

Nehemiah 8:8-12 (Lord Adalbert Percival Cecil) 141406

Miscellaneous Papers, Holy Day to the Lord, A (8:8-12)

Nehemiah 8:8-12

So they read in the book, in the law of God, distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; MOURN NOT, NOR WEEP. For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. And all the people went their way, to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

How sweetly, yet rebukingly, does this lesson come to us from the pages of the Old Testament. It is not the "gospel," and yet how much gospel is there in it too, which it would be well if we of a brighter and happier day had fully learnt.

The "gospel" is "good news": or, good news "of God" (Rom. 1:1); that which comes to us from the heart of the Good and Blessed God, at the witness of what He delights in. It is the preaching of gladness; and what is the reception of it unto the soul but the reception of gladness? News there is from Him, of such a nature and character that the mere believing listening to it is the one and effectual remedy for all the care and sorrow which oppress us naturally, and are our heritage indeed as children of men. Reader, have you apprehended that? And good news, let me add, which God publishes for his own joy and glory, so that we may know and understand Him in the message He has sent.

Well He knows, moreover, the people among whom He publishes this good news. It is just because they are what they are, His gospel becomes so sweet a declaration of what He is. And He bids it to be preached to every one of them in all the world, and makes it simple obedience, the first point of duty to Himself, to "obey the gospel" with the "obedience of faith." In other words, to believe and to rejoice!

This is the blessedness of this scene in Israel in the time of Nehemiah. Good cause had they, if any ever had, to weep when they heard the words of the law {Neh. 8:9}.

They might claim, if any, amid the ruins of their broken city, and listening to the thunders of that terrible law, which, through their breach of it, had brought in such desolation, that they did well to weep. Would it have been anything but hardness of heart on their part to have refused their tears to the misery of their condition, and the sin against their God which had introduced the misery?

Yet one voice had title to be heard surely even there. If He, against whom they had sinned, spoke, surely they were to listen. If He, even now, could preach gladness to them, surely they were to be glad! and glad the more in Him who could make their sin and misery the suited time to display His goodness and His grace. It was not "joy" simply they were called to: it was "the joy of the Lord." If it were hardness in the first instance then, not to feel their sin and misery, would it not be greater hardness not to feel His grace now and to rejoice in Him?

And this is what God is calling men to universally, beloved reader, by that gospel which he has sent out every where, to be preached to "every creature under heaven." He is bearing witness to Himself. Has He not title to be heard and to be believed? If He call to "obedience of faith" in this good news, is it humble or good to go on mourning as if He had not spoken? Is it good or wise not to be confident in the love He has in His heart toward us?

And what a precious thought is this of a holy day kept to the Lord, excluding sorrow, of necessity, as profanation of its holiness! Is it not the very echo of that thought of the apostle:

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly {1 Thess. 5:23}?

or, of that word which assures us that among the foremost "fruits of the Spirit" are "joy" and "peace"?

Dear fellow-believer in the Lord Jesus, will you let me say to you, in the presence of these blessed scriptures, that unhappiness is unholiness? that "the joy of the Lord" is alone your "strength," whether for walk or service?

You may ask me, "Do you know who I am? Do you know my failures, my sins, my backslidings, the dishonour I have done to the name of Jesus?" I reply, I am sure you will do nothing but still dishonour it, if you refuse God's way of help against such dishonour. "God is for us," beloved. Is that because we are for Him, or because of what Jesus is in His presence for us? Could we be nearer to Him by any effort or right-living of our own, than we are at this moment as "accepted in the Beloved"? This acceptance, this favor, this delight of God in His own Son, rests upon us spite of all we are. To know it, believe it, enter into it, live in it, is restoration, blessing, power for the soul.

You say, "My feet are defiled; how can I walk with God?" I ask again, know you not who it is, who, having come from God, and, going back to God, stooped in the full consciousness of that, to wash the feet of His own, that they might have "part with Him"? Was that cleansing their work then, or His? Was He at a distance from them when He did it, or near at hand? Did the uncleanness of their feet do aught but make Him serve them in more lowly fashion? If you would be clean now, you must sit still now and let Him serve you.

"Washing of water" is "by the word." You must sit, and listen, and believe. And as he puts before you all the greatness and fullness of His love, and all that love has done for security of blessing to you, you will hear him say,

Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you {John 15:3}.

That which no law, no ordinance, no striving will effect for you, a few moments in His presence will accomplish. You will learn that there is mercy with Him, that He may be feared {see Psa. 130:4};

and that in returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength {Isa. 30:15}.

Yea, the very God of peace shall sanctify you wholly {1 Thess. 5:23}.

And, reader, you who have never yet tasted of this love of His, let me assure you "to you" also "is the word of this salvation sent." There is "gospel" for you: the superscription of my message is, "to every creature." To you, surrounded with as sad evidences of your guilt as ever had Israel, the word of God's grace is still, "believe the gospel," "obey the gospel." It is the "God of peace" sanctifies. It is the grace of God which bringeth salvation unto all men {see Titus 2:11}, which teaches us and alone teaches us, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world {see Titus 2:12}.

Therefore, to you, as you are, is "the gospel of salvation" preached. You can be nothing, do nothing, save as it teaches you, even the "grace that bringeth salvation." Will you listen to it? Will you believe it? For, as surely as Christ "died for sinners," that death of His is God's great treasury of blessing for all such. Every cheque upon this must be signed with that name, that one name of "SINNER," which proves your title to the wealth laid up there.

To you, then, a holy day to the Lord is proclaimed: "an accepted time, a day of salvation." God, against whom your sins have been, who alone has title to come in with a message of joy into the midst of the ruin and misery of the fall, has come in with the "good news" of "peace" made by the blood of the cross of Jesus, and preached to every creature for the obedience of faith. To believe and obey that gospel is to listen to and rejoice in what He is declaring to us.

Reader, will you be as those of whom it is written here: "And all the people went their way, to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had UNDERSTOOD the words that were declared unto them."

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