

## “The Water Gate Revival” // Nehemiah 8 // Nehemiah # 6<sup>1</sup> // Su 1130

### Announcement

Gaynor Video / PJD Sharing + Pray (3 minutes)

This weekend we celebrate Chris Gaynor’s 40th anniversary on staff with us.

- You heard that right, 40 years. That’s not 40 metaphorical years, it’s 40 actual years
- Chris, you’ve been faithful to these people longer now, than Moses led the children of Israel in the wilderness
- (Chris is joined up here by Michelle. She hasn’t been with us 40 years; 40 years ago she was only 2 years old. Right, Michelle? They met here, in church, about 20 years ago. And beside them is...)
- Sometimes you wonder if one person’s faithfulness makes a difference. Summit, this church is what it is because of Chris’s faithfulness.
- I often say that when I came to this church I didn’t cause a wave of change so much as I rode one, caused by the faithfulness of Chris Gaynor and another long-time serving staff member, Rick Langston
- Chris was our worship pastor here for many years, and now he’s the pastor of our prayer and worship
- He’s poured himself into this church. Many of you know him because he’s walked with you through pain. He’s prayed with you. If nothing else, you recognize him as the guy saying “come on” to

me on the sermon video when I preach. He’s been a friend to me; the first person to encourage and speak vision into me when things were going well; and the first person by my side when they weren’t.

- Chris, my life is different, my family is different. This church is different, because of your faithfulness. Can you express your appreciation to Chris?

Chris sets up Goodness of God - 3 min

### Introduction

Let’s all remain standing, if we could, for the reading of God’s Word.

8:1 And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel. 2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all

<sup>1</sup> Sources consulted: Eric Mason, *Nehemiah for You*, (London, UK: The Good Book Company, 2022); Tim Mackie, “Ezra-Nehemiah - Session Four”, June 2, 2018, Seattle Area Pastors Network Conference; Skip Heitzig, “[The People, the Bible and a](#)

[Watergate Revival](#)”, June 22, 2005, Calvary Church; Nancy Guthrie, “[Coming Together around God’s Word](#)”, June 28, 2014, The Gospel Coalition’s National Women’s Conference; Dr. Tony Evans, “[Nehemiah - Rebuilding a Broken Culture, Part 6](#)”, July 31, 2020, Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship. And others as noted throughout.

the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. 4 And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiyah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. 6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. 7 Also Jeshua, (here we go again... Bono) Bani, (Sherb) Sherebiah, (the J-man) Jamin, (A.K.) Akkub, (Shabby) Shabbethai, (Hottie) Hodiah, (Macy) Maaseiah, (K-Lit) Kelita, (Ozzie) Azariah, (Big bad Joe) Jozabad, (Han Solo) Hanan, (P-Dawg) Pellaiah, (and) the Levites (honestly, using their nicknames is WAY easier!), helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. 8 They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

Leader: This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Church: ***Thanks be to God.***

You may be seated.

What a great morning, and what a great thing to celebrate this morning. Well, find **Nehemiah 8 in your Bibles, if you will**, if you haven't found it already. And if you didn't bring a Bible, no worries, I always put the text on the screen for you, but if you don't have a Bible, we'd love to gift you one. Stop by the **Next Steps area** at any of our campuses on your way out, and we'll give you one. **Nehemiah 8.**

**June 17, 1972:** That's not the date Chris Gaynor started working at this church, but close. June 17, 1972 was the date that 5 Republican operatives were caught rifling through some filing cabinets and planting a few listening devices in the Democratic Party campaign headquarters in Washington, D.C. What they were doing was not all that uncommon--operatives from both parties had done similar things to each other over the years, but this time investigators followed a cash trail that led back to the **Oval Office** and the discovery of a **secret recording system** that proved the President knew about the whole thing. Within 2 years, the **Watergate Scandal** became one of the biggest governmental scandals in U.S history, and led to the resignation of a sitting U.S. President—the only time that's ever happened.

**Watergate wasn't just a scandal;** it was a defining moment for our nation, and now, when we hear the term "Watergate," we think of corruption uncovered, a nation shaken, and a turning point in American history. **Today, I'm going to attempt to redeem the words**

**Water Gate for you**, because in Nehemiah 8, we come to another “Water Gate”—a Water Gate that was also a defining moment for a nation, but not because something scandalous that was hidden was exposed, but because something precious long neglected was brought back into the light.

**Nehemiah 8 tells the story of the most significant spiritual revival in Israel’s history** since the days of King Solomon. It’s called “the Water Gate Revival” because it occurred in the little public square right in front of the newly rebuilt Water Gate--the gate through which people left the city every morning to go fetch water from the Gihon Spring, Jerusalem’s primary water source.

This chapter is a case study in revival, identifying 5 elements of any true revival, **whether corporate or individual** (there are actually more than 5, but through a sheer act of homiletic self-discipline, I’m going to limit myself to 5. If you download the transcript, you can check out the other bonus ones).<sup>2</sup>

Some of these elements I’m going to give you are prescriptive--meaning they are things we can and should do to bring about revival. Others are descriptive, however, meaning they are things only God can do.

You see, **revival happens as a combination of us doing what we’re supposed to do and God sovereignly choosing to move.** When I was growing up in church, “revival” was a week-long event we put on our yearly calendar, and if the pastor felt like we were especially carnal one year we’d have both a Spring Revival AND a Fall Revival. Our normal church attendance rhythm was 3x a week--Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night, ‘3 to thrive,’ baby--but during

revival week we went to church every night so we could hear sermons about the rapture and why Jimmy Carter may or may not be the antichrist. The philosophy was that if we were in church all the time, we wouldn’t have time to sin. (It’s like I’ve told you, the only drug problem I had growing up was getting drug to church on a continual basis.) I know some of you know what I’m talking about. How many of you grew up like this?

The truth is, however, revival’s not based on a *calendar*, it’s based on conditions and God’s sovereign choice to move. So, I’m going to give us a few things we can do, but then ultimately we look to God for what only he can do.

**(BTW, if you’re new with us:** The book of Nehemiah is the story of the rebuilding of the city walls of Jerusalem in 445 B.C. after the Jewish exile. Nehemiah led the 3rd wave of the Jewish return to Jerusalem after the exile. Zerubbabel and Ezra had led the 1st 2 waves, rebuilding the Temple and re-establishing the city. Nehemiah was a Jewish official serving under Persian King Artaxerxes who had become burdened by the dilapidated state of Jerusalem’s walls and led an effort to rebuild them. He experienced intense opposition from enemies both external and internal (that’s Nehemiah 1–7), but he has prevailed, and as we come into chapter 8, the walls are finished! However, the inhabitants of Jerusalem now face an even bigger need than rebuilt walls, and that is their need for spiritual renewal, setting the stage for chapter 8 where the focus shifts from rebuilding the walls w/ bricks and cement to rebuilding the people w/ God’s Word.)

## **5 (incredibly powerful) Elements of Spiritual Renewal**

(renewal/revival; 5 things: #4, btw, people never see coming!)

<sup>2</sup> “Generosity” and “Confession of Sin” are the other 2. See Bullpen. “Confession of Sin” will be covered in Nehemiah 9.

Element #1:

## 1. Hunger (v 1)

- Notice<sup>3</sup> vs 1, that it's the people who took the initiative. Vs 1 says, "**The people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate...**" and "**...they (the people) told Ezra the (really old) scribe to bring the book of the Law...**"
- I love that phrase, "Bring us the book." (GRAB BIBLE). This revival wasn't a program put forward by Nehemiah; it happened when the *people* said, "Bring us the Book."
- True revival happens when people hunger for **the Book**.
- I remember when I first became a Christian how hungry I was to hear God's Word. I couldn't get enough of it. I started to listen to sermons all the time. I basically stopped listening to music--and 80's music at that, which was the greatest decade of music in human history, Amlrite? But I was a 16 year old driving around in my car listening to preaching tapes and Christian preaching stations. I'm not saying that's the way it has to manifest in your life, but whenever someone gets spiritually awakened, they develop a hunger for God's word. Like, I heard a story about a young, single guy in our church (and I've heard several different versions of this same story at our church) but he came one weekend to our Apex campus. He sat on the back row so he could slip out if he got bored--the row was empty when he first sat down, but he hadn't learned the rules of TSC, which means a bunch of y'all come in about 8-10 minutes after we start, so to his dismay the row filled up all around him so he couldn't get out without making a scene, so he was forced to stay for the sermon, but God used it to get ahold of his heart, and he told me that within the space of 2 years he had gone back and listened to every single sermon on our website... twice. He knew my stories

better than I knew them. He even asked me at one point, he said, "Hey, why are there no sermons on our website pre-2008?" And I told him, "Because I'm embarrassed of those sermons. I'm not even sure that guy was saved, TBH." The point is this guy couldn't get enough of the Word.

*Revival doesn't begin with a better strategy—it begins when people say, "Bring us the Book." And that's because of one simple, biblical principle: the Spirit of Jesus only moves where he's wanted.*

**Jon Tyson**, who was here with us a few weeks ago at our Men's Conference, said something at Passion 2025 that I'll never forget: He pointed out something striking about Jesus's life--namely that Jesus didn't do many miracles in Nazareth, even though Nazareth was his hometown--the place he grew up in; the place where many of Jesus' favorite people would have lived. His relatives; his childhood friends; his elementary school teachers. And yet Jesus did very little of his ministry there and almost no miracles. The place Jesus seemed to hub his ministry was called Bethany--that's where he raised Lazarus from the dead. Bethany was the place from which Jesus commenced his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and it was the place Jesus returned to every night of the final week of his life. Bethany is also the place Jesus went after the resurrection and it's the place he ascended back to heaven from. Why make Bethany his ministry hub and not Nazareth, since Nazareth was his hometown?

**Matthew 13:58** tells us, "**Jesus did not do many mighty works there in Nazareth, because of their unbelief.**" They said things like "Isn't this just the carpenter's son?" Bethany, by contrast, was the place where Mary broke the expensive bottle of perfume over his feet and washed his feet with her tears. Bethany is where Mary and many others sat at

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<sup>3</sup> Kidner

his feet hungering for anything and everything he had to say. And so, Jesus established his functional home in Bethany, not Nazareth, even though Nazareth was his hometown.

Jesus doesn't go where he's merely *known*, Tyson says—he goes where he's *wanted*. The same thing is true with his Spirit, today. Wherever revival happens, it is preceded by a hunger for the Word, an intense hunger, where you want the presence of his Spirit in your life more than you want *anything*. It's why you fast, because you're like "I'd rather have God's Word than food." Without hunger, there will be no revival. Revival won't happen until everything in your life screams, "Bring us **THE BOOK!**"

So here's my question: Is your attitude toward the Word of God hungry, or casual? Are you Bethany or Nazareth?

Listen, if your primary engagement with the Word is coming in here every other week or so to hear a sermon, I can answer that question for you: **It's CASUAL**. You may know Jesus, but don't expect him to do any miracles in your life. You're Nazareth, but Jesus only shows up in Bethany. You might know him, but you don't hunger for him.

*But that leads me to #2, our second element of revival...*

## 2. Preaching (vv 3-4, 8)

Ezra, **vs 4**, the elderly scribe who'd led the 2nd wave of return from exile, built a little elevated platform right there in the public square, and there he "...read from it (the Book) facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand."

- **He built this little elevated platform and taught from it** and the people sat there all day and literally hung on every word.

- **The elevated platform served two purposes: The first was functional:** It made it easier for everyone to hear. **But the second—and more important function—was symbolic.** The word of God was the elevated centerpiece of this renewal.

**BTW, vs 8** in this chapter gives my favorite definition of preaching in the Bible: *(You Bible teachers, listen up, I consider this to be my job description, or the job description of any Bible teacher).* "They (that is, Ezra and the other preacher-teachers) **read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.** **That's literally what I do each week: I read from the book, give you the sense of it** (meaning, I explain it; put it in terms you can understand, tell you stories to help illustrate it), then do my best to help you apply it to your lives.

- You see, it's not merely **hearing the Word** that helps you, it's understanding it.
  - When I was a missionary in an Islamic country many of my Muslims friends believed that just hearing the sound of the Koran (which they believe to be the Word of God) had a converting power on your soul. So I was always getting invited to go and hear "reading from beautiful Al-Quran." It was their way of trying to convert me. We'd go sit in a room and someone would read the Koran in Arabic. And while I was listening they'd always be cutting eyes at me to see what kind of effect it was having on me. But of course it had no effect because I couldn't understand it, and--get this--most of them also couldn't understand it, because they don't speak Arabic either. Most of them had never read the Koran in a language that they could understand, but to them that doesn't matter, because it's simply hearing it, being in its presence, they believe, that has the effect. It's a sacramental view of the Word of God--just coming into contact with it infuses grace into your soul.

- **The Bible presents itself differently. It's not hearing the Word, or just being in its presence, that converts you, as if it had some kind of sacramental effect; it's understanding it.**

- **In fact, OT Commentator** Derek Kidner points out how many times the word “**understanding**” is used in this chapter. It's used in vv 2, 3, 7, and vs 8. *Understanding* (Kidner says) is *EVERYTHING*, and that's because the Bible consistently says that faith is the center of the Christian life.<sup>4</sup>
  - **Galatians 3:3** says that faith is the vehicle through which all of heaven's blessings flow into your life, and that faith only grows in your heart as you hear and *understand* God's word.<sup>5</sup> **Romans 10:17** says the same thing. If you're jotting references down to look up later, jot those down: Gal 3:3/Rom 10:17
- I was talking with someone who visited our church recently (and this was fascinating)--they're only experience in church before us had been a high liturgical church; in this case the Roman Catholic Church, and so I asked them how they liked our service. Which is always a dangerous question for me to ask. And one of the things they said really struck me and I thought it was very, very insightful. He said something to the effect of, “Well, in this church, the center of everything is the Word. The largest single portion of the service is devoted to the Word: you literally stand on an elevated platform in the center of everyone, read the text and then explain how it applies to my life. That's the first time in church I've ever experienced anything like that. Previously in my church experience there was always a time where the Word of God was read, but it was way shorter, and the guy who read it

literally stood off to the side and he doesn't really explain what he's reading or show me how it applies to my life.”

- The main part of the service in many of these liturgical kinds of churches is not THE WORD, it's the sacrament; which is why the altar, not the pulpit, is the center.
- And it's why it doesn't usually matter how much you understand the Word--simply being in contact with it, being in its presence, is what does the trick for you.
- The Bible teaches, however, that salvation and renewal only happen through faith, and faith comes through hearing *and* understanding God's Word.
  - “**Faith,**” Paul says in Romans 10:17, “**comes from hearing...**” (and by ‘hearing’ here he means ‘understanding,’ and we know that because in the previous verse he explained that hearing can only come through those sent to preach--people like Ezra, or me, who read clearly and explain God's word.<sup>6</sup>)
- So, Summit, as God gives me grace, so long as I am your pastor, the center of this church will always be this Book and this moment right there, because this is everything. And I'm gonna do my best to make sure what you hear is not “Uncle JD's Wise Thoughts” about life or funny stories about my kids or grandkids one day, what you're going to hear is THIS BOOK, because **THIS BOOK and THIS BOOK alone is the source of revival and renewal:** hearing the Word, understanding it, putting faith in what it says.
  - Like Pastor Bryan said last week, this is more than just a textbook for us or the biography of great men and women of history. This BOOK is *theo-pneustos*, literally “the breath of God.”

<sup>4</sup> Heb 11:6 says that “Without faith it is impossible to please God.”

Romans 14:23 says that whatever we do that is not grounded in faith is sin.

<sup>5</sup> Romans 10:17; Gal 3:2

<sup>6</sup> In Galatians 3 Paul asks, “How did you receive the Spirit of God? And he answers his own question by saying, “You received him by hearing the Word of God with faith.”

- In Genesis 1 God breathed and spoke and the worlds sprung into existence; in the Gospels Jesus breathed and spoke and the lame walked; the blind saw; and dead men got out of the grave. This book is the breath and voice of God. And when you encounter it--when you hear it, with understanding--spiritual life and revival and renewal spring up in you. You don't come to listen to the wisdom of a man or to be caught up in the lights and sounds of a moment; you come to hear the Word.
- Reformation Tour in Germany... "nobody comes to these churches anymore...now they're just art show museums as a marketing ploy to get ppl in the doors"
  - Luther would just open the Bible, explain it, and yell at everybody.
  - That's what caused the reformation! Not cuz he replaced it with a better version of what they already had.
  - Not lights, production, quality of music...center of everything, strip all of it away, is THIS BOOK—here's what it says, you hear it and understand.

So, the 1st element is HUNGER; the 2nd is PREACHING; the 3rd is...

### 3. Conviction (v 6)

**Vs 6** says that as Ezra read and gave the people the understanding, "...all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground."

- The Word didn't stay in their heads, it penetrated their hearts, and that manifested in a physical response.
- (BTW: SOAP BOX WARNING: People say to me, "I don't like it when people shout Amen or lift up their hands or do demonstrable things in worship; I like quiet, somber, reflective

moments." Fine, there's a time for somber, quiet, reflective moments, but if you don't approve of any of the amen-shouting, hand-raising, fall-on-your-face dimensions of worship, I don't think you would have enjoyed Nehemiah's revival much--and, not to be rude, but I'm not sure how much you're gonna enjoy heaven, either, because there's a lot of that stuff happening up there, too.)

- The preaching of God's Word gripped them and moved them deeply and their whole bodies manifested that.
- **Vs 9 (b)** tells us that they began to mourn and weep for their sins. They were deeply cut to the heart.
- When revival comes, truths you know with your head you suddenly begin to feel in your heart. Hear me: revival doesn't usually come through new things you learn; it comes as old things come alive.
- **Jonathan Edwards**, who oversaw the first Great Awakening in America, the largest spiritual revival in American history, described it as the difference between knowing with your head that honey is sweet but then having that sweetness burst alive on your taste buds for the first time; what you knew propositionally in your head suddenly becomes a reality in your mouth. Before, I knew what sweetness was--but now I taste it and I sense it. Here's how he described it in his own life: "Sometimes only mentioning the name of Christ or an attribute of God will cause my heart to burn within me (notice: not a new truth he learns; just an old one that comes alive)... suddenly God appears glorious to me. When I enjoy this sweetness it seems to carry me outside of myself. I cannot

bring myself even to take my eye from this Glorious Object.”

Revival is not the product of a new means of grace, Edwards said, but a greater degree of the ordinary means of grace.<sup>7</sup> (things like preaching and prayer)

And I point that out because in a lot of circles (I picked on my liturgical friends earlier; let me pick on the other side now), revival is associated with something new--some new weird thing the Spirit is doing, some fresh way he's working he's never worked before. But Scriptural revivals don't work that way--there's no "new ways," there's "the old ways" that suddenly become effective. The Word of God is preached, just like at other times, but it suddenly comes alive in people's hearts.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a medical-doctor-turned-pastor in London who'd grown up in the Welsh revivals of the early 19th century. He said that most of us don't crave revival because we don't know what we're missing! We've just grown accustomed to how difficult ministry is; how slowly it moves. He says, *"Our problem (Lloyd-Jones says) is getting to a place where we realize how absolutely impotent we are. At first, (he says) we persist in thinking that we can set the situation right. We think if we just write a new book; preach some better sermons; start some new mission works; adopt a new program--this will stem the tide*

*of the enemy. But we come to realize at long last that it's not working... at least not effectively to stem the tide and save our children or our community... and so we throw ourselves upon the mercy of God. It is not so much an organized prayer emphasis as it is an act of desperation. And then, and only then, does the power of the Holy Spirit come flooding upon us and into us. And he does in a moment what incremental organization can hardly accomplish in half a century."*

*"God does in a moment what incremental organization can hardly accomplish in half a century."* Dr. Lloyd-Jones is using imagery there from Psalm 126, which was, btw, a Psalm written during the time period of Nehemiah! The writer of Psalm 126 (it wasn't King David; many years later) lays out the path of spiritual renewal. This Psalm is really short, and it directly corresponds to the time period we're studying, so let me walk you through it: [1] When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. [2] Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The psalmist is describing their joy in returning from exile in Babylon to a newly restored Jerusalem! It's like a dream! It's too good to be true!

<sup>7</sup> This summary comes from Tim Keller summarizing Jonathan Edwards. Edwards called revival, "the intensification of the normal operations of the Holy Spirit..." It comes through the ordinary means of grace. Things like preaching the Word and

prayer." In a revival, you're not doing something new; you're doing all the same stuff you usually do, it just has an unusual power associated with it. *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*



**But then**, in vs. 4, the Psalmist yearns for something more: **Restore our fortunes, LORD, like streams in the Negev! Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy! Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, shall return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them. Ps 126:4–6**

OT scholar Derek Kidner points out that in these verses the Psalmist identifies two distinct ways God brings about spiritual renewal:<sup>8</sup> The first is in **vs 5**. The Psalmist talks about **“sowing with tears.”**

- **The desert region of Israel** just outside Jerusalem **was** called the Negev, and it was very difficult to get any seed to grow there because it was so dry. (**PIC OF NEGEV DESERT**) The Psalmist is **imagining soil so arid** that seeds planted needed to be watered individually, with tears. **Imagine how many hours** of excruciating labor and what exhausting patience that would take—digging individual holes, planting each seed one at a time, and watering each with your tears.
- **This is the normal way God brings renewal into the world.** We patiently plant the seeds of God’s Word in the hearts of those around us, we water them with our tears and fertilize them with our faith. It feels long and laborious, with your kids, with your neighbors—some of these stories last for years—but it’s faithful ministry. And we have to be willing to do that.
- BUT.... this Psalm shows you there’s another way God can work: **Vs 4, “Restore our fortunes like streams in the Negev.”**
  - **Once every 30–40 years** in this region, they have a **torrential monsoon** where they get about 7 years worth of rain in 12 hours. It **forms streams** in the desert, and a **couple of days later, when the flood waters recede**, this is what it

leaves...(PIC of kids running in flowers). **This is called “The Super Bloom.”**

- The psalmist imagines God doing this spiritually in the hearts of these returning Israelites. God’s Spirit pours out on the preaching of the Word and more is accomplished in the space of a few moments than normally occurs in a lifetime.

Isn’t this what you want to happen in your family? In our community, in our church? **How does that happen?**

Let me read that quote from Dr. Lloyd-Jones again: **“Our problem is getting to a place where we realize how absolutely impotent we are... But we come to realize at long last that it’s not working... at least not effectively to stem the tide and save our children or our community... and so we throw ourselves upon the mercy of God. It is not so much an organized prayer emphasis as it is an act of desperation. And then, and only then, does the power of the Holy Spirit come flooding upon us and into us. And he does in a moment what incremental organization can hardly accomplish in half a century.”**

There have been times in history where this has happened:

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<sup>8</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: A Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1973), 440.

- I mentioned the Great Awakening. The United States was fundamentally shaped and changed because of the Great Awakening.
- It happened in Korea in the early 20th century. I've told you about that one.
- It's happening right now in parts of S. America and China, where the church is growing faster right now than anywhere in history.
- Honestly, I think it's happening in limited measure right now... We had more than 2000 show up at our college services and 83 POF.
- BTW, Summit, our total attendance for Easter last week, NOT counting our GF services, was 29,766 people--basically 30,000. The single largest attendance we've ever had, by far. And we had 253 POF.
- There's a wind blowing right now...
- And Pastor Bryan did a great job w/ the message, didn't he? BTW, he didn't tell you the full story. Bryan had confided to me a while ago that the thing he missed most about being a senior pastor was preaching Easter, so I figured he had some pent-up-resurrection-rage in his body and I was right. But 253 professions of faith.

There's the beginning of a wind blowing here and I want to see it turn into the streams of the Negev, Summit. Don't you?

#### 4. Joy (vv 9–10)

In **vs 9**, Nehemiah says something odd. He specifically instructs the people, and I want you to imagine this scene: Everybody is down front at the altar, they're weeping, they're confessing their sin, they're laying their hands on each other and praying for each other, and he says, get up! "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." Then he said, **vs 10**, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine... and do not be grieved..."

Why this clarification? He tells them at the end of **vs 10**, "...for the joy of the LORD is your strength." (Some of you recognize that phrase from worship songs; this is the first time in Scripture it is used!)

Revivals are not defined by days of mourning because of your sin, but days of rejoicing in God's salvation. Revival begins with mourning over sin, but, hear me, *it never stops there*. Write this down: **Sorrow may be the beginning point of revival, but fat-eating, sweet-wine drinking, dance-prompting joy is the destination.** (For us Baptists, we at least get one out of the 3 (we don't do wine drinking or the dancing, but, boy, let me tell you we can do the fat-eating thing. AmIrite?)

One of the signs God's Spirit is coming into you is you go from sorrow over sin to joy in God's salvation. The gospel's first light is always to expose your sin, but it never stops there! In John 8, when Jesus reveals himself as **the light of the world**, I've told you he does that on the heels of the story of him exposing, bringing into the light, a woman caught in the act of adultery and then forgiving her. A woman gets dragged before Jesus, caught in the act of adultery--still half naked from the encounter. The Pharisees ask Jesus what they should do with her since the Law commands she be stoned. Jesus kneels down to write in the dirt, then stands up and says, 'Let him who is without sin among YOU cast the first stone.' They all stare awkwardly at each other, drop their rocks and go home. **Then it's just Jesus and the woman, and he says to her**, "Woman, where are your accusers?" And she says, "There *are* none, Lord," and then he says those famous words, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

The woman could have left that encounter still full of shame and self-loathing because of her sin--I mean, less than an hour before she'd been committing adultery and she was likely still half-naked from the

encounter--but I suspect that she went home with joy because that moment was not defined by her sin but by the incredible declaration of his acceptance and her salvation.

*Mourning comes from looking at your sin; joy comes from looking at him.* Some of you are appropriately broken over your sin; but it's time for you to embrace the more important part of the gospel: **NEITHER DO I CONDEMN YOU.** This is a day of joy, not sadness, and you need to let the joy of that salvation become your strength! He's lifting you up out of the dirt and saying, "Yeah, your sin was bad, but my grace is greater. Your dysfunction and brokenness was devastating, but I brought the power of an empty grave to it."

- Maybe there's a lot of people you've hurt in your life! Get up, Jesus says, I've made you a new creation; I've appointed you to bring blessing and joy to others now, and no longer sorrow.
- Maybe you've been an addict: get up, friend, he's saying to you, "I've made you a new creation, and those whom the Son sets free are free indeed."
- You say, "But I feel so sinful, rejected, defeated, defiled," he literally cuts you off mid-sentence and says, "But I've declared you righteous, accepted, loved, forgiven. And my voice is louder than your sin. Your enemy spoke death but I speak life. He speaks condemnation but I speak forgiveness. You've been broken but I've made you more than a conqueror. The list of your sins is long, but my love is longer; there's literally no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

#### **Stop staring at your sin and start beholding your Savior.**

- BTW, one of Gen Z's critiques of Millennials (how many millennials? Gen Z?), their older siblings, is that they're too somber. The Millennial generation has been known to be

somewhat melancholy. And that's because, social analysts say, they've encountered the disappointments of the world in unusual ways--a lot of institutions and power structures have let them down. And that's legitimate. But your younger siblings, Gen Z, have something to say, too. Your story doesn't stop with depression, at least for the Christian. Yes, we mourn the messed up world around us, but God is doing a new thing and the joy of the Lord is our strength.

*That brings me, finally, to #5...*

#### **5. Obedience (vv 13–18)**

One of the things they discovered as they were listening to the Book is that there is a feast commanded in the Law of God that they haven't celebrated in centuries, Look, if you will at vs 14: **And they found it written in the Law (Lev 23, to be exact) that the LORD had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month...** The "Feast of Booths" was this holiday where the people of Israel erected little tents and slept outdoors--it was kind of like Krzyzewskiville (K-ville) where Duke students leave the nice, comfortable indoor accommodations that their parents paid \$94,000/yr for them to live in and stay outdoors in tents for weeks on end so they can get tickets to the Carolina game. This is kind of like that--but this "tent village" is not to get tickets to see Coach K lose his final game to UNC, but to remind themselves how God had miraculously provided for his people during their wilderness wandering. God had commanded them to observe this holiday, once every year, for a week in August.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Luke 23:33–43; Deut 16:13–15; 31:10–13; Num 23:39–43

16 So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim... (now watch this, vs 17) for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so."

They hadn't obeyed this command for 900 years. So, for the first time in 900 years they obey it, "And (when they did, vs 17) there was very great rejoicing."

Their first action after this revival was to obey a command they hadn't obeyed in NINE HUNDRED years, for almost as long as they'd been a nation.

**Here's my question for you: What command have you neglected?** Maybe, like Israel, you've neglected it for basically your whole life. Maybe it's:

- Being honest in relationships. You're living a lie with your friends or your spouse. It's time to come clean.
- Asking for forgiveness. It's become a part of your identity
- Extending forgiveness to someone.
- Maybe there's some secret habit you've nursed for years--it's almost part of your identity now, and it's time to give it up.
- Maybe you've never tithed. You've never practiced financial obedience.

It's time for you to start obeying, **TODAY**. As Esau McCaulley says, "The goal of the Word is not your information or inspiration; it's your transformation." So, where do you need to obey, **TODAY?**

VAMP

**Let me end this by coming back around to #1... How much do you hunger for his Spirit?** The Spirit of Jesus that wants to make his habitation in your heart, in your home, in this church! You show your hunger by your devotion to the Word, your repentance and by how much you seek him in prayer.

Listen, I'm willing to be the person who faithfully digs a hole for each seed and waters it with his tears--as God gives me strength, I'll do that for the rest of my life *for you*. But, I long for those streams of the Negev. Don't you?

We can't force God to send those streams. The Spirit is like the wind, Jesus says, it blows where it wishes. We can't control it, but we can put up our sails and say, "Jesus, send the Wind here."

Everything about us should put that hunger on display. Believers, your lives should be characterized by careful obedience. Our boiler room should be full each hour of each service with people asking God to send the power as the Word is preached. The boiler room is... I can tell how hungry we are by how many people are in that room! I'm willing to do the slow, hard work of sowing and reaping, but I want an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in my generation. Don't you? Listen, the life of our community depends on this. The life of our CHURCH depends on it. The life of your family depends on this.

*Mercy drops 'round us are falling, but for the showers we plead.*

So, let's open up the altars for those who want to come down and cry for it. You say, "Well, I can pray in my seat." Of course, you can. And we simply don't have space for everyone to come down here, of course. But I think coming to kneel expresses a particular kind of hunger, doesn't it? That's what worship and corporate prayer are supposed to be: putting our hunger on display.

- And maybe some of you are so desperate for it in your life and family you'd want to come down here and do that.
- Or maybe there's something you need to surrender, some area you need to start obeying. And maybe you've neglected it for years. For your whole life you've never done it and it's time to start.
- It strikes me that in this chapter, after hearing the Word, some people lifted their hands in worship while others fell on their faces in surrender. I think that's a good way for us to end, and one of those 2 is appropriate to you. Which one do you need to do? Do you need to stand with hands in surrender and worship?...or do you need to come to the altar and fall on your face in a posture of hunger?

Everyone stand, you come right now, as our worship teams come to lead us...