

The Happiest Place on Earth

Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to Nehemiah 8. Nehemiah 8. As Ted mentioned, it is a camping weekend and that happens a couple times a year at Providence and from what I understand, about 70 people are up there at Lake Lanier. You know, I'm not much of a camper so we don't usually camp out, we actually never camp out, not usually. We have maybe once or twice and we repented of it and returned to the Lord. No, the Lord's sense of humor is just so wonderful though, the providential timing of God because, you know I will say some things like that about the camping trip and I really don't, I believe there's so much good that comes out of it because there's great fellowship that really happens, people are together for extended periods of time, able to talk about Christ, and so it's really a wonderful thing, okay? But you know I have made little tongue-in-cheek comments about it here and there because I'm not always crazy about 70 people being gone on a Sunday. But the Lord's sense of humor, today we are in a passage of Scripture, Nehemiah 8:13 to 18, where the Lord's people are worshiping God by living in tents. I was thinking, you know, the Lord is just silencing me and we have some brothers that really took this text very literally.

So today the title of our message this morning is "The Happiest Place on Earth." The happiest place on earth. I borrow that phrase from Walt Disney when he created Disneyland, that was the tagline that they gave Disneyland in the 1950s, the happiest place on earth, the place where you could go and forget your troubles, go to a place that celebrates the world of make-believe. Happiness there, though, really is make-believe happiness. It's pretending. It's not rooted in reality. But we come this morning to a passage of Scripture which, I think, shows us at a moment in time, the time is 445 BC, the place is Jerusalem, the people here are the people of God, the Jews who had returned from exile, and what we witness in this text is the experience of the happiest place on earth at that moment by far because the happiest place on earth is where the people of God are experiencing the presence of God and the power of God. That's where the joy of the Lord is your strength. God is filled with joy and to be in his presence is fullness of joy. At his right hand there are pleasures forevermore and so the happiest place on earth is where the people of God are experiencing the presence of God and the power of God, the real active presence of the living God.

A couple of observations before we get into the outline that I want to share before we read the text. True genuine happiness is completely unrelated to your circumstances. Earthly happiness, human happiness is all about your circumstances but true spiritual happiness or joy is disconnected from, it's irrelevant what your circumstances are. I mean, you have to grapple with them, you have to face them but true happiness comes in the midst of difficult circumstances for the people of God. These people that experience this incredible joy we're going to read about in just a moment, their circumstances were not good and they were experiencing God's presence in the midst of a very dark and difficult time in the lives of the people of God.

Experiencing God. I use that phrase when I said the people of God experiencing God's presence, I use that advisedly. I'm alluding to a book that was written in the '90s which I'm not recommending at all, the book was "Experiencing God," by Henry Blackaby. I think he was a well-meaning brother in the Lord. It's called "Experiencing God" and the idea was to help the people of God to experience God, to have an experiential relationship with the living God and that's certainly a noble attempt, a noble objective, even a right objective when we really understand what that means. But he offered a pathway that was not biblical and so it was basically you will experience God by trying to listen to inner impressions, to hear the Lord's voice in your life, and to try to join God where you see him working. So it taught some unbiblical ways, though I think in general there was a lot of Scripture and it wasn't all bad but there were some fundamental flaws that made it a damaging book. But I believe this passage tells us how you really do experience the presence and power of God and it's not through trying to listen to something within. Even when you're trying to hear God's voice within, I'm not saying that God can't prompt you, he can do that but the Bible does not instruct you to look for that. God does not call us to be looking for his voice anywhere other than in the pages of Scripture. This is where we hear God's voice, the word of God, and this is what we see in this passage. These people are the happiest people on earth because they are experiencing the presence and power of God because they are experiencing him reveal himself through the written word of God and it's transforming their lives in the midst of their circumstances. God's not making them happy by changing their circumstances, he's making them happy within their circumstances because they're coming to know the living God. It's the word of God expounded and applied because the word of God expounded and applied reveals the character and the heart of God. This is God's purpose. He reveals himself in these words. This is his means. It's the foolishness of preaching. It's the foolishness of words in human language that God has chosen this apparently unimpressive means to be the avenue through which the glory of heaven makes itself known in the midst of the deep need of humanity in real life experience. It's the word of God. So let's read God's word and look at this worship and joy of the people.

Nehemiah 8:13,

13 Then on the second day the heads of fathers' households of all the people, the priests and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law. 14 They found written in the law how the LORD had commanded through Moses that the sons of

Israel should live in booths during the feast of the seventh month. 15 So they proclaimed and circulated a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches of other leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written." 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. 17 The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them. [In the text it says, "Lived in the booths."] The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was great rejoicing. 18 He read from the book of the law of God daily, from the first day to the last day. And they celebrated the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly according to the ordinance.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we come to You this morning and we want to come humbly, we want to come as Your word tells us to, that You dwell with those who are humble and contrite and who tremble at Your word. So Lord, let us in the word of God behold Your glory, cause to come from our hearts, the depth of our beings, true worship, deeper love and affection for You, more faithful and right obedience and, Lord, in that, may we find our great joy in You, our greatest treasure. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

The happiest place on earth is the place where the people of God are experiencing the presence and power of God through the word of God. I don't know about you, but this seems like in our day that happiness is becoming a more and more elusive commodity. There was a phrase you may have heard before that used to be talked about a lot, really particularly in the '70s and '80s, it was called the misery index. It was an economic, it was a vision of an economist who basically said the misery index was to take the unemployment rate and add the inflation rate to it and then you had the misery index. So if the unemployment rate was 7%, inflation was back then like 10 or 11%, the misery index was like 18%.

So that's an interesting thought and it certainly has some validity to it, I mean, people's lives are very difficult when unemployment and inflation are high but I think from a standpoint of the spiritual misery index and I just want to throw something out at you to think about and maybe help frame our observation and interpretation of this passage. I think there's a sense of a spiritual or maybe not spiritual but soul index or soul misery which comes not from adding the unemployment rate and the inflation rate but it comes from adding the resentment rate of two things. As people resent God's design and people resent God's providence, they become more and more miserable and this is what's happening in our culture. People resent, they resist and resent God's design. They resist and resent how he has created them. They resist and resent when he made them, where he made them, how he made them, the sex he made them, physical characteristics with

which he made them, the intellectual capacity with which he made them, and resenting that is a sure path to misery. Resisting it is a sure path to misery. You will only reap misery. Then people resent God's providence. They resent the fact that how he has governed their lives, what he's done in their lives, what he's allowed to happen to them. And when you think about it, if you resent what God is doing in your life and you resent how God made you, you are increasingly miserable and our culture is running to that. It's all about resenting all that's happened to you and resenting where you are and how you've been made. It's all about that.

So Christians, we need to be not like the world. Don't increase your misery. In fact, the birthright of the people of God is true and lasting happiness. I mean, the fruit of the Spirit, what are the fruits of the Spirit? Love. Joy. The second fruit in the list, joy right behind love. Think about the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek." And the word "Blessed are" literally means "Oh, how happy." Jesus pronounces the blessing of "Oh, how happy are his people," in each of those eight Beatitudes. So where is our joy? You can have joy in no matter what circumstance you find yourself, no matter what providential thing God brings into your life. It doesn't mean that you have a pretend happiness, you don't go to some kind of spiritual Walt Disney World or Land in your mind, you face reality and you receive the word of God ingrafted and it makes you worship God and love God and trust God in the midst of whatever circumstance you are in and you will have deep abiding joy. This is the way of God. This is the inheritance of the people of God. We are to be as sorrowful yet always rejoicing. We face reality, the world is filled with sorrow, we weep with those who weep, but yet in the midst of it when we are worshipping God, there is a joy that wells up from within and drives away the sorrow so that the sorrow actually becomes a friend because it's pointed us to God. That's the Christian life. It's not thinking about all that you wish was different in your life, it's about going to the one who makes everything different when you're in his presence.

That's what we see here in this passage. The happiest place on earth is the presence of God. The people of God experiencing the presence and power of God through the written word of God, we see this right before our eyes. 445 BC among a group of people who had a lot of reasons to complain. Their prospects for the future were not great. They weren't good. In fact, we're going to see in the next chapter, in chapter 9, as they respond to what God is doing in their lives, they worship him and they even conclude this hymn of praise by acknowledging their ongoing circumstance that they're in that's not changing. They say twice in 9:36, "We are slaves. We are slaves in the land that You have brought us back from exile but we, even though we are in the land, we are slaves in the land." Twice it says that and yet those people who are slaves in the land are filled with joy. That's the inheritance of the people of God. You will find yourself if not today, each of us will find ourselves in hard circumstances, some of you are in hard circumstances right now and you don't know how you're going to make it and we are called to mourn with each other when we're in those circumstances but not to mourn as those who have no hope. We're to weep with those that weep, we're to come alongside them and we're to speak the truth in love and the word of God brings and mediates the presence of the living God, and when you're in the presence of the living God and you

remember that you're robed in the righteousness of Christ, you're filled with joy. Like Peter says in 1 Peter 1, joy inexpressible, joy that you can't even put into words. He says joy inexpressible and full of glory. That's what Peter says about believers who are suffering. 1 Peter, the keyword in the book of 1 Peter is the word "suffer or suffering," 15 times in that book the word "suffer and suffering." In the passage I just mentioned, 1 Peter 1:8, he's talking about suffering through trials which are hard to go through, painful, and yet when you keep believing and trusting, what do you keep believing? You're believing the word of God and you're meeting Christ in it. He says then you see Jesus. No, no, you don't see him, you experience him. Though you don't see him, you love him. You're experiencing his presence in such a way that you are now filled with joy inexpressible, full of glory.

That is the birthright for the people of God but it comes in an unexpected way. It comes in an apparently unimpressive way. It doesn't come with bells and whistles. It doesn't come with, you know, warm feelings, some kind of spiritual impulse, emotional fervor that wells up from within other than it starts with the word of God. That which seems just bare and actually have you not had the experience of reading your Bible sometimes and feeling like you're just looking at rows of black print on white paper? There are times we don't feel anything, even, but faith keeps going to Scripture and that kind of faith will always receive the promises. "Without faith it is impossible to please God, for the one who comes to Him must believe that He is and He is a rewarder of all who diligently seek Him," but we are to seek him according to his means and we seek him in his word.

What I want us to look at this morning is two things, two points, two main points this morning about how these people experienced the presence and power of God in the midst of difficult and dark circumstances, and the first point is they had a right approach to the Scriptures. They had a right approach to the Scriptures. We look at this passage and we see people who hunger for the word of God and who attend to the word of God and are transformed by the word of God, that it's important to learn a right approach because you can be in the word of God and receive nothing from it if you don't come to it the right way. I want to call attention to four subpoints here of a right approach, four imperatives that I think they illustrate as we look at the people in Nehemiah's day, that they illustrate that we need to have in our heart as we come to the word of God if we want the Scriptures to be the place where we meet God.

The first is to be expectant. When you read the Bible, be expectant. Expect God to speak through his word. Realize that when you read the Bible, though it may seem like you're reading rows of black print on white paper, in reality this is the living word of God. This is the way he has chosen to reveal himself. This is where heaven meets earth, the word of God. We see this in the way that they approached the Scriptures. In verse 13, "Then on the second day," that's the second day of the seventh month, "the heads of fathers' households of all the people, the priests and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law." They came to gain insight. The idea is they came to gain understanding. They came motivated. They're expecting God to do something. They're not just going through the motions, they're coming eagerly to hear from God and they believe that the very words of Scripture are the words of God. The

text emphasizes this. They wanted insight into the words of the law. The law, the first five books of the Old Testament, the law, the Torah, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. They expected that those five books, that the words of the law, that if they went to them, they would gain insight and the insight would give them experience of the living God and the ability to live for him.

The idea of the written word is emphasized. "They found written in the law," verse 14, "how the LORD had commanded through Moses." You see, they understand that when Moses spoke, God spoke. So they come expectant because they believe, they come believing this is the word of the living God and after they hear, they read about they're supposed to have branches and make booths, sometimes this was called the Feast of Tabernacles. I kind of like that better because I have trouble saying booths correctly, the th is a little challenging. I mean, it's not like that Feast of Boots. Everybody is wearing boots. No, the Feast of Booths, Feast of Tents, Feast of Tabernacles. It's a time that commemorated the 40 year wilderness wandering when the people of God went from the Exodus in Egypt to Canaan and God was in their midst, his glory was present in a pillar of fire at night, a pillar of cloud by day, that glory cloud dwelt over the tabernacle, the tent of meeting that they made right after they left Egypt so that they could worship God, they received instructions at Mount Sinai how they were to worship God, they made the Tent of Meeting and then the glory cloud dwelt over that tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting. And then when the pillar of fire would leave the Tent of Meeting and start moving, the people would follow after. The wonderful experience of the presence of God. They had the visible manifest presence of God, the Shekinah glory, and they knew where to go. Where do you go? You follow the pillar.

What an amazing time and these people are remembering now to commemorate that because the Lord when he saved his people out of Egypt, he gave three main feasts. There were a number of feasts but three main yearly pilgrimage feasts that they were to celebrate each year. The calendar was to be a continual reminder of the acts of God in history and those three feasts were the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was associated with Passover, that's the first one. The second was the Feast of Weeks, which is also called Pentecost. And the third was the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles, sometimes also called the Feast of Ingathering. This feast happened in the seventh month of the Jewish year which corresponds to our fall, September/October, and they were to commemorate these three feasts to commemorate the works of God. Unleavened Bread commemorated what God did in the actual deliverance of the people from Egypt. They killed the Passover lamb again each year to commemorate that that's how God delivered them from Egypt and then they ate unleavened bread for a week. It symbolized the absence of sin, that somehow God was teaching them through this that the blood offered by the Passover lamb took away their sins and so they were looking back every year when they celebrated Passover, they would be celebrating looking back at that.

The Feast of Weeks or Pentecost which followed 50 days, seven weeks after Passover, celebrated the firstfruits of the land, the possession of the land. We talked about this on Easter Sunday because that's when Peter preached his sermon on the Feast of Pentecost in Acts 2. So they celebrated, it was God giving them the land that they were celebrating in

the second feast. The first feast, God's deliverance, it pointed to Christ. The second feast, the possession of the land which, in a sense, points to heaven and all the blessings of heaven that become yours when you become a believer. You begin to have the firstfruits, you have the Holy Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit. All of those things are given to the believer. That's firstfruits and so they, the Jews were reminded each year to think back on what God did in the Passover so that they would understand they need a Passover lamb to come, Jesus who is our Passover, 1 Corinthians 5:7. Every year they were to celebrate the Feast of Weeks, they would celebrate and they would be bringing the firstfruits of this harvest, the wheat harvest that had just finished and the barley harvest that was previous to that, and they're bringing the firstfruits and they're thanking God for the blessings of the land, his provision for them, and they're anticipating the blessings of the land, of the true land of Canaan, the spiritual Canaan, heaven.

But the third feast, there is some irony about this third feast. Celebrate the time that you lived in tents, your fathers lived in tents. You mean the time before we had houses? Yes. The time before we had lands? Yes. The time before we had any possessions? Yes. The time before we ate any good food? Yes. The Feast of Tabernacles commemorated that time of wandering in the wilderness where they were homeless, in a sense. They didn't have, they weren't eating of the fat of the land. They were eating manna every day. Manna fell from heaven and they would make it into bread, they had to make it into cakes. It was like some kind of floury sort of thing that God was sending down out of heaven every day and they got tired of the manna. I think it's Numbers 12 or 11, chapter 11 where they complain about the manna. Now it's interesting, the Hebrew word "manna" is actually "manna." We don't translate that. That's a transliteration of the Hebrew word. If we translated it, we would say they ate what's this? What is it? That's what the word "manna" means in Hebrew. They called the manna "what is this?" We might colloquialize it, what is this stuff? That's what they called the manna.

So they ate manna for 40 years. Now they could have had a quicker time of manna, they could have gotten there in just a couple of years if they'd gone into the land by faith when they first had the opportunity when Joshua and Caleb were saying, "Let's take the land." But they still would have commemorated this time of a couple years of eating nothing but manna. That's a special diet there. You know, you've got the Keto diet, you've got the manna diet. In Numbers 12, they lament the fact that they actually are sitting there, they're getting manna from heaven every day, they've lost the awareness that this is a daily miracle and they say, "Would that we were back in Egypt that we remember the fish that we had, remember the cucumbers and the leeks, cucumbers and melons, the onions, leeks and garlic?" When I hear that, I've gotten where I like to cook. You can almost never put too much garlic in something, in my book. Onions, yes, more. Garlic, yes. So you understand they remembered the taste of the food back there and so they're out here and they're not having the pleasant food, they just have manna and God is saying, "If you had any sense, if you had any sense, you would be glorying in the fact that for 40 years I fed you with manna, and if you could return to that, you would want that rather than the blessing of the land. So celebrate the fact. Why? Because it wasn't just the manna. You had Me visibly present in your midst." That was typological. God was not intending to do that forever, he was going to do something better than that which is what he did when his

Son came and tabernacled among us. Then when he went to heaven and he sent his Spirit now and you are the temple of the living God.

But their circumstances weren't that great but the words of the law, as they read the words of the law, they gained insight into the words of the law. They came expectantly to the Scriptures, then God fed them from the book. Be expectant. Secondly, be teachable. When you come to the word, be teachable. One of the things that's interesting here, they come to Ezra, they want him to teach them. We need to be teachable. We need to understand that other people need to teach us. We all need to be taught, every one of us. But being teachable isn't just about listening to other people, it's how you listen. Are you willing to submit and obey?

Come to the word expectant but come to the word in a teachable humble frame of mind, that what I find, I will abide by, in fact, that brings us to the third point which really is be submissive. Be expectant, be teachable, be submissive, that is, when the Scripture says something and it's different than what you thought, take your thought out and throw it away and replace it with what the Bible says. That's what it means to be submissive, in fact, being submissive in Scripture is the only sane thing to do. To hear from God and to not do what God says is insane even though people pretty it up and make it look good. They make it look insane to listen to what God says and sane to listen to what they say, and look at the world and how the mess they're making while they do that, and you know from your own life that when you have had a pattern of not listening to God, how quickly your life disintegrates around you. We've all had that experience.

Be submissive. It's really interesting, the author here quite possibly Ezra putting this together in the final version, many people think, he took Nehemiah's journal and his own and he put it all together here in the final written form. But anyway, he tells us in verse 15 that when they had heard the words of the Scripture, they found written in the law how the Lord had commanded through Moses that they should live in booths. This was something new. What's interesting, it wasn't new that they celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles or Feast of Booths. That was not new, in fact, Ezra 3 when they first got back to the Promised Land in Ezra 3, the first thing they did was celebrate the Feast of Booths. Ezra 3, I think it's verse 4. They celebrated the Feast of Booths for a week. They offered all of the offerings that they were supposed to offer that are recorded in Numbers 29 for the Feast of Booths, they offered those offerings. Apparently what they had been missing, though, because we're told as we read on that they celebrated this feast in verse 17, they lived in their booths, the sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. They had not for a thousand years done this. It's interesting, the Exodus happened 1445 BC, here we are 445 BC, a thousand years after the Exodus, a thousand years after they were living in those booths. A thousand years is a long time but they had not done so since the days of Joshua which would have been probably about 60 or 70 years after 1445. So it's been about 930 or 940 years since anybody celebrated the Feast of Booths like this. What was it they did? They actually lived in the tents for the whole week. They saw in the law something that they had missed. This took a very careful humble look at it but when they saw it, they did it.

Before I show you that, I want to mention one thing related to submitting. You see in verse 15, they made a proclamation, that after they saw what the Scripture said, they made a proclamation and there are three imperatives in verse 15. "Go out to the hills," that's the first. The second is, "bring olive branches, wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches, branches of other leafy trees." So it's go and bring to make booths. Go, bring, and make. That's what the Scripture said and that's what they sent out, this is our interpretation of the Scriptures, this is what the Bible says, go, bring and make. And look at verse 16, "So the people went out and [they] brought them and [they] made booths." You see the same three verbs. The text said go, bring, make. The people went, brought and made. Submit to the word of God. When the word of God says something, do it.

But fourthly, be diligent. It relates to that be submissive. It all kind of fits together. Be expectant, we said, be teachable, be submissive, be diligent. You have to go at the word with effort. You've got to study. You've got to really pore over the text. I mentioned that they had been celebrating the Feast of Booths, they celebrated it in Ezra 3, but they had missed this part of it because they hadn't been reading all of the Scriptures. Now they started reading all of the word and obeying all of the word and that resulted in God's presence and glory being made known through all of the word.

They had seen a lot of what is said in Numbers 29 but they had missed Leviticus 23, and so apparently when they're reading the Scriptures, they're attending to the words of the law, somewhere along the way they come to Leviticus 23 and they discover what's been lost for almost a thousand years. Leviticus 23:40, we'll start on verse 39, "On exactly the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD," this is the Feast of Booths. He's already told us that a little bit ahead of this back in verse 34, Leviticus 23:34, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Feast of Booths for seven days to the LORD.'" Then verse 39, "On exactly the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered in the crops of the land, you shall celebrate the feast of the LORD for seven days, with a rest on the first day and a rest on the eighth day. Now on the first day you shall take for yourselves the foliage of beautiful trees, palm branches and boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. You shall thus celebrate it as a feast to the LORD for seven days in the year. It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations; you shall celebrate it in the seventh month. You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths."

That's what they got, live in booths, and I think they also got the idea of rejoicing and celebrating. You're to celebrate three times. That word "celebrate the feast," there are different words sometimes translated as "celebrate." This particular Hebrew word means to, like, move in a circle. The root idea is move in a circle when it says celebrate. The idea is dancing. When it says celebrate here, those three times it's used it's talking about celebrate the feast. It doesn't just mean, okay, it's time to, you know, do what the feast says. No, celebrate it. So they got that part too because they understand they're supposed to be joyful. But they saw for the first time that we've not been doing this. We're

supposed to be making tents out of branches, and so they see that and they add to the word and they do what the word says.

They're diligent to search the Scriptures and to do what it says, so they do that. We saw that in our text. They went out and they got all those branches and brought them in and they made booths and they lived in them for the entire seven days. But not only that, they were searching out other Scriptures that they were finding for apparently the first time in a long time. When you look at Nehemiah 8:18, it says that Ezra, that's the "He" there, "He read from the book of the law of God daily, from the first day to the last day." This is the first record that we have of them doing this too, and that, reading the book of the law first, each day of the feast apparently for the first time in many years was because they found in Deuteronomy 31:10 to 13, another reference to the Feast of Booths. In Deuteronomy 31:10, it says, "At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess." They were to read the law every day throughout the feast every seven years. Well, they haven't done it in a long time so they do it this year.

There's one other reference I'll just mention, you don't have to look it up, but Numbers 29:35. Though they had been practicing some of the stuff there, they also in verse 18 showed that they listened to that verse because "on the eighth day," this is back to Nehemiah 8:18, "on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly according to the ordinance." The ordinance there is from Numbers 29:35. So I just mentioned three passages, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. We could add Deuteronomy 16, I think it's 15 to 17 where they're told to rejoice. They seem to be getting all of the Scripture and they're saying, listen, the Feast of Booths was to be the happiest of all the feasts. When you look at all that it says about all of the feast, that's what you get. The Feast of Booths was to be the happiest.

Now think about that. Wouldn't you be happy about your deliverance from sin, the redemption? Doesn't that make you happy? Of course it does. That's a great reason to be happy. There's incredible joy in that. Aren't you happy that you have the blessings of heaven? That's the Feast of Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks, the second feast. Of course you should be happy in that and you are, you are to be happy. But when you look at the instructions that the law says about all three feasts, it's clear that the Feast of Booths is the most joyful of all three. Think about that. You have joy in your redemption, you have joy in the possession of heaven, but your supreme joy is that you have the presence of the living God. That is your joy, you know God, you're able to be in his presence.

The right approach to Scripture. The second point is the certain result. The right approach, the certain result. The certain result, what we see when you hear the word and

you obey the word, now we need to remind ourselves too, that when we hear, we don't just hear the word and hear it with joy, we obey it, we do it. That whole thing about go, bring, make, they went out, they brought, they made, they did what the word said. James 1:21 to 25 says receive the engrafted word which is able to save your souls and be not hearers of the word but doers. So you've got to be diligent to do the word and when that happens, now then the result, back to the second point, the certain result.

Two subpoints here. The certain result is true worship, that's the first certain result. When you hear the word of God expounded and you apply it to your life and you do what it says, it creates in you the heart of true worship. It is in itself, obedience is the essence of true worship, obedience that's done by grace out of gratitude. We don't obey God to please him, to make him accept us. That's not the gospel. The gospel is not do this and live, the gospel is live and now do this. God changes your heart. God saves you in spite of all that you are, you bring nothing to Christ, you bring nothing, no obedience, no work at all. You come to him humbly, pleading for his mercy and you receive salvation and then having received it now, having received a perfect righteousness, we saw earlier in the passage that was read about the cross that Charles shared, he took our punishment, we get his righteousness. It's a gift. But now the Christian who has a changed heart now has the joy of worshiping God out of gratitude, not to earn anything but out of gratitude for what we've already been given and that is true worship. That is seeing the glory of God and giving all praise and honor to him. There's nothing that we bring ever to the Lord, it's all by grace and that's what happens for these folks. They, because they hear the word, they now know how to worship God rightly with the Feast of Booths. They do everything correctly and the Lord tells you how to worship. We don't make it up ourselves. That never works. It may feel good but it doesn't bring you to God. You worship God according to how he tells you to worship him.

And their worship is true worship according to his word. They make it their desire to worship and it says at the end of verse 17 after it tells us they had not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day, "And there was great rejoicing." Right worship leads to the second subpoint, the certain result is right worship, true worship and great joy. Great joy. In our song earlier, Ted pointed out those lyrics, "Gladness breaks like morning, where ere thy face appears." That's the reality of biblical teaching. In the same way that the dark night gives way to a beautiful dawn, gladness breaks when you see the face of God. In the midst of your difficulty, in the midst of your trial, in the midst of your sorrow, when you see the face of God, the heart of man is truly filled with joy. Nothing more delightful than to see the Lord.

That's what the Lord wants, he wants that for your life. He wants your life to be more and more an experience of the happiest place on earth. You say, "My life is not like that." My life is not a lot too. What's the problem? "Look at all my circumstances. How can I be happy when this goes wrong, and this goes wrong, and I think I'm making some progress over here, something else goes wrong, and when this goes wrong, and this goes wrong. Nothing is going right, how can I be happy?" You can be happy because if you will humble yourself and be instructed in the word of God, you will be in the midst of that

circumstance beholding the face of the glorious King of the universe, knowing his love in the midst of that storm is better than being out of the storm by far.

So the message and think about it too, I mean, the Feast of Tabernacles was basically saying this is how you live. In fact, it's really cool how Deuteronomy 8 and I would encourage you to read this this week, Deuteronomy 8, Moses explains what God was doing in the whole manna business. I mean, I love that. He explains it. He explained it to the people that were still eating the manna. This is why God did this. I mean, God could have had, he could have lined up fast food restaurants all along the way if he wanted to. Seriously, he could have. He's God. But he fed you with manna from heaven, Deuteronomy 8:3 says, so that he might test you and he might humble you and he might show you that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Think about that. Think about the imagery. They were to gather manna every day for that day, not for two days except on Friday, the day before the Sabbath. God would send a double portion of manna that day and you could keep it and it would last for the second day. In fact, when they first started getting the manna, some of the people were like, some of the people that are going around shopping for paper towels and toilet paper, they were hoarding the manna, thinking, "Man, I'm going to get as much of this stuff as I can. I don't know when it's going to come again. I mean, it just dropped out of the sky. We don't think it's going to happen again." So they hoarded it and worms got in it. God had told him, "Tell them to get only enough for a day," and he gave them exactly the amount they should eat. You couldn't keep manna for the second day except on Friday. You could always keep it on Friday.

What was that saying? It was saying, listen, you need the word of God every single day of your life. I need the word of God more than I need my food. I need it every single day. Why do I need the word of God? Well, I'm a sinner. Yes, I need it because of that but I needed it before I was a sinner. I mean, there was never a time before I was a sinner but we needed it before we were sinners. Adam and Eve needed the word of God. I've said it many times, when God created man in their sinless state, the first thing he did after he created them was he spoke to them. Man even without sin needed the word of God to make sense of his life, his place in the world, how much more do we need it every moment to make sense of our lives and our place in the world? But it doesn't just help you understand your place in the world, the beauty of the word of God is it reveals the face of God to you. That's what makes you see your place in the world, is you see the Lord in his supreme majesty, his supreme value, and as you treasure him, everything else begins to start to fall into place.

And we need it every day. The Lord wants your home to be the happiest place on earth. That's a really good thing to think about, is our home the happiest place on earth? How often is it like that? I don't know about you but I think I bring a lot of negativity in my home. If I'm feeling stressed or under the gun, I can very easily fall into a pattern of thinking like my face is communicating, if you're like me, my wife often tells me my face is communicating things that I don't even think my face is communicating. Have you ever had that experience where you're like, "You have a really stern look on your face," and I'm thinking, "I was really trying to be nice and friendly. That was really an effort I was

making." It's like, I mean, I almost jump up and down or something, "Hey!" No, but seriously, we don't know but the point is we have inner attitudes and beliefs that are going on and because we're not being instructed with the word of God, inevitably we began to be like the world and we begin to think like the world and we began to value the things that the world of values, and when you value the things that the world values, you cannot be truly happy. Not for long. Maybe for an instant but it passes like a vapor. But the happiness that God gives is the happiness that lasts for eternity because God is with me in this, and as I take his word and apply it to my life and I'm continuing to feed on it and meditate on it, it's correcting me, it's bringing me into his presence and there's nothing but joy in the presence of God. And now even though the same pressures are there, things haven't gone away, the difficulties are still there, that's the gospel. We don't get delivered from the difficulties, we get delivered in the difficulties because we are with the Lord. Jesus is with us. The one who died for us walks with you and he's using the circumstances even to help you look to him.

Think about that. What a loving wise God. He knows that you and I forget how much we need him and so he sends friends to us and these friends are affliction and pain, suffering, rejection, persecution, and those are friends because in those, each of those things causes us to see that this world is not our home, we can't be happy here. "Oh yeah, I'm here for God. He's my exceeding joy. Lord, meet me, give me Your word, show me how to walk in Your truth. What passage can I apply to my life right now? What do I need to remember? Is it that I need to remember to be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to let my requests be made known to God and the peace of God will guard my heart, is that what I need to do? Or Lord, do I need to flee immorality and to put on purity? Or do I need to not be angry, be angry and don't sin. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth but only such a word that is good for edification. Put away anger and clamor and slander and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you." You take the word, you hear the word, you obey the word in the presence of God, by the power of God, and you look for the Lord in the word and you meet with God and sometimes you're not going to feel a lot different but if you trust that he's working in it, his power is at work, his presence is there and you will be increasingly joyful over time and you'll have a joy that's more unshakable the more you learn to walk like this. Less times in the dumps. Yeah, there are still going to be hard circumstances. There are no promises. We don't know what's going to happen tomorrow but God does. He's laid it out and if we could see what he sees, he sees it and he delights in what he's going to do in your life tomorrow. He delights in even the affliction and sorrow he's going to bring, not because he loves to bring affliction. No, Lamentations 3:38 says, "He does not afflict the sons of men willingly." He doesn't enjoy the process of afflicting you but when he afflicts you, he does it purposefully because he knows you're going to come to him and he delights in knowing that you will know how he is everything that you need. What a loving Father. What a wise Father. What a wonderful Savior.

The Lord has called us to be people who are the happiest people on earth, that have homes that are the happiest place on earth, that this church ought to be the happiest place on earth, every Bible study. May God help us have hearts that are expectant and when

you feel miserable and you feel like not going to church, isn't it crazy that you don't go then? I mean, if the happiest place on earth is where the people of God are gathered around the word, why would you stay home because you're depressed? That's insanity. It's also insanity to go camping and not come to church. No, it's not really. They're having church there and I did hear what the Lord said about this. Camping is a good thing. You see, we have to submit to the word of God, don't we? God is good. Isn't it wonderful to know that even though you don't know what's going to happen, things can happen that you would think are unimaginable, that you cannot possibly imagine yourself going through, and if it happens because God is sovereign in your life, he is over every molecule in the universe, then you know that a loving Father has prepared that for you and he will be with you in it. There is no fear when we're thinking biblically, there's only joy. "What is my Father going to show me today? What does He have for me today?"

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how good You are, how glorious You are, how wise You are. You're the all-wise God. Forgive us for our unbelief, our doubts, our apathy. Lord, have mercy on us for not attending to Your word as we ought and not realizing that we are called to worship You. That's all we're called to do, to worship You, to praise You, to trust You, and in that we will be made glad. Help us to stop resenting our circumstances. Help us to stop resenting Your providential dealing with us and help us to know like the sons of Israel should have known, that the most delightful thing to eat in the world is the manna when God gives it to you. Make us content and joyful in You and in Christ. Lord, for those that are here that don't know Jesus, may You open their eyes. Help them rest in the finished work of Christ, realize they have nothing that they can do to make themselves right before You, but Jesus has done everything in His atoning death and in His glorious bodily resurrection and He says, "Come." Save them, Lord. And Father, keep saving us in the sense of changing us and sanctifying us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.