

INTRO: PLEASE, today, in honor of God's Word, stand to your feet and read with me **Nehemiah 8:10** *"Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."* I want to preach today on the subject, "Celebrate Your Time, COME ON". Air high five someone before you sit down and tell them the party is about to start! I know, I know, some of you are going to have that song running through your head the whole sermon now. But just give me your attention for a few minutes. We'll get through this together

Nehemiah is one of the great books of the Bible. As a matter of fact, and you may not be aware, but Nehemiah was recently voted 1 of the top 66 books of the Bible. Yeah, Nehemiah, good read. JUST TO GIVE YOU A LITTLE BACKSTORY, Nehemiah has gone to Jerusalem to address some issues that needed correcting. And when he gets there, God uses him in a mighty way. He rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem that had been torn down for 150 years. And he does it in 52 days! That's significant. And that's a reason to celebrate. He did something that no one in a century and a half was able or willing to do. And he did it so fast that the scripture says in Nehemiah 6:15-16 that everyone knew this was the hand of God at work, for no one could have accomplished such a task, that fast, on their own.

Now in chapter 8, where we're going to spend the majority of our time this morning, we see something awesome take place. After the walls of Jerusalem are completed, the people of Israel have a celebration. Now it's a strange celebration, a little weird, but this is how they partied, this is how they got down, in "J" Town. The people call for Ezra the priest to stand on this platform they have built for this occasion, and they want him to take out the book of the law of Moses and read it. **HERE LET ME READ WHAT IT SAYS...**

Chapter 7:73 *"...and when the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities"* meaning they settled into their homes. They were able to rest with peace of mind for the first time in a long time. The walls are built. They're no longer vulnerable. There is a sense of safety and security they haven't known in years. They're finally able to relax. So they settle into their communities and homes.

Chapter 8:1 *"...all the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. 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."* (the Pentateuch or Torah is the first five books of the OT which Moses wrote) This book of the law had been around for a long time but they hadn't read it in a while. As a matter of fact, because they had forsaken much of the law and weren't keeping God's commandments, God had allowed them to be overcome by their enemies. That's the reason the walls were broken down, the reason their cities had been destroyed. But look what they did in **vv 2-3** *"So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. 3 He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law."*

DID YOU GET THAT?! How many of you would stand and listen to me give an exegesis from the book of Leviticus for 5 hours? **NO ONE!** Ezra, here, is just reading and expounding the law. **REALLY?** Yeah. They were so moved by what they had seen God do that they wanted to know what was next! That brings me to my first point...

1) KNOW WHAT YOU'RE CELEBRATING: **vv 4-8** *"Ezra the teacher of the Law stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion... 5 Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up."*

I) KNOW WHAT YOU'RE CELEBRATING: vv 4-8 *"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. 7 The Levites instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. 8 They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read."*

Now, I'm pretty sure you're not put out about this as much as I am, but we're teaching our kids to celebrate nothing! I'm not bashing Little league baseball or kids soccer, but come on. Back in my day you actually had to win to get a trophy. Not today. Just show up and you get one, sometimes you don't even have to do that. Now I know why you men agree to this stuff, it's your wife! I get it. But deep down in your heart you know that's not right :)

Some of you in this church are celebrating but you have nothing to celebrate. You're living it up, partying down, but you don't know Christ. And if Jesus isn't part of your life, you're losing, well as a matter of fact, you're lost, "lost in your trespasses and sins". You're just like a little league team going to Baskin Robbins to celebrate after losing 31 to 0, because they don't know they lost. They don't know because no one bothered to keep score. But in real life someone is keeping score, and without Jesus you're a loser. John 3:18 says *"you're condemned already"* But the good news is with Jesus you have a real reason to celebrate. The Bible says in Romans 8 that through Christ we have been made more than conquerors, that is, Victorious, now that's reason to celebrate!

Most of us are consumed with the WHEN to celebrate. WHEN we get down to a certain weight, WHEN our bank account gets up to a certain weight, WHEN our GPA gets to that perfect number, then we can celebrate. But our celebration should never DEPEND ON WHEN, but rather, it should be DICTATED BY WHAT! WHAT God has done, WHAT God is doing presently in your life, WHAT He has planned for you in the future! When you KNOW WHAT you're celebrating, you'll find there's a LOT more reasons to celebrate! The Israelites got this sense that God was at work, and they wanted to know more about His desires for their lives.

II) KINDLE YOUR CELEBRATION: vv 9-10 *"Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "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. 10 Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."*

When the law was read, they realized how far they had fallen away from God as a people, and they wept. Nehemiah and Ezra, when they saw the brokenness of the people and that their hearts were turned toward God, they realized this was time for rejoicing! This was the moment for revival, so that KINDLED the celebration!

APPLICATION: Did you know before there can be celebration, there must be a time of brokenness and sacrifice. Before an Olympic athlete ever bows their head to receive a medal, years of sacrifice and brokenness, and pain have been endured. And that's often true of life. But if we don't get ahead of ourselves, and we have a mind to work, and we keep God in His rightful place, there will always be reason to celebrate!

So here we are, almost 9 years after our first worship service. We started out with 12 people and no money! Today is our first service in a beautiful new facility. We are looking for more property to build on, and we have almost 200 people now that calls Christ First Church home. Those of you that started with us and have been here since the beginning, I don't know how you're sitting there. We should probably be on our feet clapping our hands and praising God for His good work. WE HAVE REASON TO CELEBRATE!

I) KNOW WHAT YOU'RE CELEBRATING: vv 4-8

II) KINDLE YOUR CELEBRATION: vv 9-10 CONTINUED STAND WITH ME AND LET'S JUST GIVE HIM PRAISE!!! COME ON, CELEBRATE YOUR TIME, COME ON! Let's build a fire in this place. Let's KINDLE a celebration that causes Satan to have a little heartburn! Now notice the last thing...

III) KEEP ON CELEBRATING: vv 12,17b -18a *"And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth (to celebrate with great joy), because they had understood the words that were declared unto them...17b And there was very great gladness. 18a Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days..."*

What a celebration! One thing you can say about the Israelites, they know how to celebrate.

When I say KEEP on Celebrating, I'm not talking about to the point you're still in the end-zone dancing when everyone else is running the next play, I'm talking about doing what it takes to make sure you have another reason to celebrate. And then another, and then another.

God gave us this example. When He created the world, (you guys do know He created the world, right?) when He created the world, each day as He created, when He created He would look at what was made that day and He took time to admire and celebrate. Each day He would say it is good. But He went right back to work the next day, and the process started over again.

That's what I'm talkin about. God has done some great things at C1C in the last 8 years. And we love to celebrate our successes. And God wants us to! But we must be careful not to celebrate the same success too long. That's what so many churches are doing that had their hay day back in 1977. They're still living that year out over and over again. God never wants us to do that. God wants us to work hard, pray harder, live for Him and love everyone, and when good things come, CELEBRATE! But then we must look again to the things of God and what's next. We need to love others, touch more, reach out further, hope larger, win others, so that we can celebrate our new victories.

You'll find out about me that I'm never satisfied. I'm often content, but never satisfied. I'm constantly looking for that next reason to celebrate! And I'd like it very much if you'd come along on the ride...COME ON, let's CELEBRATE OUR TIME, COME ON!

CONCLUSION: Today if your life is full of nothing, and you've been trying to celebrate it but find yourself empty inside, why don't you come accept Jesus and learn what it is to have a real reason to celebrate!