

PP Nehemiah: The Way the Word Works (continued)

Nehemiah 8:9-12

Part 27, 2/9-10, 2013

Illus A young French girl who had been born blind, learned to read by touch when a friend gave her a Braille copy of Mark's gospel. She read it so much that her fingers became calloused and insensitive. In an effort to regain her feeling, she cut the skin from the ends of her fingers. Tragically, however, her callouses were replaced by permanent and even more insensitive scars. She sobbingly gave the book a goodbye kiss, saying, when translated in English, "Farewell, farewell, sweet Word of my heavenly Father." To her surprise, she discovered that her lips were even more sensitive than her fingers had been, and she spent the rest of her life reading her great treasure with her lips.

Last week we saw five ways we approach the Word of God to unleash its power to transform us

PP We eagerly open the Word of God with excitement and anticipation

Expecting God to speak to us His life-giving Words

Esteeming and valuing God above all others and exalting Him to the highest place of authority

Exalting Him to the highest authority

And asking the Holy Spirit to explain God's Word to us, valuing those among us He has gifted to teach

As chapter 8 continues, we begin to see the transformation come over God's people

If you are taking notes, cross out point number 4 as I took that out in final sermon prep

PP 1-The Word of God produces grief in us

There are times when we read God's Word and it cuts us painfully to the bottom of our hearts Simply because of this reason: *we are guilty!*

A hardened heart feels no remorse when their guilt is shown them, but the Word of God brings not only the realization that we have sinned, but the grief that should accompany it

We see this at the Water Gate, "***And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, 'This day is holy to the LORD your God, do not mourn or weep.' For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law.***" 8:9

This was a holy day, the day of the Feast of Trumpets

It was the only one of the 7 holy days God gave, that He commanded to be observed when a new moon was in the night sky, the darkest of nights

This festival was a memorial day

Look *back* and remember the dark days of our history, when life was miserable

Look *up* and remember our merciful deliverer who brought you out and set you free

Look *forward* and remember that His enduring faithfulness is a promise for eternity

It was a day that began with the sober realization that they were an unfaithful people, but ended in joy at their faithful merciful God

During this day, "***all the people wept as they heard the Words of the Law***"

Notice the tense, '*as they heard*'

God's Word was being read, and around and through that great assembly of thousands, the growing sound of weeping could be heard

Not just a few, who had done really terrible things in their lives, '***all the people wept***'

Powerfully, immediately, the Word of God showed this assembly that they had been neglecting His word, disobedient, and it was producing sorrow in them

PP *“through the law comes knowledge of sin...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* **Romans 3:20, 23**

This is the power of the living and active Word of God

Have you ever experienced this soul-cutting sorrow that the Word of God can produce?

PP *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”* **Hebrews 4:12**

God has to perform surgery on our hearts in order to cut out what is choking off our relationship with Him

He performs surgery with his scalpel, which is His Word

And as the Great Physician, He knows perfectly where to cut and how deeply to cut

He will never cut more deeply than is necessary, and He always uses the anesthesia of His grace

Please remember friends, God will never produce sorrow in us without the grace to endure it

When He shows us our sin, His grace is already running through our spiritual veins to enable us to endure it

Let's look at another way the Word of God works

Remember what we have learned: water for drinking symbolized the life-giving power of the

Holy Spirit while water for washing symbolized the cleansing power of God's Word

PP *“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,”* **Ephesians 5:25-26**

How interesting that the word *‘washing’* here is the Greek word *laver*

You see, in the tabernacle of Israel, there was a bronze laver, a large bowl, filled with water

The priests would wash from this before they administered the sacrifices, else they would die

This washing from this laver symbolized confession and God's willingness to forgive and make us clean in order to stand before God in fellowship

PP It is the one *“who has clean hands and a pure heart”* who can stand in God's presence **Psalms 24:4**

And He makes His people clean by washing us with His Word, scrubbing away old sinful desires and give us new pure desires

How this bronze laver was made is very interesting!

PP *“He made the basin of bronze and its stand of bronze, from the mirrors of the ministering women who ministered in the entrance of the tent of meeting.”* **Exodus 38:8**

So many people detest mirrors, because they hate to see what they believe are their imperfections

Are you avoiding God's Word for fear of what He may show you that you do not want to see?

The Bible is God's glorious mirror and when we look into it through reading, listening and studying it, He reveals His perfections, reflects our imperfections, and all the while, the shofar is blowing to remind us of His grace and mercy

If God is revealing our sin, the anesthesia of His grace is already flowing through our veins He will not leave you in grief, His Spirit will tell you, *‘do not mourn or weep’*

Because the aim of God's Word is sorrow that precedes repentance, and repentance brings transformation

PP 2-The Word of God produces giving in us

God's Word aims at transformation and every heart will respond in some way when God speaks
 Either it will harden like Pharaoh's or melt like the Israelite's that we see today
 The sun shines on clay and ice, and one will harden while the other will melt

"Then he said to them, 'Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord.'" 8:10a

He is Nehemiah, and what he tells them is basically, eat, drink and be merry
'Eat the fat' means to eat the best cuts of meat, like the prime rib or filet
 No cube steak for them on this day!!
 And pull out the sweet drinks, nothing bitter nothing tasteless, everything is create joy

This was a holy day before the Lord and they were to celebrate

What is interesting however, is that in their celebrations, they were to make sure no poor, orphan, widow or stranger was left out

'send portions to anyone who has nothing ready...'

I can picture Theresa Schnable and Lynn Blodgett heading up this ancient meal ministry!

It was just a few weeks prior to this day that the people of Jerusalem were divided into factions, one complaining against the other, the rich exploiting the poor

Now the Word of God was exerting its power and greed began to recede from their hearts, selfishness began to be replaced with love

The Word of God was at work, and suddenly, care for one another blossomed in their hearts
 It is what Ezra had just read to the people

PP ***"When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. ²⁰When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. ²¹When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. ²²You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this."*** Deuteronomy 24:19-22

Verse 12 shows us the transforming power of God's Word to move us to love those in need: ***"all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them."***

When God's Word is at work within us, it will yield a greater love toward those in need

PP 3-The Word of God produces gladness in us

Illus Sometime around 6th grade, I became consumed with the Word of God. My mother told me, just a few years ago, she always thought I would be a pastor. Truthfully, I never even considered it until 1992, and the calling found me more than I found it. In 6th grade, I was up late one night reading my Bible and I wanted to read the story of Samson. I looked and looked for it and I could not find it anywhere, and finally, frustrated, I went through the now-dark house to the kitchen for a glass of juice. I returned to my bedroom and noticed that when I had gotten out bed, my bible had fallen on the floor, face down. I picked it up and the first thing my eye noticed was the name Samson. It was Judges 13. I distinctly remember, coursing through me at that moment, the electric realization that God had done that for me. And I felt for the first time His pleasure on me for my concern for His Word. It produced in me a joy for the Word of God that has remained with me my whole life!

The Word of God produces sorrow in us so that we would repent
 It works to increase our compassion and love for others
 But here we see that the aim of God's Word is that the Christian would be filled with great joy!

“And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength. So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.” Nehemiah 8:10b-11

The Feast of Trumpets, perhaps rediscovered again on this day, was to be a day of celebration,
 not a day of grieving

Remember that Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the king of Persia, given a leave of absence to
 rebuild Jerusalem

He knows full well that it was illegal and often deadly to appear before the king with anything
 but happiness on your face

PP *“It is as wrong to mourn when God has forgiven us as it is to rejoice when sin has conquered us. The sinner has no reason for rejoicing and the forgiven child of God has no reason for mourning”* Warren Wiersbe

Sometimes we need to say to our spirit, ***‘do not be grieved’***

Holiness and gloom do not go well together!

The Christian should not be living in despair and the night of conviction and guilt should quickly
 break to the dawn of mercy and forgiveness

PP ***“For His anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”*** Psalm 30:5

God wants us to celebrate His faithfulness, not grieve, to rejoice in His mercy and goodness, not
 weep!

PP ***“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!”*** Psalm 100:1-2

God's Word aims at producing this joy in our hearts

Again, look at verse 12, *all the people...to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.*

PP ***“I rejoice at your word like one who finds great spoil.”*** Psalm 119:162

There are great treasures found in God's Word, and we dig for them as we read, meditate and

memorize His Word
Finding them yields great joy in us!

PP Jeremiah wrote that *“Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts.”* **Jeremiah 15:16**

PP David wrote that *“the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart...”* **Psalm 19:8**

There are too many Christians who are the eeyore’s of the church, who picture the dark storm cloud of God’s displeasure constantly over their heads
If you see your sins more than you see His grace, then God’s Word has yet to work fully in you
Sin gazing without mercy watching makes the most miserable of Christians
We should be filled with joy that God in His mercy, though none of us earned or deserved it, has forgiven us and set His permanent eternal love on us

The joyless Christian is the weak Christian, and this is what we see at the end of verse 10, *‘The joy of the Lord is your strength’*

It’s a noun, because it is God’s joy, the joy He possesses, and He will give it us for our strength
It is a natural outcome when we are in fellowship with God
His joy noun, makes it possible for us to *‘make great rejoicing’*, a verb

Friends, do you love God’s Word?

It is His mirror for us, that we may look in it and see His perfections and love
We look in it to see reflected our sins, that which is harming our relationship with Him and others

We look in it to hear Him say, I love you, My mercy is new every morning
It is a day for joy, so celebrate together with My people!

Let me close with an excerpt from the book of James

PP *“For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”*
James 1:22-25

The Word of God is a mirror, and it will show us what He asks of us
So let me close with each of us asking this question: *What do I need to apply immediately?*

Pray