

Victory of the Lamb – Forward No Matter What – Spiritual Renewal
October 10, 2021 – Pastor Bill Limmer

Rhetorical question because I think it is easy but I don't want to put anyone on the spot. What is the 7th month of our year? July. On July 20 of this year, about 65K people gathered in the Deer district to watch Game 6 of the NBA championship in the hope of the Bucks winning their first NBA Championship in 50 years. Not many if any could of the fans there or fans watching on TV could remember the first time the Bucks won the NBA Championship 50 years ago in 1971.

Today we are continuing our series **Forward No Matter What** I want to catch us all up so that we can be on the same page. There was a God sized vision that Nehemiah brought – to repair the wall as a way for the glory of God to be revealed and for the people to live under the blessing of the glory of God. They each had a role to play in the building of the wall. They faced opposition, intimidation, and persecution from the outside, as well as maltreatment from the inside. But now the wall, after more the 70 years is up and we see the point is not some much the building up of the wall but the building up of the people. So today as we turn into Nehemiah 8, we do so seeking the answer to: **What are the steps of spiritual renewal?** And I pray that this message is equally good for those who are believers as well as those who are unbelievers. So I am praying for you and me that the Holy Spirit will lead us all into spiritual renewal.

Nehemiah 7:73ff **When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel.** The square at the Water Gate is the busiest place in town. It was the Deer District of the day. They gathered with great anticipation for a super special event – the reading of God's Word. You see they did have the YouVersion Bible app, they didn't have the Bible somewhere in the house. They had been in exile for 70 years living in a culture that frowned upon the idea of one true God. They live in a time of oral tradition. The stories were passed down by mouth from one generation to another and now on this day, the scrolls of the Word of God were going to be read to them and the skeptics of the day, could see that what was passed down by word of mouth was also written down. If you lean in close enough you can almost hear the people in the Water Gate District of Jerusalem with the newly constructed wall surrounding them chanting not "Bucks in 6, Bucks in 6" but "Bring out the Book! Bring out the Book! It was something that had not been done in over 70 years. They were hungry for God's Word. Sometimes the Bible can seem like such an ancient book. And you know what? It was ancient book already at the time of Nehemiah. It was already 1K years old. But the Bible **teaches timeless truths to today's people** no matter what day it is.

The Psalmist says, 42:1 **As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.** And Jesus says, Matthew 5:6 **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**

What are the steps of spiritual renewal? 1. Bring out the Book.

The account continues: Nehemiah 8: ³ **He (Ezra the priest) read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.** As Ezra was reading the book of books, the people were mesmerized. They lost track of time. They listened intently. This wasn't a to do list item for them. This is what they wanted to do. It wasn't just one word after another. They pictured in their minds the story arc of what they were hearing.

Asking for a friend: For those of you who are reading the Bible or who have read the Bible, have you ever just kind of taken it one word after another and move along instead of putting yourself into the setting? What a difference it makes when I engage in the story not just in the word. What a difference it makes when I am cognizant of God's presence as I read His Word. And that he has these words written for me. Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of God.

What are the steps of spiritual renewal? 1. Bring out the Book. 2.– Be present in the story of the Word.

The account continues. Nehemiah 8: ⁵ **Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up.** ⁶ **Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen! Amen!'** Then they bowed down and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ⁷ **The Levites – . . . – instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there.** ⁸ **They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear^[a] and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read. Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.**

And so as the people listened the story arc of God's plan of salvation was shared with them. It began with God in his glory and in his perfection speaking things into existence. You know that is what the word universe means – one word. God said and there was. And God looked over everything he had made and it was very good. And then they heard the account of Adam and Eve and then they heard of sin the first time and the thing causing all suffering, pain, and death, the thing that is very opposite of God. And the first promise of the Savior. They heard about Abraham and all of his sin and in spite of his sin how God was going to bless all nations through a single descendant of Abraham. They learned about how God delivered the children of Israel from slavery and Egypt with nothing short of one miracle after another but how sin led the people to complain about their circumstances and push God to the perimeter of their life until they pushed him off the cliff. And the people made the connection that they too sinned against God even though he was always loving and doing good to them. And they were convicted of their sin. And they wept.

The first time I read the Bible I was in high school. I was blown away at how sinful I was, how much I needed a Savior. Hebrews 4:12 **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.** Even today, I am blown away at my sin. And as I think about my sin, I find another layer, and then I find another layer. I like the people in Nehemiah see the incongruity of my life and God's will. What I am finding out, and what I bet you will too, is at the heart of every sin whether it is selfishness, pride, gossip, lust, hatred is really the sin of idolatry, of deGod-ing God. Do you realize that if we kept the first commandment of you shall no other gods, we wouldn't break the others. And when we break the others, understand we have already broken the first. Breaking the first Commandment is placing something or someone before God, whether that is ourselves, our desires, daydreams, fantasies. What a great God we have who loves us enough to point out our sins because it is our sins that want to destroy us. **What are the steps of spiritual renewal? 1. Bring out the Book. 2.– Be present in the story of the Word. 3. Be convicted of my sin.**

To the people who are now weeping because of their sin, Nehemiah says, **"Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength"** (Nehemiah 8:10) A little context here, It was

the first day of the 7th month in the Hebrew calendar. This was the day on which they were to celebrate Rosh Hashanah. It was to be a time of joy but how could they celebrate when they had just heard about their sins and what they deserved for them? I mean would you feel like celebrating if you just found out that you had a huge debt that you had no idea about but now you have to pay or you will go to prison? It would be hard to have a merry Christmas with that kind of news hanging over your head. But wouldn't you celebrate if someone paid that debt for you? That's exactly the point Nehemiah was making when he said: "Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10b).. It gave God joy to send his only Son to pay for our sins that we might live with him. The debt that stood between God and us has been removed, paid for in full by Jesus' perfect life and innocent death on the cross and so we have eternal blessings too!

Have you come here today burdened by the guilt of your sins? Do you admit that you're not the great person others say you are? Well, empty your pockets. Don't take any sin home with you. Leave them here at the foot of the cross. Jesus has already paid for them. See the joy of the Lord is His work of salvation for you which is already completed. **What are the steps of spiritual renewal? 1. Bring out the Book. 2.– Be present in the story of the Word. 3. Be convicted of my sin. 4. Celebrate Jesus removing all sin.**

And one last thing. Nehemiah 8:14 **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 month¹⁵ 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.^[b]**

¹⁶ **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.** ¹⁷ **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.**

The people didn't just time to hear the Word of God. They didn't just place themselves into the story. They were not just convicted about what they heard. They didn't just celebrate what they heard. They did what they heard. 1 John 5: **this is love for God: to keep his commands.**

Jesus said, in Luke 11:28 **Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.** Jesus brother James says it this way, **James 2: Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.** ¹⁶ **If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?** ¹⁷ **In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.**

What are the steps of spiritual renewal? 1. Bring out the Book. 2.– Be present in the story of the Word. 3. Be convicted of my sin. 4. Celebrate Jesus removing all sin. 5. Do what God says in love.

Forward with spiritual renewal no matter what is only possible as The Holy Spirit works through His Word, convicting us of sin, comforting us with the loving Savior, and using that joy of the Lord to give us strength to love God and to love others.