping as one And yes, of course There will be challenges But having these family services Maybe every few months I think that would be a brilliant start And I really thank God For English service here Because you guys are already doing it So wonderful If we think one step further It is very important for us

As a community To have combined bilingual services Like the one we have on Easter Sunday It is about worshiping as one big family Across ages and languages And second The festival of tabernacles And second The festival of tabernacles Teaches us something very special Sometimes we need a change of scenery To hear God's word with fresh ears That's exactly why we do church retreats Sometimes Yes, they can be fun And they should be But they are also about creating space Where we can pause Reflect And really soak In God's message And just like the festival Of tabernacles We celebrate We blend celebration With spiritual growth I think recently Our Saturday youth leaders They have had their own retreats You know, they rent a far away place And yeah, they study I think the book of Job together So that's brilliant Anyway, I think any group In our church can do the same And thirdly The festival reminds us that As God's people We can fully embrace joy In our celebrations And think about it People saved by Jesus It doesn't matter If you are a first Or second Or third generation Christian We are lost But now we are found by Him We used to live in darkness And now we enter Into His marvelous light So, with our church Love feast coming up in November How many people have already signed up?

Yeah? Sorry they are already sold out So, let's celebrate With our whole hearts Because our joy Actually delights God These celebrations Aren't just about looking back They are little previews Of the heavenly banquets to come When we gather and share meals together It can be packed with meaning And you know, learning to celebrate Is actually a spiritual discipline So, that's why Paul puts it Rejoice in the Lord always Now, I would like Actually, Sheua She invited all of us To share one thing That can bring you Instant joy I would like you to Go around Share another thing That would bring you instant joy When you think about it Okay?

[30 : 43] We'll do that In one minute I mean, yeah Take one minute to do that And then we'll close With a prayer together Okay? Go! Let's go! Okay, we'll finish with this prayer Together Wondrous God Father, Son, Spirit Your joy is our strength Nothing more Nothing less Nothing else Grant us grace to receive you And your joy Grant us grace to trust it Above all other powers and plans Grant us grace to bear it And share it as generously as you For the honor is yours The majesty is yours And your kingdom is at hand Amen Amen God bless you all