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NEHEMIAH 8:13-18

Series: Life Lessons from Nehemiah

I'm really pleased, grateful for Tom's ministry. If you're here today and you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, there's a transformation that can take place in your life when you do. The message of the gospel is powerful. People are hungry today. They need answers. You've come to the right place today. If you don't know Jesus Christ personally, you'll get to know Him today. We'd love to talk to you more about what that looks like in very practical ways for you. Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we thank you for the ministry that Tom and Theresa have and we pray your blessing on them. Prepare the neighborhoods that they visit, prepare the hearts of the people that they come in contact with. Thank you for their tracks. We pray that those tracks would be received by those that aren't around, but they just leave the tracks sometimes. Lord, we just ask that you would bless your word as it goes out to touch people's hearts. We all know that we have a mission to share your message with others, so we thank you for the encouragement that Tom and Theresa are to each one of us and we pray that you'd use us to be the light for you in our world. In Jesus' name, amen.

You can open your Bibles to Nehemiah, the last part of chapter 8. The last part of chapter 8 we're going to look at today. I want you to understand what happens. When you look at God's word, here's your goal. Your goal is to find something. When you read the Bible, your goal is to find something. You're looking for applications to apply to your life. But here's how it works. You go into the Bible and you try to understand what does the passage mean by what it says? What is the interpretation? There's only one interpretation. We might disagree at points about what that interpretation is, but there's one interpretation. What it meant to those people at that time when God inspired those people to write it down. There's one interpretation.

As you study the different passage and you dig into the context, then often these principles emerge. The principles are timeless truths that are true across the age span so that children, youth, and adults all can benefit from the principles. The principles are true and valuable for people across history that people many years ago are applying God's word and we too in our period of time can do the same thing. The word of God is applicable and these principles cross even cultural boundaries. It's really fascinating to see how God's word applies in different cultures.

One of the things I do is I train biblical parenting coaches. Today starts an eight-week training for my coaches. In my training I have a group of students. Two are from China, one is from Nigeria, and one is Latvia (that's in eastern Europe) among a number of people in the U.S. Now

what's fascinating to me is that biblical parenting principles apply to parenting in different cultures, and they are practicing that and we are getting stories in the group. They may use different terminology oftentimes, but we're seeing how God's principles apply across cultural boundaries. So these principles come up. They cross over the boundaries and they come down in the form of applications. It's the application that you and I are looking for. What does God want from me today? How can I apply this to my life today?

So let me bring you up to date on our story. Ezra is speaking to the people. He's on this platform, on this stage and he's got thirteen guys on the stage with him and he's got thirteen in the crowd and they're explaining more of the word. So he reads the scriptures, the Law of Moses (the first five books). We don't know exactly what he read, what portions. Maybe he picked and chose what he wanted to read during those days, but he read portions of the Old Testament (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). As the people listened to whatever he was reading, they were touched in their hearts and they realized these words that were written long ago apply to me right now and I need this in my life. So it changed them.

In that first day, in day one, which was their new year's day. It's the seventh month, first day, which is their civil new year. Like we often say we start a new year in the fall as school is starting and so on. After summer's over we start a new year. That's the kind of new year it was for them. And it's the seventh month, first day. They hear the word of God read to them and taught to them from about 6:30 A.M. to about noon the Bible says. And their hearts are just so convicted as they listened to the words.

I don't know exactly what the words were, but I'm going to read you a passage right now. In fact we're going to read it and stand together in a moment. It's a passage that comes from Deuteronomy and it's just so fresh. When I read this passage this week, I said I'm going to read this to everybody while we're standing because that's what happened. Ezra was speaking and all the people stood up in honor of God's word and they listened to it and it touched their hearts. And these were the people who had been in the Promised Land. Of course they had come in many years before and they had lost their touch with God and they started worshiping other idols and God tried to bring them back with the prophets, but eventually they had the captivity where the foreign armies came and took them away. Now they're back and now they're reading the word. You know if you spend some time away from God and you come back to Him, there's this freshness that you enjoy. The Bible says that as they were standing there and hearing the word it touched their hearts.

Maybe this is one of the passages they read out of Deuteronomy 8:10-18. Stand with me as I read this. Imagine you're standing as the sun is coming up over the wall of Jerusalem in the morning and Ezra is reading these verses to the people out of Deuteronomy 8:10-18.

He says this: *When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the*

land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

As the people were listening to God’s word, they were touched so much by the words (maybe this passage, but other passages like it) where they’re warned here be careful of your pride because your pride can cause you to say I have all this because of my own hands. And he says remember the Lord your God. *Remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gave you the ability to produce wealth.* Don’t forget the Lord your God. Remember the Lord your God. That’s the message and they’re hearing that and it’s meaning something very powerful to them.

You may be seated.

So obviously a principle that comes out of this passage is this idea to remember the Lord your God and something that we want to take away. Now that is significant for these people because they’re touched. They don’t have Bibles that they carry around. They have the Bible read to them occasionally like this and they’re reminded again of who God is and what He has done for them. That’s day one. Their first day of the seventh month, their New Year’s Day.

Let’s go to day two and that’s in our passage that you can see in Nehemiah 8. Verse 13 says this: *On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the teacher to give attention to the words of the Law.* They’re giving attention, they want to pay attention because they’re coming with this sense of anticipation. God is going to speak. What does He have for us? What is He going to say?

Notice it says the next two words – *they found*. Because every time you open the Bible you are on a mission, you are anticipating something. You want to find something. You want to find an application, a passage that applies to you, something that can help change your day. This is going to change their day. It’s going to change their week actually. They’re going to take this and they’re going to run with this in a powerful way.

So it says – *They found written in the Law, which the Lord had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month.* They’re in the seventh month. They’re reading about this is what you do in the seventh month. There’s a festival that you guys need to participate in. So they’re hearing his and they’re going whoa, tell us more.

Verse 15 – *and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem (here’s the word): “Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make temporary shelters” —as it is written.*

So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves temporary shelters on their own roofs (these are tents that they make out of these branches and stuff), in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God and in the square by the Water Gate (where the reading of this word is) and the one by the Gate of Ephraim. The whole company that had returned from exile built temporary shelters and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great.

Day after day, from the first day to the last (that's the first day to the eighth day; it's an eight-day feast), Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.

Okay. Now you're looking at this and going okay that makes sense. They got excited about it, but what does it mean for us? This is one of those times where if I interpret this for you, if I help you understand it, it will mean more to you and it will make more sense to you and you'll be able to recognize the application that God might have for you.

There were seven feasts. I've shown you this slide. I'm going to show it to you again. There were seven feasts in Israel. Each one of the feasts had a purpose. They had a purpose to remind the people of something. For example, the Passover. You know the Passover. All of this is read in Leviticus 23. So Ezra must have been reading Leviticus 23 to them and they got to the seventh feast and they're going whoa, that's this month. We should be doing that now. We'll talk about that one in a moment.

Every one of these festivals is important in the Jewish calendar. Because each one reminded them of something that God was doing and that they could do in response to the Lord. Passover, you know, is that celebration where the people escaped out of Egypt because they put the blood of the Lamb on the sides of the door and on the top of the door. And when the angel saw the blood, he passed over them. Don't ever forget this. That's why we're going to call it Passover. And you need to celebrate this and tell your children what this is about. So Passover is reminding the people of their deliverance that God had cared for them and taken them.

Now we can look at all of the feasts. We'll look in particular at the last one. But you got to realize Jesus many, many years later lived in Israel, was in Jerusalem during feast times. He celebrated these feasts. We have stories in the gospels about things around the feasts that were going on. Not only did He celebrate them, but His very life embodied these feasts, were a fulfillment of these feasts.

Look at the first one. Do you know that Jesus was crucified on Passover? God worked out the calendar so when Jesus was crucified it took place on Passover. So now these people who went and got their little lamb and they're killing the lamb and they're eating that lamb on the Passover meal as a representation that God had rescued them and delivered them with the blood. Now Jesus Christ died on the cross for us, rescuing us with the blood of Christ. That is really powerful that God designed it that way.

Each one of the feasts have this statement about this is what you need to remember people. And the Jewish calendar is full of these things. The Unleavened Bread, that was a feast for seven days.

Firstfruits was one that they brought at the beginning of the harvest time. They took their very first harvest, they went out there and got that wheat or whatever it is, and they gave it to the Lord as a statement. Not Lord, I'm not just going to give you the leftovers of my life. I want to give you the very firstfruits. So it was a statement, a celebration. His firstfruits.

Pentecost, as you know, happens fifty days after Passover and it's remembered in particular the purpose is to show joy and thanksgiving over the harvest that has taken place. But in the New Testament God chose this day of Pentecost to be the birth of His church. When Peter got up and the Holy Spirit came down, and the disciples spoke in tongues, and people heard the message, and three thousand people got the tracks that day and they got the message, and they accepted Jesus Christ in their lives, and they go forward – yes, we need this – that's Pentecost.

It's just each one of these feasts are powerful. There's a Feast of Trumpets which is the seventh month day one. We talked about that already. That's the civil new year that they experience.

The Day of Atonement is an amazing holiday for them. Just restored fellowship by the fact that God has atoned for their sin.

And now we come to the last one and that's what we're talking about today. I want you to understand. It will make sense to you in the passage in Nehemiah that we're reading. This is the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Tabernacles. It's the Feast of Tents or the making of these little booths. I want to understand what the purpose of this is. Because it's reminding them that they traveled around the wilderness for forty years. And when they traveled around the wilderness for forty years, God provided them food with manna, He gave them water to drink out of the hard rock, He provided them with protection from their enemies. They often had to build little shelters out of booths and so they built these tents. It's like a camping experience.

So if we go to Leviticus, which is the passage that Ezra must have been reading at the time, then we see Leviticus says this: *Live in temporary shelters for seven days.* They would go and grab these branches and they would stack them up together to form a little booth or a tent. It was like a camping experience. Even today the Jewish people celebrate this feast. If you're busy during the day, maybe some of them just eat in this place for their dinner in the evening. Or some of them go and sleep there overnight or they'll take one or two nights and do something. But it's a whole celebration for them.

But notice. *All native-born Israelites are to live in such shelters.* Why? Why do you do this? This is a family learning experience. You go out and do this because *your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in temporary shelters.* Don't let them forget. It's this idea of remember the Lord.

And you want to pass this on to your children so they understand this. The purpose of all of this: Pass this on to the kids so they'll get it. Young people and children, they need to know this

message because when you build a shelter, “Why are we doing this, Dad?” “Well, let me tell you the story, son, about how this happened.” “Dad, how come you’re involved in this?” “Well, let me tell you the story about my own history and how I either am a Jew or became a Jew. Let me tell you about my life. Let me tell you about what’s going on.” The meaningful conversations that took place to pass on the faith from one generation to the next generation.

This Feast of Booths is described in other places of scripture, but I want to show you some pictures of these are modern day booths. This is the Feast of Sukkot it’s called or the Feast of Tabernacles. So they’ll build a little place. But one of the rules here when you build your little booth, you want to have space in the branches at the top so that you can see the stars. Yeah, rain might get in. But you want to be able to see the stars because you want to tell stories. And one of the stories is – You see all those stars up there, daughter? They represent this promise that God made to Abraham that through you all the nations of the earth will be blessed and that your descendants will be more than the stars of the sky. That’s another rendition of the Sukkot. It’s about children. It’s an exciting one so that children can learn more about the faith, that we can pass this faith onto them.

It’s just a strategic thing for us to pass the faith onto the next generation. We’re trying to do this here at church. Obviously we’re very concerned about young people and children, but also this role that parents have in passing the faith onto their children is a strategic one. Remember the Lord. Don’t forget what God has done for you because you can become proud, you can start pushing things out.

Young people start developing opinions sometimes about the faith. Sometimes young people will imagine well during the week I learned about history and science and math and then on Sunday I learn about the Bible. It’s just another subject. When in reality what we need to do is help our young people understand that the Bible that this Christian worldview is the basis for science and history and English and math. That it’s integrated together. Sometimes young people have a hard time with that idea. Integrating faith into the rest of their schooling to the rest of their lives. Let’s pass the faith onto the next generation is the idea here.

Now this whole event took place many times. And in Deuteronomy as he’s sending the people into the land again, he’s describing for them what they should do when they get together to celebrate Sukkot. He says – *Assemble the people—men, women and children*. Notice everybody, the whole family, is getting together. And this other group of people, that’s *the foreigners in the land*. That’s you and me, by the way. Unless you’re Jewish here today, you and me, that’s us. We’re *the foreigners residing in your towns*.

So why do we get together on Sukkot? Why do we get together on this festival? *So they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law*. They come together to read the scriptures so they can learn how to live.

Their children (that is the your children, your and my children and all the ones who are non-Jewish people, the people who are sojourners that have come into the land, the foreigners), *who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess*.

There is a mission on Sukkot or the Feast of Tabernacles to pass the faith onto the next generation. That is the goal. How are we going to get that faith passed on? Let's tell stories. Let's help them understand. Let's read the scriptures so that everybody can know what the Bible means and how we can apply it to our lives. So let's take some applications and draw some principles from this that we can apply in our own lives. I would suggest that if you're a parent the first thing you want to do is you want to try to have meaningful and significant conversations with your children. That's hard to do sometimes.

One of my clients this week, a sixteen year old girl in some other place in the world, and the parents are saying life goes on fine, she's not giving us a hard time, but we have a hard time having a significant conversation. Significant conversations are hard sometimes. So I said, "Okay. you're on assignment. You tell your daughter, 'I have an assignment. I need to have four conversations with you this week.'" She said, "Oh that's going to be great. Now we have kind of a reason to get into these conversations." I said, "Great. If that's what you need, do it." So meaningful conversations are very important. We also want to create on-ramps to talk about spiritual things.

When they sat in the camping out experience (you know when you sit and you're camping out and there's no internet and no cell phones wherever you are), then conversations become part of your life and it's obviously an opportunity then to talk more about spiritual things. I think we need to learn to be more transparent about our own spirituality. You know that God is working in our lives every day and we're okay about praying and we're okay about talking about God and what He's doing. We want to make spirituality an obvious priority in our lives. So if you're a parent, those are some applications for you.

Parents today, here's one of the things they want to know. How can I accelerate the development of my child? I want to help my child grow up strong. I want to accelerate their development. And so they get them involved in all kinds of good things, things like sports and music and martial arts and drama and all kinds of good things. Those are great things because they help accelerate development. But there's nothing that can accelerate development in a child as spiritual training. Because spiritual training does something really big. It helps children think outside of themselves and understand identity and why am I here and who am I. It helps them understand that there's a God in the world who is working and that I'm living my life for. There's an understanding that I'm more others-centered. And young people can become rather self-focused. So helping them understand a biblical worldview, how we're others-focused does something to them that accelerates their development. Obviously I could talk about parenting for a long time.

Let's talk about children. If you're a young person here, I want you to understand something really important about your role in catching the faith. So it's not just catching the faith, it's passing it and you have a job to do, young people, and here's what it says. Joshua 4, this is another story about how the Israelites actually did cross over the Jordan River and Joshua says go get these stones, stack them up there and here's why. *Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord.* Who's responsible in the

passage for the initiative, for the faith-passing? It's the children. The children need to be asking questions.

Children and young people, do you know what your mom or dad did to become a Christian? What prompted them to accept Jesus Christ in their lives? Young person, do you know why your parents chose to attend this church out of other churches? That's a good question to discuss why. Young people, do you know why your parents handle their lives differently than other people and their emotions and their finances and their time? Asking questions about that is something young people can do to catch the faith. And there's a responsibility for young people and children tied right into this. We want to extend this gospel to the next generation.

And then I would say for the rest of us, that is the sojourners, the travelers in the land, the people who have been grafted into the family, were adopted into God's family, we need to realize this. If you're a sojourner, you need to learn about the Lord and you can start anytime. That's one of the beautiful things. The Jewish people would welcome people into their community, but like all of us who are welcomed into God's family, we're a little behind. We've got to do some remedial work. We got some catch-up. We've got to figure out what the things are going on, what's happening here. We've got to get involved in this and learn and grow and understand what God has for us. We've got work to do. What are we going to do? We're going to go to God's word and we're going to learn more about that and what God has for us.

God's church is called a family because it fills in all the gaps, safety net for all people. So even if you were raised in a Christian home, there are challenges that you face in your home that left holes and God has provided a church to be that place where He can continue to work in our lives as a family. Some of you are not with your family. You are moved away, your family has excluded you, or something. The church is this place that God has allowed for this family to grow, a place for us to learn and grow. And then I think the whole key issue in this passage is remember the Lord. We all want to look for ways to look for the Lord because we have a tendency to forget.

So I'm going to read this passage that I started with again. This is just so helpful. He says – *When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.*

And so those people in Nehemiah's time who went out and they said they found something in God's word. This is something. We've got to do this. And they built these little booths and they started talking about the Lord and it became part of who they were. We're on a mission to go and find out from God's word the applications that we can take back in our own hearts and lives and apply them in practical and special ways in our own lives.

I hope you'll remember the Lord. How do you remember the Lord? I suggest you have a Bible. They didn't have a Bible. You've got reminders, technology that sends you a verse of the day. You've got all kinds of ways to remember the Lord. Every day of our lives we can do that. Remember the Lord. Because remember the Lord – it keeps us humble, recognizing who we are, why we're here, and what God has for us.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, teach us how to live for you every day. We ask, Lord, that you would help us integrate our personal faith into our lives in ways that impact us, impact our hearts. Lord, we're grateful for all you've done and we never want to forget that where we are today is because of your grace, your power, and your work in our lives. Lord, use us to be effective vessels for you. We ask that you would allow us to be the ones who are sharing with the sojourners and the travelers in this world who need you so much. And you are the God who provides even the ability to make wealth, has given us so much that we have. And we're grateful for that. Thank you, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.