

DAY ELEVEN:

BOTH GRIEF AND JOY

INTRODUCTION

What would community revival look like? Of course, every powerful work of God is different so it is difficult to predict, but let's have a look at a spiritual revival that occurred in the Old Testament to see if we can find some clues. First some background. As God had promised in yesterday's Scripture, many Jews returned from exile and set about rebuilding Jerusalem. It was not easy reconstructing a nation from scratch and eventually their energy waned, and they returned to bad habits both physically and spiritually. It was very disappointing. But God was not ready to give up, so he called an important godly official in the Persian empire (a Jew named Nehemiah) to lead a new delegation back to Jerusalem to get the revival going again. Nehemiah helped the Jews to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, but they still were not in a good place spiritually. So Ezra, the main Bible teacher of this revamped nation, stepped up.

SCRIPTURE: NEHEMIAH 8:1, 5-11

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...

v5 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 worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

The Levites instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear 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.

Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

The Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for this is a holy day. Do not grieve."

DEVOTION

The Book of the Law of Moses that Ezra read from was most likely the whole Pentateuch – the first five books of the Old Testament. These books contain foundational narratives of God's relationship with his people, but they particularly focus on how God's family can live in covenant relationship with him. They lay out what Israel



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needed to do to live close to God. Now you would probably find someone reading laws to you rather boring. A bit like someone reading a Constitution aloud. Not a promising start for revival. But most of these people were illiterate. They were used to listening to the leaders read and as Nehemiah makes clear, there were some helpful explanations happening as the covenant law was read. They also stood the whole time out of respect for God's word, and this probably aided concentration.

Whatever the arrangements, God was at work in a powerful way this day. Everyone started to cry as they listened. They realised that they had not been living the way God wanted. That they had abandoned God and his covenant again. They were mortified at their callousness to what God asked of them. It struck them how far they had slipped away from their God as a nation. And the tears flowed. They were deeply sorry. God was convicting them about their apathy and disobedience. Revival was beginning. Revival is always accompanied by deep repentance from sin. This seems to be the only way to enter revival. God convicts and we repent. Often accompanied by tears. We repent alone and we repent together.

But while repentance is vital and Israel would need to do more of it (see Nehemiah 9), revival does not stop there. The spiritual leaders of the nation recognised this. The dominant emotion of revival is not grief but joy. The joy of coming close to God. The joy of living God's way. The joy of following God together. The joy of delighting in God. The joy of seeing God work in power. The joy of the Lord becomes our strength. In revival there will be more joy than you could ever dream of. A foretaste of heaven.

PRAYER RESPONSE

Lord I long for the tears that will bring release. Release from my shame and guilt. Release from my cold-heartedness to you. Release from the chains of sin that bind me. But even better will be fresh joy. I desperately need your joy to sustain my spiritual strength. I want to profoundly enjoy you and your work.

PRAYER FOR REVIVAL

Lord in your grace, please bring your conviction on us – our church, our community, our nation. Show us how we have abandoned you. How we have wounded you. How we have ignored you. How we have disappointed you. Do not leave us alone to slowly perish in our self-righteousness. Please convict us so that we can know real joy.

