

REJOICING

celebrating God speaking and us listening
Nehemiah 8:2-8



memorize
this:

We will celebrate and praise you, Lord! You are good to us, and your love never fails. No one can praise you enough ... (Psalm 106:1-2a CEV).

We like celebrating.

The recent coronavirus pandemic has changed how we celebrate the major events and holidays of life. At the outset for many, our weddings, graduations, and birthdays were simply postponed. But soon we have learned to adapt.

points to ponder

1) In what ways has the quarantine changed how you live your life ... how you shop, how your travel, how you treat people and how you celebrate?

2) Has the quarantine caused you to realize your need for God? Give some examples to the group. In what ways have you come to appreciate things about God that you took for granted?

words to wrangle

We tend to celebrate when we are successful. Read Psalm 106:1-5, 44-48. We are to celebrate when God is strong.

1) Can you give examples of times that God was faithful even when you were less than obedient?

2) Does the recent pandemic fit into this? How has the virus proven God to be faithful? How can we celebrate?

conclusions to consider

A primary truth in this lesson is that we are to celebrate the fact that God has spoken and we are to listen.

During the past week, how have you listened to what God is saying to you during the pandemic? In what ways can we celebrate?

Jesus loved to tell stories. He often taught in parables. The term "parable" is a transliteration of the Greek word *parabole* (parah-bow-lay). The word means "to throw alongside." A parable throws one idea alongside another for the purpose of providing a better explanation. Think in terms of "the big picture" instead of "item-by-item" details.

The word starts with the Greek preposition "para." It literally means alongside, but it stresses a nearness, a closeness or a relationship that is often not expressed in translation. If I mention "peanut-butter and jelly," the use of the word "para" describes what happens to the two when they are spread in a sandwich, as opposed to two separate jars which set on the shelf.

By the eighth chapter of Nehemiah, the walls of the city and the temple were near completion. The phrase "all the people gathered as one man" into the square is identical to Ezra 3:1, which also refers to an assembly on the first day of the seventh month. The object of the meeting in Ezra was to restore the altar of burnt offerings and sacrificial worship.

Can you imagine the energy and celebration that was present? Think about two kinds of celebrations at the event. There is no real reason to mention everyone by name in verses four and seven. The lesson taught is that individuals need to be celebrated. No doubt each played an important role in the rebuilding of the walls and temple.

Notice also the celebration connected with the giving and reading of God's Word. The people all participated. When the Torah was brought before the people, there must have been shouts of praise and applause.

The reading was given for the people who understood the Law.

The people bowed their heads as the Scripture was read and placed their faces on the ground. Verse nine tells us that the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. But Nehemiah and Ezra told the people not to mourn or weep, for this day was holy to the Lord. Instead the people were told to go, to eat, drink and celebrate for "the joy of the Lord in your strength."