**BCM Bible Study – February 21/22, 2018**

**Nehemiah: Renewal (Nehemiah 8-13)**

Intro: Nehemiah concludes with the people rededicating themselves to the Lord after the completion of the reconstruction on the wall. The people gather together within the city to renew their dedication through the reading of the law and recommittal to it.

(Leviticus 23 provides background for the laws and traditions the people are returning to in chapters 8-10)

Ezra Reads the law: **Read Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-8**

* “*The assembly before the Water Gate does not appear to have been a routine assembly. Special preparations had been made including the construction of a wooden pulpit, and even women and older children had been assembled for what was clearly an extraordinary occasion. Ezra, the teacher of Torah who had recently arrived from Babylonia was invited to read the book of the law of Moses. He, assisted by the Levites, read from early morning until midday.”* (Broadman Bible Commentary Vol. 3, hereafter BBC)
* What is the significance of this event?
* Why do the people go to such extremes just to read the law?
  + What does this tell us about how we should approach God’s word?
  + What can we take away from their approach?
  + How do we fail to show the appropriate reverence for God’s word?
    - Why is reverence important?
  + What are some ways that we can choose reverence in our approach to reading scripture over habit?

The People’s Response: **Read Nehemiah 8:9-12**

* What is the people’s response to the reading of the law?
  + *“The reading of the law made the people keenly aware of their failure and guilt and caused them to weep and mourn.”* (BBC)
    - Why do they mourn?
* What are Nehemiah’s and the Levites’ responses to their mourning (v.10-11)?
  + Why does God demand rejoicing?
    - [Contextually, the reading of the law was not a time where grief was appropriate. It was a time to be glad and thankful for how God had worked in the past. (BBC) There is a time to recognize our sins and there is a time to rejoice in what God has done. The purpose of reading scripture isn’t so that we can feel guilty about our sins. Scripture definitely lays out sin and how we can mess up, but it also tells of how sin has been demolished by Jesus which gives way for rejoicing. Reading scripture is ultimately a celebration of getting to know God, His son, and His heart while looking back on what He has done.]
  + What does it mean that “the joy of the Lord is your strength”? How have you found this to be true for you?How can joy be a more integral part of your life?
  + Where does an appropriate grief towards sin come into play? How does Christ turn our grief to joy?

**Nehemiah 8:13-18** tells of how the people return to the celebration of the “Festival of Booths.” This was to help the people remember their journey through the wilderness and their dependence on God and His provision while they were waiting for the promised land. Not only are the people celebrating this festival, but Ezra continues to read the law during this seven-day period.

In **Nehemiah 9:1-5**, it tells of how the people continue to honor the Lord through reading of the law, fasting, and confession. A prayer is then offered up to the Lord in verses **6-30**. This prayer is a beautiful retelling of what God has done from the beginning of time until the Babylonian captivity. It is an affirmation of the forgiving and faithful God that He is. It talks through all the mistakes the Israelites have made, but always points back to how God ultimately provided. Overall, it is a prayer that proclaims and praises God’s character.

A Prayer and Commitment: **Read Nehemiah 9:31-38 and recap Nehemiah 10**

* **Nehemiah 10** lays out in writing the agreement the people make with God after their prayer. It lists the names of those who made the agreement. (it is assumed that not everyone signed it, instead many people were grouped under other names based off of common ancestors(BBC)) After the names, the documentation states all the things and actions that the people put into place in their recommittal to God.
* What stands out to you about the people’s prayer (9:31-37)?
* What is the attitude of the people towards God in their prayer? Why is this attitude important?
  + “*No attempt is made in the prayer to excuse the Jews or to minimize their guilt. But throughout history God has revealed Himself to be merciful and forgiving. It is because of this divinely revealed grace that the petitioner can look for pity and relief from his hardship and distress.”* (BBC)
  + How does this compare to your own prayers of confession? What does healthy confession look like?

Before the walls were rebuilt, the Jews lived on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The only exception to this is the Jewish leaders who remained inside the city. In **Nehemiah 11**, once the new walls have been built, it is decided who has to move back into the city. You might think this would be an easy transition, but most of the Jews had well established homes and lives outside the city. Volunteers are encouraged to step forward, but otherwise lots are cast for one tenth of the Jews to move back into Jerusalem. These people are listed, as well as many who remain in the villages outside of Jerusalem. **Nehemiah 12:1-26** gives another list, this one of all the priests and Levites who returned to Judah as well as some genealogies.

Recognition of God and Establishing Habits: **Read Nehemiah 12:27-30 and 12:44-13:3**

* “*It is not surprising that Nehemiah should plan a formal ceremony for the dedication of the city wall. He did not think of the affairs of his administration as divided into sacred and secular. All of his work was in the service of God, and the building of the wall in particular was viewed as a religious exercise (cf. 2:12; 4:4-5; 6:16).*” (BBC)
* What does this tell you about Nehemiah and his character?
* What do you think of the statement, “Nothing in your life is divided into sacred and secular”? Do you struggle with this statement? How does it apply to your personal life?
* In these verses we see the Israelites establishing habits and practices for how they live their lives e.g. the Levites purifying themselves, giving portions to Levites, and keeping the Ammonites and Moabites out. Why is the establishment of habits important for the Israelites? Why is it important in general?

Uprootal of Sin: **Read Nehemiah 13:4-13**

* What is happening in these passages? (Note that Tobiah is an Ammonite and is the same Tobiah who opposed Nehemiah throughout the first half of the book)
* The rest of Nehemiah 13 retells other similar stories of the people drifting away from what God has called them to do and Nehemiah’s efforts to correct them.
* Why is it so easy for the Israelites to go back on the new practices in place? Why is it easy for us to fall back into sin?
  + How does Nehemiah deal with the sin of the Israelites?
  + What does this tell us about how we should deal with sin?

Conclusion

* Nehemiah concludes with him offering up a prayer to God, “Remember me with favor, O my God.” Nehemiah never lost sight of the importance of what God had laid out for him, even when he came back and the people were once again sinning. He constantly worked for the betterment and renewal of God’s people. These chapters do so much to point towards the perfect renewal and change that Jesus brings. He must be our reason for change and the focal point of how we realign our lives.
* Where are you struggling to commit to God? Are you finding it hard to respond to God’s call, are you struggling to establish healthy habits, or does the uprootal of current sin in your life feel impossible?
* What has renewal looked like for you in this past year? How has Christ made things fresh and new in your life?
* What does the call to renewal look like for you right now?
* If time allows, spend some time reflecting on the past year and what God has done in your family! (Or set aside some time at your last social!)