



7. Rediscovering the way it's meant to be

Nehemiah 8:1-10 and Acts 2:42

Rediscovering #1 Church

"... all the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate." They came together as one... how they've changed! A previous generation had been challenged through the prophet Haggai about their individualistic attitude: Haggai 1:9 "My house remains a ruin while each of you is busy with your own house."

Now they had worked hard on their unity:

- United to a common purpose to rebuild Jerusalem
- Overcome issues of ego to serve the greater good
- United against a common enemy, learned to look after each other

It was the same in the New Testament. Devoted to the fellowship – greek word “koinonia” meaning “participation”. They discovered their value as part of a community. They overcame similar challenges and were one body.

The Israelites learned that when they acted alone, spiritually they grew cold. Christians, like coals in a fire are designed to keep one another spiritually warm.

“Some Christians try to go to heaven alone, in solitude. But believers are not compared to bears or lions or other animals that wander alone. Those who belong to Christ are sheep in this respect, that they love to get together. Sheep go in flocks, and so do God’s people.” ~ Charles Spurgeon

Hebrews 10 says “Don’t give up meeting together”. Why do we need that instruction?

Because it's hard!

- Because being together is always presents challenges that being alone doesn't!
- Uncomfortable. (43,000 people in a square!). Group dynamics challenge us all in different ways.
- When you're together it means that by definition everything that goes on runs the risk of not being so tailored to you.
- Together means we always question the value of our personal involvement.

So why bother?

- Jesus is praying for his church to be one. That means you and I in community.
- Jesus promises to be among us when we meet.

A good indicator... Do you speak of church as a "They" or a "We"?

Rediscovering #2 God's Word

Acts 2:42 "*Devoted to the apostles teaching*"

Nehemiah 8:4 "*Ezra the teacher of the Law stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion.*"

- Planning our lives around God's purpose is important (v4)! What structures are in place in your life to receive God's word?

"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."

In Nehemiah, they *invited*. In Acts, *they devoted* themselves to Apostles Teaching.

- Being teachable requires personal buy-in.

The Book of the Law (the first five books of the bible) was God's gift of revealing his character. They had followed the blueprint for the walls, now it was time to follow the blueprint for their lives. Somehow in their busy lives they had let this get squeezed out. Nehemiah clearly lived differently. His prayer is full of knowledge of God's revealed law.

They elevated the teaching of God's word to the highest place, respecting it as superior to them. They listened and they stood (some churches still do this every time the Bible is read out).

Psalm 138 “*for you have exalted above all things your name and your word.*”

They agreed it was authoritative. The Scriptures deserve the highest place, but that high place gets filled by other things: human wisdom, cultural trends, etc. The longest chapter in the bible is Psalm 119, all about living by God’s word!

We may say, “If only we had some apostles teaching us”, but we have the Holy Spirit’s “best of” the Apostles teaching in the New testament. Teaching is simply to read their material and explain it.

Rediscovering #3 Relationship with God

Acts 2:42 “*Devoted to prayer*”

“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.”

Their worship and prayer was a response to revelation from God about Himself. The scripture was God’s revelation as best they knew it at the time. We have God’s revelation in so much more detail! In creation, in his Word and supremely through Jesus.

Hebrews 1 “*In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.*”

Col 1:15 & 19-20 “*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*”

John 1 “*We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*”

The main fuel for prayer (which we all struggle with) is to remind yourself of who God is - His grace in making himself known to us.

Rediscovering #4 Grace

“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.’

Acts 2:42 “*Devoted to breaking bread*”

They wept in Nehemiah's day. When we evaluate ourselves against God's standards we too recognise our shortcomings.

- #1 Our failure to live in community
- #2 Our failure to live according to God's word
- #3 Our failure to offer heart felt pure worship

Where there's failure there's forgiveness. That's grace! Breaking bread was the symbol Jesus gave us to remember his sacrificial death which covers all our failure.

Romans 5:20 “*Where sin increased grace increased all the more.*”

The molehill of my sin is covered by the mountain of God's grace.

And his power changes us. He turns isolated individualistic people into family. He turns opinionated rebels into teachable Christ-followers; he takes spiritually dead people and makes them friends; he takes people who deserve judgement and gives them grace.

Questions:

- Of the 4 rediscoveries mentioned, which one can you personally relate to the most in your experience. Why?
- Rediscovering Church: What do you find most energising and most frustrating about living your life as part of a church community? How can we best deal with our frustrations?
- Rediscovering God's Word: Nehemiah built a platform to help people understand God's word. What structures can we put into our personal and church life to give the Word proper priority?
- Rediscovering Relationship with God: Dan talked about using God's revelation (e.g. creation, word, Jesus) as a starting point for prayer. How do you best get stimulated in prayer?
- Rediscovering Grace: Some Christians believe that God wants them to constantly be “weeping” over their failure. Is that right? How does understanding grace correctly help us?



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