

Introduction: The God who created everything and is King over all He has made, has graciously made a covenant with people from the beginning. Over time He has made known to people more of who He IS, more of His amazing LOVE, and more of what He will do for all who humbly fear Him and have received faith to obey Him. *** In the days when He delivered His people Israel out of four hundred years of bondage in Egypt, He guided them by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21). When they camped at night the pillar over the Tabernacle was fire (Exodus 40:38). *** The glory cloud (Exodus 14:19; 16:10; 33:9) filled the Tabernacle after it was set up for the first time (Exodus 40:34-35). This was the only time Moses could not meet with Yahweh in the cloud. The cloud is the Presence of God, or the Holy Spirit. *** When Yahweh commanded Jeremiah to speak out against false prophets, He declared: Is not My Word like a fire (Jeremiah 23:29). So, the fire represents God's Word. *** The principle of the Spirit and the Word guiding God's people is still true in the Church today for everyone who follows Jesus by faith. *** In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, God's people had joy when God's Word through Moses was explained by the Levites so the people had understanding, The Spirit of God is the one who gives people insight concerning God's Word. ** In our Gospel account, we find Jesus commending a woman who anointed His body for burial. He defended her beautiful deed to Him and blessed her with a promise until He returns. *** Let's learn how we can have mutual joy in God's Word as we understand it together in God's Presence.

I. As the people understood God's Word through Ezra, they mourned; but, he commanded them to eat the Feast and share because the joy of Yahweh is their strength. (*Nehemiah 8:2-3, 5-6, 8-12*)

A. As Ezra reads from the book of Moses to all who could understand, with the help of the Levites, the people mourned over their sins.

(*Nehemiah 8: 2-3, 5-6, 8-9*)

1. Then Ezra the priest brought the Torah before the assembly: men, women and all with understanding: hearing, on the first day of the seventh month. (*Verse 2*)

Feast: This is the Feast of Trumpets. After the exile, it became the secular holiday it now is, Rosh HaShanah, 'head of the year'.

Understanding: Any young person who was able to understand God's Word could join the adults.

2. Then he read from it, facing the street, before the Water Gate, from first light until noon, before men, women, and those understanding, and the ears of all people (were to) the book of Torah. (*Verse 3*)

Ears toward: A figure of speech is used to describe the people attentively listening to God's Word.

Levites: Thirteen Levites flanked Ezra on the platform, six to the right and seven to the left. Later, eleven apostles would be with Peter as he proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus at Pentecost (Acts 2:14). (*Verse 4*)

3. Then Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people (because he was above the people when he opened it); all the people stood. (*Verse 5*)

Stand for Word: This was in the fifth century before Christ. But to this day, people at synagogues and many Christians who are able, stand for the reading of God's Word.

4. Then Ezra blessed Yahweh the great God, and all the people answered: amen, amen; lifting up their hands, then they bowed and worshipped Yahweh, their faces to the ground. (*Verse 6*)

Blessing God: The root word is 'knee', meaning to bow before God in humble praise and adoration.

Lift hands, faces low: First, they lifted their hands in praise. Then, they bowed in worship. Again, all God's people still do this.

Teaching: Now, thirteen different Levites teach the people what the words mean. Per the Torah and First Chronicles, Levites had three duties: guards-soldiers; singers-musicians; teachers-judges. (*Verse 7*)

5. And they read from the book, from the Torah of God, having made distinct to give wisdom; then, they understood the meaning. (*Verse 8*)

Explain: The Levites helped each person understand the distinct meaning of every word and phrase.

Give wisdom: Wisdom is the ability to correctly apply God's Word in everyday living.

6. Then said Nehemiah the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who made the people understand: This day is holy to Yahweh your God, you all will not mourn and weep; because all the people wept when they heard the words of the Torah. (*Verse 9*)

Holy: This holy Feast preceded the Day of Atonement and the week-long Feast of Booths.

Weep: They were weeping because they had been convicted of their sins from God's Word.

B. Ezra told the people to feast and share with others because the joy of Yahweh is their strength; they became silent then celebrated.

(*Nehemiah 8:10-12*)

1. Then he said to them: you all must go, eat the fat and drink the sweet, and send portions to one not having prepared, because holy day to Adonai; and, not you all will be grieved, because the joy of Yahweh (is) the strength of you all. (*Verse 10*)

Holy deeds: Ezra commands all to go to their homes and eat, drink and share with those who have nothing.

This is practical holiness to Yahweh. The early church had 'love feasts' with Communion (Jude 12;

c.f. 1 Corinthians 11:20-22; 2 Peter 2:13), but these were subject to abuse!

JOY: People who know they have sinned and their sins are forgiven by faith in God's Word, will desire to do 'holy deeds' for other people, resulting in joy given by God.

When people understand God's Word to them, they rejoice

2. The Levites silenced all the people, saying: You all must be still, because this day is holy, you all will not be grieved. (*Verse 11*)

Be still: They must enjoy forgiveness from God. We should enjoy forgiveness in Jesus even more.

Knowing our relationship with God is restored should keep us from mourning over our sins.

3. Then all the people went to eat and drink, and send portions, and make great rejoicing because they had understood the words that were made known to them. (*Verse 12*)

Faithful full obedience: They obeyed in faith all they understood God commanded them through Ezra.

Great rejoicing: The result of their faithful obedience to the Word they understood was great rejoicing.

When people understand God's Word to them, they rejoice

II. The people understand from Moses about the Feast of Booths and celebrate it with very great joy;

Jesus proclaims a woman who anointed Him did a beautiful work. (*Nehemiah 8:13-18; Mark 14:1-9*)

A. On the next day they understood about the Feast of Tabernacles, and celebrated it with more joy than any time since Joshua. (*Nehemiah 8:13-18*)

1. The second day had come together the heads of the fathers of the people, with the priests and Levites to Ezra the scribe, to consider the words of the Torah; then they found it was written that Yahweh commanded they will dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month. (*Verses 13-14*)

Consider: The next day leaders of the people further considered the Torah with Ezra.

Booths: They discovered Yahweh had commanded them to live in ‘*sukkoth*’ (booths or tabernacles) starting in the middle of the seventh month, after the Day of Atonement.

2. And they should proclaim in all their cities and Jerusalem: You all must go out to and must bring olive branches and branches of oil trees, myrtle, palm and leafy trees, to make booths as it has been written. (*Verse 15*)

Proclaim: They proclaimed all Yahweh gave Moses to write about this feast (*Leviticus 23:34-43*).

3. The people went out and brought, and made for themselves booths, each on his roof and on their courts, and the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the Water Gate and the Ephraim Gate. (*Verse 16*)

Obey: They fully obeyed what God said through Moses and what Ezra and the Levites proclaimed.

4. Then they made, all the assembly returning from the captivity, booths, then they dwelled in the booths; because they had not done from the days of Joshua, son of Nun, to that day, the people of Israel; then there was rejoicing, very great. (*Verse 17*)

Since Joshua: It had been more than nine hundred years since God’s people had so properly and enthusiastically celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles!

Very great joy: When the leaders understood God’s Word, and instructed the people what to do, their obedience produced very great joy in them! We can have more joy by always dwelling with God through Jesus who tabernacled in human flesh to save us.

When people understand God’s Word to them, they rejoice

5. Then (Ezra) read from the Torah of God day-by-day from the first day to the last; then they kept the Feast seven days, and on the eighth day had a solemn assembly according to the ordinance. (*Verse 18*)

Keep: Torah called for a Sabbath on the eighth day (*Leviticus 23:39*). They fully kept God’s Word.

B. A woman anoints Jesus to prepare for His burial and He proclaims this a beautiful work. (*Mark 14:1-9*)

1. It was being the Passover and the Unleavened Bread, after two (more) days; and, they were searching, the chief priests and the scribes, how Him, in deceit having taken, they might kill; because they were saying, ‘Not on the feast day, lest there will be riot of the people.’ (*Verses 1-2*)

Feasts: The Passover and Unleavened Bread Feasts celebrated God saving Jews from slavery in Egypt.

Kill Jesus: Many of the chief priests and scholars of God’s Word desired to kill Jesus.

Human fear: But, they wanted to do it when Jerusalem’s population was not swelled from pilgrims.

2. After Him being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper reclining, a woman came having alabaster with precious ointment (myrrh) of a honeysuckle plant. (*Verse 3*)

Precious ointment: She brought aromatic oil, for medicine or religious ceremonies, pure and costly.

3. Some were being indignant to themselves (saying), ‘Why waste the ointment (myrrh) because this to be sold three hundred denarii and given to the poor’; they were speaking harshly against her. (*Verses 4-5*)

Indignation: They were indignant at this woman, cutting her with harsh words!

Reason: They could not understand why she would throw away a year’s wages on Jesus!

4. Jesus said, ‘You all must let her be! Why are you all doing trouble to her? A beautiful work she has worked in Me’. (*Verse 6*)

Jesus: Jesus confronts their misunderstanding, saying the woman has done a good and beautiful deed for Him.

Jesus is pleased she is ministering to Him.

Jesus delights whenever people minister to Him

5. ‘For always the poor you all are having with yourselves, and whenever you all may be desiring you all are being able to them to do good; but, not always Me you all are having’. (*Verse 7*)

Poor: Jesus says there will always be poor people, and God’s people will have opportunity to help.

Me: But, soon He will be leaving them and may be away for a long time.

6. ‘What she had, she did; she came beforehand to anoint My body to (be) buried’. (*Verse 8*)

Burial: She did all she could with what she had. She understood what Jesus had been saying, and took action to prepare His body for burial, because He would die for all the sins of all people! Salvation from sin IS much greater than salvation from physical bondage.

7. ‘Truly, I am saying to you all: wherever may be preached the Gospel in the whole of the world; also, what she did, it will be spoken to a memorial of her’. (*Verse 9*)

Gospel: Jesus would command His disciples to make disciples by preaching the Gospel about Him (*Matthew 28:16-20*).

Memorial: Now He says this woman will receive an amazing reward for ministering to Him: she will be included in two Gospels as a memorial to her beautiful act of ministry. May we all desire to minister to Jesus because of who He IS and what He does, so we may be graciously commended by Him.

Jesus delights whenever people minister to Him

Conclusion: As Ezra read from the Torah of Moses and Levites helped the people to understand, they mourned. But, he commanded them to enjoy the Feast and share, because the joy of Yahweh is their strength. Then, they understood about the Feast of Tabernacles and kept it with exceeding great joy. After a woman ministered to Jesus by anointing Him for burial, He proclaimed she did a beautiful work that will be remembered.

When people understand God’s Word to them, they rejoice