

Neh. 8 “A Special Day”

For the Children: Some things are both happy and sad at the same time. When a Christian dies, it is a happy and a sad occasion – happy, because that person is with the Lord; sad, because we will miss them here. Worshipping God is also both happy and sad. It makes us sad when God’s Word reminds us of how much we have sinned against Him; but it makes us happy to know that God has forgiven our sins. The more we know about our sin, the more we can understand how great is God’s mercy. **Questions:** What made the people of Israel sad? Why were they told to stop crying? What can we learn from the OT feast-days, like the Feasts of Trumpets and of Booths?

Introduction:

First Point: The Re-Building of Public Worship

- 1) Attention to the Normal: Now that the urgent and irregular duties of re-building Temple and walls have been addressed, God’s people could turn to re-establishing the regular worship
- 2) A Grass-Roots Revival: This desire to restore worship comes from the people, not just the leaders. The people desire to hear Ezra read the Law. The term, “people” or similar phrases is used around 17 times. Reformation and revival need the people to fear the Lord as well as the leaders
- 3) A Temporary Revival: Even with leaders and people on board, such revivals do not last. Christ still needed to come and to pour out His Spirit. In that Spirit, the church today needs to be “always reforming”
- 4) The Roots of NT Worship: The elements of worship here are similar to that of the synagogue, which in turn influenced NT church worship. We find all the people assembled, who were able to understand the Word. Their interest in hearing God’s Word was central. They read the Law. There were translators and interpreters. A wooden pulpit was used so that the people could see the Law read and show their reverence for it – even for half a day!. The leaders came back the next day for more in-depth teaching. They responded with praise, through Ezra (v. 6). The people said, “Amen” and bowed low to bring their supplications before the Lord. The reading of the Law leads to confession and godly sorrow

Second Point: The Re-Building of Joy

- 1) Joy the Order of the Day: Grief over sin is appropriate, but the completion of Temple and Walls was a cause for joy. But also this was the 7th month, a time for religious festivals: The day of Atonement, the Feast of trumpets and the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths. Joy was *commanded* at these festivals (Dt. 16:14-16, 26:11-12). So Nehemiah tells the people to stop mourning and weeping and to rejoice. That the people do so with the greatest celebration of these feasts since the days of Joshua, shows that they see their great reason for joy: the return from Exile and preservation despite hostilities. This shows that God shows mercy to those who grieve over their sins. If we have repented, we can rejoice. There is great strength in such joy, for it relies on the mercy of God in Christ (v. 10)
- 2) Grief and Joy Inseparable: This does not mean that confession was to be halted permanently. Confession and grief are seen again in ch. 9. Sorrow over sin is necessary for true repentance and joy. Confession and joy therefore go together to give us strength – Law and Gospel. Many have tried to gain strength from grief alone, or joy alone. But both are necessary
- 3) The Greatest Joy: Israel was commanded to rejoice to celebrate their deliverance, protection and provisioning by the Lord. We see that saving work even more in Christ. Our joy should be even greater than in the time of Ezra-Nehemiah!
- 4) Substance above Shadows: Feast-days are no longer needed to show that joy, because Christ has come to fulfill all the OT feast-days represented. See Col. 2:16-17. Individuals are free to observe these days if they wish (Rom. 14) or not (Col. 2:16-17). It is the joy in salvation that is the important thing, not the observance or non-observance of days

Conclusion