

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE 10.30.22

As One Man: The Collective Spiritual Sense of a Gathered People Under Christ

Nehemiah 8:1-8

The book of Nehemiah is the account of how one man named Nehemiah would be released from Babylonian captivity to go rebuild the city wall around his home town, Jerusalem. By chapter eight, the people have gathered for worship, now under the leadership of Ezra, the priest. And if you read to verse 9 and following you'll see that such proclamation led to genuine revival. Nehemiah knew what God knew - it's not enough to build the wall, there must be life on the inside.

In verse one we see a phrase used to describe the gather of God's people, "one man." Though the church is not present but only in distant view (Acts 2), the people of God are no less present here in Nehemiah 8 and are gathered as one assembly. Therefore, as CBC gathered on this day as one service (Homecoming), it is appropriate to see such a phrase as setting forth a main idea as consider the passage in full.

MAIN IDEA: When the people of God gather, God sees them as one.

What then does it mean for the people of God to gather as "one man"? With the Bible in mind, and the church in view, we could make a few (4), though not exhaustive, explanations to better understand the notion of "one man" as illustrating the gathering of God's people. The church is: a collective noun; a public witness; a spiritual force; and a gospel community.

- a. The church is a collective noun. The gathering reminds us that the Christian is part of a greater whole. That's why membership matters.
- b. The church is a public witness. The people give a witness to the watching world. The local church assembles publicly as an expression of their identity with Christ and community with one another.
- c. The church is a spiritual force. The people believe and obey as they participate in a worship service. It is not merely the sitting under the preaching, but the singing, praying, giving, and most important the observation of ordinances. We are not gathering just to gather. We are gathering with the intention to worship.
- d. The church is a gospel community. No other gathering functions like the local church. Here is a kingdom outpost of heaven. The church is a people of "use to be" people. They use to be lost, but now they are found. They used to be dead, but now they are alive. The church is a changed people. They have been transformed on the inside by the gospel. To gather with these people is to see a people in the world but not of the world.

The gathered people had a certain spiritual sense about them. They gathered as a whole and presented one mind as one man. As we read on we see the priorities of the gathered people. We may think of them as the "priorities for every worship service."

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1. Expository Preaching (v. 2-5)

The people were hungry for the Word, begging Ezra to “bring the Book.” They were committed to believing and obeying the Bible. They were people “who could understand what they heard,” not just in terms of language, but the Bible itself. We see a model of expository preaching—reading, explaining, and applying the word—as well as of prioritizing preaching. Ezra stood on a centralized platform (the arrangement of a church’s furniture can tell you what they value), and the people committed their time, remaining from “early morning until midday” with attentive ears.

2. Fervent Prayer (v. 6)

God demands a response, and prayer is how we respond. Prayer is the apex of worship. Preaching is provocative, and in our prayerful response we show our contrition of heart and our desire to be conformed to God’s word. Ezra did not give an invitation, his preaching was the invitation. One to prayer, and humility before God. We therefore see the need less chatter and buzz in our lives, more stillness and silence, consecration and gravity.

3. Spiritual Progress (v. 7-8)

These verses include a list of functional elders—men who helped the people understand the law and who acted as spiritual shepherds. We see progress in people’s spiritual lives as a result of God’s grace. Information and application lead to transformation. Jesus said that we are to make disciples by teaching them to observe all that he has commanded them. Before discipleship is anything, it is teaching. And when people understand the Bible, spiritual progress is made in their life.

Nehemiah 8 therefore is a picture of revival. We see a people returned from captivity, gathered together inside the newly built walls ready to worship God. Their restoration was not by the means of the mystical, but through the ordinary means of grace - people, preaching, prayer and progress.

What then do we bring to the worship service? Those numbered among God’s people must have these priorities of mind as they gather for corporate worship: Preaching, prayer, and progress. Or perhaps put in imperative form: to know God’s word, to pray in God’s ear, and to aid in God’s mission.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can a church collectively prioritize preaching and prayer?
2. How does it shape our understanding of prayer to realize that God demands a response?
3. What does spiritual progress look like in the life of the local church and what is its connection to worship?



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