

Letters to the Church



MARCH '23

DEARLY BELOVED IN THE LORD,

If you think about it, according to societal norms we Christians do an increasingly rare thing every Sunday morning. Where else do you find people of a local community leaving their homes once a week to hear one person speak from an old book uninterrupted for thirty-five to forty-five minutes and then leave, only to return the next week to do it all over again, but the church?



In our rapidly changing culture, it seems the very act of leaving home is becoming rare enough, let alone in our time of short videos and sound bites - who sits still to listen to just one thing this long anymore? But to the Christian, there is no place we'd rather be and we gather with readiness because we are assembling to sit under the Word of God.

In the book of **Nehemiah**, we find one of the greatest Bible-teaching events in history. What we find is that the people did four honorable things: They **(1)** gathered expectantly, **(2)** listened attentively, **(3)** responded properly, and **(4)** departed joyfully.

#1 They gathered expectantly:

And all the people gathered as one man... And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel.

NEHEMIAH 8:1

All the people gathered as one person. We find from the chapter prior that the count was about fifty thousand individuals gathered that day. Yet, they came together with one heart, one mind, one purpose, and with one voice they said, "Ezra, bring out the book!"

#2 They listened attentively:

So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand... And he read... from early morning until midday... And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

NEHEMIAH 8:2-3

All ages came to hear and understand the Word of God. Just picture these families: fathers, mothers, children, teenagers, and grandparents, as one with ears to hear. Astoundingly, that day, God's people stood, rapt by the Word of God from morning to midday (about six hours). May we all have the fortitude and desire to listen to God's words for an eighth of that time!



#3 They responded properly:

...all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law.

Then he [Ezra] said to them, "...do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

NEHEMIAH 8:9-10

This is the type of response when ready hearts encounter the true Word - theirs was a genuine repentance and godly sorrow. But Ezra encouraged them, that it wasn't a day for weeping and mourning...

#4 They departed joyfully:

And all the people went their way... to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

NEHEMIAH 8:12

Why did they depart with great joy? They were ecstatic to have "understood the words" declared. I cannot stress enough the importance of preparation by prayer for this kind of glorious outcome. With great prayer and great expectations, we shouldn't be surprised by the results of great faith in our hearts. Effective Bible teaching requires two things: an expectant praying preacher, and an expectant praying congregation. Then, when you have that prayerful anticipation on both sides when the Book is brought out, there's a divine spiritual chemistry that takes place and everyone marvels at the glorious working of God. So that every heart is not just challenged, but changed by the working of God by His holy spirit within by the power of the Word just presented. Then, every heart is moved and everyone departs with joy because the truth was declared and understood.

So, the world thinks we do a strange thing every Sunday morning, but let's not waste the opportunity to bring out the Book, listen all together as one person, respond with the right heart, and depart with joy - ready to live it all week and return again next week to assemble again, and sit under the Word of God.

YOUR PASTOR & SERVANT,