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## RELIGION AND REVIVAL

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### Part 13 of Nehemiah

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Nehemiah 8:13-18 | June 10, 2007

You're listening to Nehemiah, a teaching series by Pastor Mark Driscoll. The following is a presentation of Mars Hill Church in Seattle. For more audio and video content visit [marshillchurch.org](http://marshillchurch.org).

The hope of Mars Hill since the beginning is that Seattle is a great city and what it needs is a great city within that city, a city that loves Jesus, a city that believes scripture, a city that lives for the good of the whole city; not just its own self-interest. So Mars Hill started off as an experiment to see if we could build a city within the city that would love the city and seek the transformation of the city as the city meets Jesus.

Welcome to Mars Hill. Good to see both of you on this nice sunny Sunday evening. My name is Mark, one of the pastors here at the church. We'll be in Nehemiah 8:13-18 tonight. If you've got a Bible you can go there. We're taking the better part of a year to study this great book of the Bible and give you a little heads up on something that's coming up as well. I know e-mails, bloggers, media, everybody's got questions and opinions about me and Mars Hill. So we figured we may as well just open it wide open.

You'll hear about this forthcoming, but you can start thinking about it. We're going to put together a web page on the [marshillchurch.org](http://marshillchurch.org) site to where people from around the world can post any question they would like to hear a sermon on. This could be critics, enemies, haters, friends, fans, I don't care. Then everybody can vote and the top ten will each be a sermon. So I can pretty much tell you three that'll be on there: women in ministry, alcohol and homosexuality.

So start thinking about it and go ahead and post and we'll just see where this goes and I'll actually put a series together on it and a book and it should be fun, at least for me. So looking forward to that. That'll be forthcoming soon.

Good to have you join us. I'm going to go ahead and pray and we'll get to work in Nehemiah chapter 8.

God, we begin by thanking you for yet another opportunity to gather as your people to study your word. We pray God as we examine how you worked so mightily in the city of Jerusalem that you would enlarge our heart for the city of Seattle and it's our prayer, God, that you would use us as you used the people in Jerusalem that we would see lives change to the degree that they saw lives changed in their city. God, for that to happen we want to focus on the person and work of Jesus and so we ask that the Holy Spirit be sent to inform and instruct us from the scriptures about Him and to give us hearts that would love Him and minds that would trust Him and lives that would imitate His.

So God, we do love you. We thank you for the scriptures. We thank you for an opportunity to study them and we ask that our time would be pleasing to you Lord Jesus and that it would be profitable to us as we ask this in your good name. Amen.

Catch you up to speed. Nehemiah's a great story and one of the reasons we love it so much here at Mars Hill is it really shows God's heart for a whole city. How God loves cities as we've investigated. Cities are the places from which culture emanates and flows. So in the cities you have the centers and spheres of influence; the media, the colleges, the record labels, the art centers are housed there, politics is housed there. There's more density, diversity and from the cities, information, goods, services, people, transportation go out from the urban centers to other outlying areas as well as other cities and around the world.

So God loves cities because of their strategic importance and God loved the city of Jerusalem and we know that He loves the city of Seattle. So as we look how God's people worked in the city of Jerusalem according to God's leading it gives us some insight on how to be God's people here in Seattle and pray for the same thing that they experienced. The city of Jerusalem was one that had lay in ruins for 141 years and it had been neglected. God then burdened a man named Nehemiah to relocate to that city to build that city physically, to rebuild the walls so it could be fortified. That indeed happened in 52 short days. Amazing, amazing progress after 141 years of neglect.

We saw at the end of Chapter 7 then that 50,000 people roughly moved into the city of Jerusalem and then the city within that city was opened up, the church. We saw in Chapter 8 how Nehemiah humbly stepped aside and let this other spiritual leader, Ezra, step up and teach the Bible. He taught through the first five books of the Old Testament, also known as the Pentateuch which means book in five parts authored by Moses and in teaching a revival broke out. Fifty thousand people were convicted of their sin, fell face down in the dirt, confessed their sins to God. Some became worshippers of God that day. Some had been sort of lazy and indifferent and distant worshippers of God and they returned to real vibrant relationship with God.

This week we'll see the following day and weeks after that amazing move of God and we're going to look at three marks of true revival where God

visits his people and three things that happen in Jerusalem as a result of God showing up in this extraordinary and powerful way. We begin then in Chapter 8 Verse 13. I share these with you so that you can join me in prayer for our city that these same things would happen in our city to the degree and magnitude and depth that we have the privilege of witnessing here in scripture.

Chapter 8 Verse 13 – on the second day. So the day after the Billy Graham crusade of the Old Testament when 50,000 people showed up, “The heads of the Father’s houses of all the people with the priests and the Levites came together to Ezra the scribe, the spiritual leader in order to study the words of the law.” My first principle is that true revival turns the hearts of fathers toward their children. This is the promise of the coming of Jesus that we find in the closing lines of the Old Testament that when Jesus comes you’ll know that guys have met Jesus when they have a heart for their family, when they want to get married and love their wife and have children and love their children and their hearts are inclined toward marriage and toward fathering.

What we see here is that after learning the scriptures all of a sudden the men decided that they needed more teaching. They just got a six hour sermon and the next day they come back for more. That’s because these men after learning a little bit about the Bible realized “We’re not doing our job. We’re not good husbands. We’re not good fathers. We’re not good boyfriends. We’re not good sons. We’re not good uncles. We’re not good brothers. We’re not good men. We have lots of sin and folly and stupidity in our life and there’s a lot of things that need to get fixed and straightened out. We need to go back and learn more Bible.

So on the first day there were 50,000 people. That included the men, women and children. The second day the men came back. The women and children stayed home and Ezra sort of had a men’s meeting, a men’s advance as it were. He got the guys together to talk about here’s what it means to be a Godly man and here’s what scripture says and this is what you guys need to do. And this is a huge passion of mine. It’s also a rock that my critics love to throw, which is fine. Blog all you want, but let me explain it to you and that is this.

That we live in a world where most young men have absolutely no idea what they’re doing. They don’t. Forty percent of kids tonight go to bed without a father. Every night I snuggle with my kids, pray, read scripture, kiss them, hug them. Forty percent of kids have no dad to tuck them in bed. So a lot of guys grow up with no dad. The dad they do have beats them, hits them, yells at them. It seems like every year at least one song ends the year in the billboard top ten and it’s some song lamenting the loss of a father or the kind of father they wish they had or the father who beat them up and never encouraged them or the father who beat their mother and divorced mom. It seems like this is just this perennial theme of the father wound that just is woven through the whole culture.

So guys don’t know what to do. They don’t know where they’re going. They don’t know what they’re doing. They pick up a men’s magazine. Not going to get a lot of discipleship there. If you do what the men’s magazine says you’ll be a boy. That’s what they should be called, boy magazines ‘cause they’re for seven and eight year old thinking. They’re not for grown men. You could turn on the guys’ television stations and watch Spike all day and have no clue about how Leviticus applies to parenting. That’s for sure. So guys don’t know where to turn. So where do they turn?

Well they turn to guys like Tom Leykis on the radio. I’ll just start talking from the hip here and get myself in trouble, but he’s the number one talk radio show host for young men in America and guys call in. They say, “Hey dad” ‘cause he’s the father they never had. “You should be proud of me. I got a vasectomy and I don’t intend to ever get married and I’ve got seven girlfriends and none of them know.” He’s like, “Good job, son.” Good job, son? What? No; that’s not the goal. The goal is not to never take responsibility, lie to women, take advantage of them, never have children and abdicate responsibility your whole life. That’s not a man. That’s not why God made men.

That kind of thinking, that kind of immature boyish thinking that wants all the benefits of being a man and none of the responsibilities of being a man leads to so many social ills and problems. These guys here in Jerusalem, God sort of got their heart and He opened it up toward yeah, I need to not take advantage of women; love them. I need to not just use women for sex.

I should think about being a husband if I want that kind of enjoyment and I should look forward to being a father and I should love my wife and my kids and read the Bible with them and pray for them and love them and serve them. Not scream at my kids. Not raise my hand or my voice to my wife or my children. They all showed up and said, ‘Ezra, we don’t know what we’re doing.’ “We’re really good at World of Warcraft. We can find free porn on the internet. We can drive a stick shift. Beyond that we don’t really have any skills. We need help.”

So at Mars Hill one of the big things we say is it’s good for young men to meet Jesus and when you meet Jesus He opens your heart toward responsibility, toward loving women. Not lying to them and taking advantage of them. Toward loving and being faithful to one woman your whole life. Toward being a father and having some children and feeding them, caring for them, reading the Bible with them, praying with them.

You’ve heard me say it before, but I believe young men are like pick-up trucks and they drive straighter with a load. Some of you guys don’t have enough responsibility, right. You need job, ministry, college. I don’t know. End world hunger. Stop the war in Iraq. Just take a few things on your plate as your personal responsibilities and with that kind of load you’ll drive straighter. Most young guys are too squirrely. They’re not thinking marriage, job, pay the bills, kids, legacy, five generations. They’re not thinking that way. A load on a young man is good. It straightens them out.

For me what this means practically is that I so want to impart to the guys this desire for Jesus and for marriage and for fatherhood. I didn’t know this. I grew up in Seattle, having sex with my girlfriend, not knowing what I was going to study in college and no real plan. If you would have said, “Well do you plan on getting married and having kids?” I would have said yes. “What’s your plan?” I don’t know. I guess the wife fairy shows up and brings along kids. I don’t know. I don’t know how this works. I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.

Then I met Jesus and got convicted of my sin. Okay; I gotta stop sleeping with my girlfriend. I gotta get my life together. I gotta figure out what I’m

gonna study in college. Gotta get a job, pay my bills, gonna marry her. We're gonna make babies. I'm gonna raise those kids, love those kids and let me tell you, gentlemen. It is the only life that is really worth living and it is a joy. And I'm not yelling at the guys who are single and saying if you're single you're godless. Jesus was single. I get it. I understand, but 90 percent of you plus will be married. The question is will you be a good husband, bad husband. Will you be a good daddy or a bad daddy. How's this all going to go?

One of the great encouragements I have at Mars Hill, this has happened hundreds of times, guys come up to me when their wife gets pregnant for the first time or seventh time. It's Mars Hill. They come up to me and they'll look me in the eye and say, "My wife's pregnant and I give you my word I'm going to do my job." Just because there's something in men that has dignity that wants to be called out that wants to be appealed to. So at Mars Hill one of our big values is the men, is imparting to the men a desire for being Christians, for being husbands, for being fathers.

I'll tell you one cool story happened to me recently. I guy came up to me. He had a pad and a pen and he said, "I hear you take your daughters on daddy dates." I said, "Yeah, I love taking my daughters out on daddy dates. I'm gonna beat those junior high boys to the punch by a decade. I start early." So the daddy dates with me – I've got two daughters and three sons, five kids. We had a miscarriage otherwise we'd be at six.

My daughters, they love to go out to tea and dinner and we go to the nursery to see the plants. My youngest likes to go to the pet store 'cause I won't buy animals because they do stuff in the yard and I just don't like that. I already got five kids. I got that stuff all over the house. So I'll take her to the pet store to see the animals. So I have all these little things I do with my daughters on daddy dates. I take them out. I love having daddy date time.

So he said, "Well what are the favorite daddy dates your daughters have?" I said, "Well, my one likes to do this. My other likes to do that and here's some of the things my daughters like to do." Here's what he said. He said, "Okay, cool." I said, "Why? How many girls do you have?" He said, "We don't have any kids yet. I just found out my wife is pregnant and we're having a girl. So I'm making a long list of daddy dates." That's what I'm talking about. You hear the women, right?

Now you men, just write that down. All the women went awww. I would like to marry him. Note to self. "Note to self. Make a list of daddy dates. I don't care if I'm in high school. I've gotta start thinking about my future." That's what I'm talking about. Daddy's who pray with, love, encourage, bless their children. Not the overbearing mean-spirited ogre of a dad.

These men didn't understand a lot about fatherhood and masculinity and marriage, but they came to Ezra and Ezra opened the Bible because their day like ours was filled with lots of opinions, but you're not going to get any real wisdom on how to be a man, how to be a husband, how to be a father apart from scripture. There's nowhere else you're going to go to get any wisdom on these things.

Here's why it's so important to us. Statistically Christianity is for women and children, statistically. Guy named George Barna, he is a researcher and statistician. Some years ago he did a large survey and here were his findings. He said that 60 percent of all Christians are women; 60 percent. That means there's between 11 and 13 million more Christian women than men. How many of you go to a Christian college and you go, "Yeah, I noticed that. I noticed that there was 1 guy and 427 women. I noticed that the odds were different." That's why. There's far more women than men who are Christians.

Furthermore women are 100 percent more likely to be in a discipleship group; 56 percent more likely to be in leadership; 54 percent more likely to be in a small group; 39 percent more likely to have devotional time with the Lord; 33 percent more likely to volunteer for a church or ministry; 29 percent more likely to read their Bible; 29 percent more likely to attend church; 29 percent more likely to tell non-Christian friends about Jesus; 23 percent more likely to give money and 16 percent more likely to pray. Now somebody say, "What is he saying? Is he saying that it's bad?" No; I think it's wonderful. If lots of women love Jesus, walk with Jesus, serve Jesus, care about Jesus I think that's absolutely wonderful.

The question is what about their brothers. What about their husbands. What about their guy friends. What about their sons. What about their grandsons. What about their nephews. What about the guys. What tends to happen is that women and children go to church; dad and the boys don't. Eventually when the boys grow up they don't want to go anymore either because mom's going but dad isn't going and if you want to be a man then you be like dad and if dad doesn't care about God, doesn't read his Bible, doesn't pray, doesn't go to church then neither do the sons.

Then the daughters grow up and they want to marry someone like their dad. So if dad doesn't care about Jesus they don't think it's important to marry a guy who cares about Jesus and it does matter.

Now at Mars Hill we're about half married, half single, half men, half women. We have programming for men and women and coed and we want to welcome everybody, serve everybody, care for everybody, but my heart has always been young men 'cause I grew up here as a total meat-head non-Christian guy who didn't know anything about what he was doing. Then Jesus saved me, opens my heart and I'm thinking marriage, husband, kids. I love my wife. We've got five kids. I'm actually a really happy guy. I actually really enjoy my family. I really love being a dad. There are times yeah, it's work and it's hard and it costs money, but everything that is worth something costs something.

Tell you one Gideon story. He's one year old. At some points in the sermon I just tell stories about my kids 'cause they're cute. So I'll tell you one. Gideon's about this tall. He's one-year old. He's recently discovered the hose. So he'll just soak himself and then he goes to the sandbox and rolls in it. He looks like some sort of coated candy bar. He's got sand in his mouth and he can barely look out his eyes. He's absolutely covered in sand. I love my kids. I come home; I play catch with my sons. I take my daughters out on daddy dates. Yesterday was my nine-year old daughter Ashley – she came up to me. She says, "Daddy, it's time to snuggle." Yes, it is. It's always time to snuggle. So we snuggle up and watch a TV show and we're visiting and hanging out. I'll tell you what. I really like being a dad. Jesus has fully opened my heart to being a dad.

I would encourage you young men not to say, “Well that sounds like a lot of work, money and responsibility.” Yeah, it is cheaper to live alone in your car. It’s also simpler, but not nearly as rewarding. Furthermore we live in a city where the cohabitation rate is 250 percent higher than the national average. Everybody wants to sleep together. Everybody wants to live together. Guys don’t want to get married. That’s why we invent birth control and abortion.

We are not pro-abortion. We don’t say that birth control is always a sin, but if you’re a young guy thinking “Well the last thing I ever want is to get my girlfriend pregnant.” So you shouldn’t be sleeping with her. You should get married to a woman and whether or not you want to have kids right away we’ll leave that up to you and her, but is it the worst thing in the world to have a baby? Is it that bad?

The Bible says that children are a blessing from the Lord and the way people talk about it – you’ve got 20 year old guys all over the country going in for vasectomies because they think child is like the doctor said you have cancer. No; it’s a blessing. It’s an honor. Where’s your heart gentlemen? Where’s your mind? Where’s your desires? Is it for Jesus? Is it for marriage? Is it for your kids? Is it to love your sons and raise your daughters?

I know some of you women are here and you’d say, “This sounds very scary. Men leading their homes? Is this chauvinism?” Actually it’s just the opposite. I guess I want you to trust me on this. I won’t get into all the details. I grew up in a rough neighborhood. I have seen women beaten by their husbands as a kid in front of my own eyes. I’ve seen daughters beat up by their fathers in front of me. I’ve seen violence of every sort and kind. I have dear women who are friends that I literally got between them and their abusive boyfriends and actually put my life on the line on more than one occasion.

I understand that men do horrible things to women and I know that usually it’s your dad, your brother, your uncle, your grandpa who’s the one who rapes, beats, molests, abuses, walks out the door, destroys the family, falls down on his responsibility. As your pastor and as your brother in Christ for those of you who are Christians I would say I am terribly sorry and I am deeply burdened for that.

My question is well who’s going to go after the guys. Who’s going to tell them you weren’t made for that. You weren’t made to be an abuser. You weren’t made to be someone who abandons and abdicates responsibility. You’re made to love your wife. You’re made to love your children, to serve them, to protect them, to care for them like Jesus with his own bride, the church, to die if needed. If God’s the Father and we’re His kids, to treat your kids like God treats us, which is love and encouragement and correction and support and nourishing in every way.

What I say often can and does and will get completely misunderstood, but I’m appealing to the hearts of you men that once your heart is inclined toward Jesus it’s inclined toward your spouse, it’s inclined toward your kids, it’s inclined toward your grandkids and you realize that you were put here to love, to protect, to provide, to care, to serve, to nourish, to bless and that’s what it means to be a man. It’s easy to have sex with your girlfriend. It’s easy just to be a bully and a thug and a jerk. It really takes the grace of God to be faithful, to be loving for a lifetime to one woman and to the children that God would entrust to your care.

So some of you women are here you say, “I don’t know. I don’t trust men. I’ve been abused.” I understand. I know a third of the women in the room right here were sexually abused. Most of you by an older man who was part of your own family. I would say this. If you don’t trust men I understand. Just trust one man, Jesus and start there. Just start right there.

I got this really cool letter recently from a young woman in this church. She said, here’s her story. Sometimes I do get cool letters. It’s not all hate mail. She said, “I came to Mars Hill. I was not a Christian. I had been repeatedly physically, sexually, emotionally abused by my father” and I think it was her grandfather. She said, “I came to Mars Hill as a non-Christian and Jesus is the first man I ever trusted.” I said, “Well that’s a good place to start. He’s the one guy you can trust.” She said, “Then I realized I wanted to be married and I wanted to be a mother, but I didn’t trust men because of what had been done to me.” Understandable. There’s fear.

She said, “I met a guy who became a Christian at Mars Hill and his desires were for Jesus and marriage and kids and he seemed like a good guy. We got married.” She said two things. She said, “He’s never raised his hand, he’s never raised his voice to me or the kids. He’s very sweet.” She said, “Every night we’ve got two daughters. He snuggles with them. He prays over them. He reads the Bible with them. He kisses them on the forehead. He tells them that he loves them. He sings worship songs to Jesus with them. They think their daddy’s the greatest man in the world.”

She said, “Almost every night I cry because I realize that my family’s changing and my daughters won’t have to deal with what I dealt with because they have a different daddy.” Now that, okay, that’s what I want. You know what? That’s what God wants. That’s what God wants.

So the reason I’m so passionate about all of this is that we’re in a city where it is the least likely city for a young man who is in his 20s to early 30s to go to church in the United States of America. How many of you are single guys are in your 20s to early 30s. Single guys raise your hands. Okay. Look around. You are a miracle. I know you thought, “Oh, I just parked.” That’s a miracle. You actually came to church to open the Bible to learn about Jesus. You’re doing the same thing as these guys. You’re saying, “I may have come from a line that was totally messed up or maybe even I came from a good line, a good family, but I have not fully walked in those ways. I’ve been foolish myself, but I’m here ‘cause I want to be a Christian and a Godly man and a husband and a father and a protector and a provider and a nurturer and an encourager and a supporter and I can’t find anywhere else that tells me anything. So I’m coming here hoping we open the bible.”

That’s exactly what happens here. That’s why Ezra gets all the guys together, the heads of the homes, the patriarchs, the husbands, the fathers, the grandfathers and he says, “Guys, we’ve got a lot of work to do ‘cause you don’t know what you’re doing, but scripture talks about you and how you can live your life in accordance with God’s principles so that you and your wife and your children and your grandchildren can be blessed and not burdened by your existence.”

Do you guys get my heart in this? I know it's gonna get spun weird somehow. At the end of the day I want the women loved, I want the children served and I want the men to be dignified, respectable, Godly, strong, honorable gentlemen for Jesus. That's all. That's all. That's all. [Applause] Keep going. That was my first verse. One down. But you guys know where my heart is at on this. This really matters to me. I've got three sons, two daughters. I really want when they hear God is a father I want them to think, "Well my dad loved the Lord and hm, if God's like my dad, but only the perfect version then that sounds good."

Verse 14. "And they found it written in the law" in the Old Testament "that the people had been commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths or tents." Some translations may say tabernacles. "During the feast of the seventh month and that they should proclaim it and publish it in all their towns and in Jerusalem go out to the hills bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle palm and other leafy trees to make booths as it is written."

Second principle is that when God visits his people in extraordinary way and true revival breaks out there is joyful obedience of God's word. Here they're reading the Old Testament. They realize, "Ya' know, it says we're supposed to celebrate this thing called the feast of booths." Some of your translations may call it the feast of tabernacles. What it was in the Old Testament God's people were in slavery and bondage for 400 years to a cruel pharaoh in Egypt. God liberated them, parted the Red Sea and let them go free.

They were supposed to head to the Promised Land that God had guaranteed for their inheritance yet they grumbled, whined and complained so God made them walk around in the wilderness for how long? Forty years. Grumbling, whining and complaining is a sin. I tell this to my kids all the time. "Arg arg arg" Alright; you want to walk around the house for 40 years. You can do that.

That's basically what happened, right. God was like, "If you guys don't stop complaining I'm not going to take you to the Promised Land." They're "Oh, we hate the manna. We want to go back to Egypt." God's like, "Alright; one more trip around the cul-de-sac kids. Here we go. Keep on goin' nowhere." And this went on for 40 years and during that time they lived in tents. So they were camping essentially. They'd pull in branches and they'd build little huts or booths; tabernacles is the word that some translations use and they would live in the tents.

So the feast of booths was remembering how for 40 years they were whining and complaining and disobedient and God loved them, but they had to live in tents and they didn't make it to the Promised Land until Joshua and Caleb and a whole new generation inherited the promises of God. So the feast of booths was to remember that. To remember that they were sinful, but God was faithful.

Now what is interesting is that after 141 years the walls were fortified after 52 days of work. The people moved back into the city just in time for the celebration of the feast of booths according to the Jewish calendar. So what this shows is that they're reading the Bible and they get to the part that exactly applies to their own calendar weeks before that holiday is to occur so it's perfectly timed for them to apply what they've learned.

How many of you have noticed this with God, that God is sovereign. That means He works through providence and He works out the details of our life. How many of you have found that you're right in the middle of something and all of a sudden a sermon, a friend with some information from scripture, the reading of the Bible, you're given the book and all of a sudden you're like, "That's exactly what I needed right now. That totally fits. I can't believe it. God actually cares and He knows I'm going to ruin everything so He got me a little wisdom here to help me get through this season."

Have you noticed that with God that things, information just shows up. You just happen to be reading the Bible, you're like "That's exactly what I'm dealing with. It fits." That's 'cause God loves you and God's providential and here they're reading along. They're like, "Feast of booths. Isn't that next week? We should do that." Here's the point. That scripture exists not just for information, but for transformation. That the point in reading scripture is not to memorize a lot of facts so you can go on Jeopardy and win a lot of money by nailing the ancient Mesopotamian culture category. The point of scripture is that you would learn about God and repent of sin and be more like Jesus.

That's why in James 1:22 He says, "Do not merely listen to the word and thereby deceive yourself." Do what it says. Do what it says. So what they're learning here is you know, God's a good God and when God says something to us it must be a good thing that He says so why would we foolishly disobey a loving God who is a father. We should just do what He says.

Now let me say this. Your view of God really determines whether or not you're going to obey scripture. If you see God as this mean, distant sort of bitter ogre, when He speaks it'll just be like a shrill or the shouting voice of an abusive father and you'll say, "Ah, I don't want to obey." If you see that God is a loving Father, that you're one of His kids, that He deeply cares for you and that His commandments are good and He's just lookin' out for ya', when your dad speaks to you, you're more inclined to listen and obey. That's where Jesus says, "If you love me you'll obey me." Jesus doesn't say, "Obey me." What He says is "I love you. If you love me you'll obey me and you'll know that when I tell you to do something it's a really good thing."

Now again I've got five kids. I've got to watch which stories I tell 'cause they usually come to this service, but I do this with my kids. I establish the relationship. So one of my kids recently was being a little defiant, disobedient. Get down on their level, look 'em in the eye, "Who am I?" This is our little series of questions. "Who am I?" "You're my dad." "Who are you?" "I'm your child." "Okay. Are you sinning?" "Yes." My kids are pretty honest. "Yes, I'm sinning." Not totally repentant all the time, but pretty honest about the whole thing. "Yes, I'm sinning."

"Okay. Now I told you to do something. Are you doing it?" "No." "Okay. Have I ever told you to do a bad thing?" "No, you don't tell me to do bad things. You tell me to do good things." "Do I love you?" "Yes, you love me." "Are my rules to keep you out of trouble and to make life good for you and the rest of us 'cause none of us are having a good time." "Yes, yes. Your commandments are good. You love me. We're cool. You're my daddy. I got it. Give me the knuckles." We do the whole thing.

So then I ask, "So what are you gonna do?" "Alright, I'll do it. Cool; we're cool. I'm sorry. I'll do it." And then the kids tend to obey. Now if you're the parent who's always screaming and yelling and threatening and nagging, kids are like, "Ya' know what? I'm not sure mom, dad" whomever the disciplinarian is; "loves me, cares about me. I'm not sure they really want to connect with me. I'm not sure they're interested in me. They just like to bark orders from a distance" where there's no relational loving, intimacy and connection.

These guys, these people rightly understood God's a loving Father. His commandments are for the good of His children. His commandments are to bless them, protect them, make their life better, make the lives of others who are in their sphere of relationship better. So all of a sudden they start reading scripture and they say, "You know what? If God wants to talk to us we should listen and obey 'cause He is the best. He loves us. He's wise. He's good. So we need to hurry up and obey Him."

You know that Jesus has showed up when dad's hearts are inclined toward their children and you know that God has showed up when people start reading the Bible and not arguing against God, not defending their behavior but just changing, repenting, obeying, going a different direction because God loves them and they love God.

Which leads us to the third point beginning in Verse 16 with this sanctified holy camping, which is what it is. "So the people went out and brought them" – those are the branches and such – "made booths for themselves, each on his roof and in their courts and in their courts of the house of God and the square of water gave them the square of the gate of Ephraim." They didn't leave town. They camped in town on the roof or wherever. You just couldn't sleep in your house.

Imagine one day the whole city of Seattle shuts down and everybody's camping in the city. That's what's going on. Somebody say, "That's great." Not really. Let me just talk about camping for a minute. I prefer bed and breakfast; two things you don't get camping. Anyways, Verse 17 – you get ground and cook it yourself. I prefer bed and breakfast. "And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths for from the days of Joshua, the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so and there was great rejoicing." Happy campers. Oh come on; that wasn't too bad.

"And day by day from the first day to the last day he, Ezra, read from the book of the law" – the first five books of the Old Testament – "the law of God. They kept the feast for seven days and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly according to the rule." So they basically had a six-hour sermon, then a men's conference and then a one week Bible camp. It was like Pentateuch-alooza. Everybody shows up. That's a good word. See if you could say that. Pentateuch-alooza.

They all show up for this one week Bible camp and they're all learning scripture and they're all living in tents and they're all hanging out and it's this big celebratory event for God's people to learn His word, to build their friendships, to worship Him, to rejoice, to enjoy one another and there's a great amount of joy and there's a love for God and there's a love for one another and there's this forward progress of this heart change among people in the city.

And my third point then is based upon this section of scripture that true revival occurs. That people have really met Jesus. When religion is overthrown by the gospel. Now this may surprise some of you. We don't like religion. Religion is the enemy of Christianity. I know what James' says that true, pure religion is to look after widows, orphans and those in need. That's cool.

What we're talking about is the religion of the guys who murdered Jesus, the very religious guys. The very religious guys who loved religion but not God. What we see here is that these people were not atheists previously. They were religious. They believed in God. They believed in the Bible. They would occasionally go to their sacred church meetings, Old Testament church. They would occasionally offer sacrifices. They would occasionally celebrate certain religious holidays. They were pretty religious.

If you would have said "What's the list of good things and bad things?" They would have said, "Well, these things are good, these things are bad 'cause we know a little bit about the Bible and God tells us right from wrong." These were not atheists. These were religious people. In our day we might even call them spiritual people.

But here's what happened. There were two events that were occurring within the same week that led to this celebration and rejoicing and change. When I use the word gospel I mean good news. Religion doesn't have good news.

The first event was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Within that same week they had the feast of booths. So they're celebrating these two events together in the course of a week. It's like when we have Christmas and then New Years all in the same week. It's a big holiday week. Christmas is the big deal. For them it was Day of Atonement was the big deal and then their feast of booths was actually in some ways kind of like our New Year's celebration.

So Yom Kippur, the day of atonement is where they would deal with their sin. They would all come together and here's how it would work. There would be a high priest who was the mediator between God and people. He would bring people's sins to God and he would bring God's word to people. He was a foreshadowing, Hebrews tells us, of Jesus who is our great high priest. God became a man to mediate between men and women and God. And on the Day of Atonement what would happen is the priest would get two goats without spot or blemish showing that they were without sin and perfect, foreshadowing the coming of Jesus as the perfect sacrifice. One would be called the sacrificial goat and the other would be called the scapegoat. You may have heard that. Some people still use that term.

The priest representing the people would take that sacrificial goat, put his hands on the animal and confess the sins of the people. "God, some of us are

sleeping with our girlfriends. Some of us are cheating on their spouse. Some of us are lying and stealing and cheating and coveting. Some of us are gluttons; we eat too much. Drunkards, we drink too much. Some of us are just religious, think we're better than everybody else and we're filled with pride and we're wicked, too." And he would name everybody's sins.

Then what would he do to the animal? Slit its throat. This is a bloody, gory, disgusting mess; animal twitch, wail, scream, blood gushing out, sick mess showing that the wage for sin is death. Death typified by blood. How many of you don't like me talking about blood? Freaks you out. I once preached a whole sermon on blood and a woman passed out. We had to call 911. That's how freaked out people are by blood.

Now the reason that God connects – there's a lot of blood in scripture and the reason God connects blood in sin is because the wage for sin is death. One of the ways we know that somebody's dead is when they've lost their blood, right. If it's inside that's good; outside, bad. That when you see blood you think somebody got hurt. If you see a lot of blood you think somebody died. The wage for sin is death. Death is typified in blood and blood disgusts us in the same way that sin disgusts God. So when you see a lot of blood and you're like [Makes gagging sound] not good. That's how God feels looking at our lives.

God's as sickened by our sin as we are sickened by the sight of blood. So God connects the two to remind us that sin is displeasing to Him and that sin results in death. So the blood would be flowing. This was a bloody, gory, horrendous day.

Now the priest was representative of the coming of Jesus, our great high priest and the sacrificial goat was representative of Jesus who would stand in our place on the cross, suffer and die and literally shed his blood to pay the penalty for our sin.

The second goat was the scapegoat and again the priest would lay hands on that goat, name the sins of the people, but rather than slaughtering that animal would let it go free to run out into the woods and do whatever free goats do. I don't know. The showing of that was that not only has Jesus paid the penalty for our sins by dying as a substitute in our place, He also takes our sins and takes them away. He takes them away.

Just like that animal, name all the sins, animal away, sins going with the animal is what it's trying to show. Theologically we call this propitiation. Jesus died for our sins. Expiation, He takes away our sin, we're cleansed, we're freed. We're no longer seen by God in that sinful, rebellious state of judgment. We're seen through the person and work of Jesus in a state of love and forgiveness and redeemed reconciliation. That's what Jesus does.

So that was how they had their sins dealt with. In the Day of Atonement they were waiting for the coming of Jesus, their priest, their sacrificial substitute and their scapegoat. That gave the people great hope and great joy. Then after that within the same week they would celebrate the feast of booths. The feast of booths again was remembering their sin and disobedience and folly, but God's faithfulness that even though for 40 years they were disobedient, God never left them. Just like scripture says, "I'll never leave you. I'll never forsake you." Jesus says, "I'll be with you always to the end of the age." Paul says, "Even when we're faithless God is faithful."

The feast of booths was remembering, "We're sinners, but God's faithful and our hope doesn't lie in our ability to hang in there, but in God's ability to continue with us. That God was faithful to the people in the past. He's faithful to us in the present and He's going to continue with us into the future until one day He takes us to Heaven which is our eternal Promised Land and that life really is a journey and we really will sin. Sometimes we're really going to wander from God, but God won't give up on His children. God will be as faithful to us as He was to a previous generation walking with them for a full 40 years until their land of promise.

In these two events as they studied the Bible and as the Holy Spirit convicted them and as they leaned into the future looking forward to the coming of Jesus that gave them great hope. The result was that they walked away from their religion and they walked to the gospel, the good news of the person and the work of Jesus who was coming into human history and they were anticipating their arrival.

Let me say this to you as clearly as I can. My fear is that some of you may come here and you may think, "Okay, Mark says I need to repent of my sin. He's trying to make me religious." No. I'm saying sinners need to repent of their sin and religious people need to repent of their religion. My goal is not to convert the religious people to sinners and my goal is not to convert the sinners to religious people. My goal is to push everybody to Jesus. That's my goal.

So if you're here and you say, "Well he said that sleeping with your girlfriend's bad and watching porn's bad." And so is being religious. Equally bad. In fact the guys who killed Jesus weren't the prostitutes and the drunks. It was the religious people, which should freak religious people out. "Hey, hey, we're in the book. We're in the book. We killed God. That probably was not a good idea. That's our team." At least the prostitutes wanted to talk to Him and talk about their messed up life and ask for help. It was the religious people who killed Him.

So if you're here and you're the porn addict, you're the meat-head 20 year old guy, you're here with your girlfriend saying, "Why did I pick this Sunday. She's not gonna sleep with me now." You need to repent of that. But if you're also here saying, "I can't believe he said girlfriend. That's a naughty word." Then you need to repent of that too. You're a religious person. "Did he say porn? Yes, he did. He can't say that. He did. He just said it again." You need to repent of your religion – of your religion.

So let me close with this. I think what happens here and why I get so encouraged and why I pray this same thing for the city of Seattle is that people didn't go from being sinners to religious. Some sinners went to Jesus. Some religious people went to Jesus and religion was not the answer and neither was sin.

So let me explain to you the difference between religion and Jesus or the gospel, the good news about Jesus. Some of you have heard me say this

before, but Martin Luther says rightly, the great reformer, that religion is the default mode of the human heart. That you and I are so prone to forget about the gospel and go to religion it's just this default that we have to continually be brought back and reminded about who Jesus is and what he's done.

Here's the difference. First of all, religion tells you that if you obey God will love you. That's horrible. That's just terrible. Again I have five kids. Could you imagine me saying this to my kids? "If you kids are good I will love you and be your daddy, but if you're not good I won't love you and I won't be your dad." That's disgusting. That's horrible.

No. I am your dad. I do love you. Because of that you should obey me. Not so that I will love you but because I already do. See, Jesus would tell you "You don't need to obey God so that he will love you. You can obey God because He does love you." God demonstrates his love for us and this scripture says while we were still sinners, "Jesus Christ died for us." Jesus didn't stand back and say, "If you kids are good then I'll be your friend." Jesus came in and said, "You kids are horrible. I'm gonna die for your sin to demonstrate my love and because of my love you're going to be able to obey and live a whole new life out of the power of my love.

Again, I've got a three-year old daughter, blonde hair, blue eyes, cute as a button. This week I sat down. She had a little rebellious moment. I sat down with her and before I disciplined her – she wasn't doing what we asked her to do and she was making it kind of difficult on all of us. I sat down, sat on her bed, look her in the eye. I said, "Sweetie pie, who am I?" We do the questions. "You're my dad." "Honey, are you sinning?" "Yep, I'm not doing what you told me." Okay; good. "Honey, do I love you?" Here's my daughter. She's pretty dramatic. She says, "You love me bigger than the sky and deeper than the ocean." She's very dramatic. And now I'm supposed to discipline her. I'm like oh no. Like oh man. I'm like alright.

I'm not making this up. She throws her arms around my neck and puts her cheek up against mine and kisses me and I gotta fix this otherwise her husband is gonna be in for a world of manipulation. Anyways. What I told her is this. I said, "I do love you, honey, and I will always love you and I'm your daddy and my love for you doesn't change, but I need you to obey me 'cause I'm your daddy." "Okay daddy." "So we work it all out.

Religion says "If you obey God will love you." Jesus says, "Because I have loved you you can now obey." Do you see the change in motivation? It's not just what you do. It's why you do it that counts, too. When you overcome a sin, when you see change in your life you don't look at God and say, "Okay, God, will you love me now?" You look at God and say, "God, thank you for your love. It's so powerful that it allows me to live a different life."

Another way that religion is different than Jesus and we could do many of these, but I'll give a few. Religion sees the world filled with good people and bad people and you're always on the good team. So it's like Democrat, Republican, men, women, young, old, rich, poor, black, white, whatever it is, Mac, PC, whatever it is, we're the good guys; they're the bad guys.

The truth is that the Bible says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory God. We're all bad guys and Jesus is the good guy. So as Christians we don't see good guys, bad guys, good girls, bad girls. We see repentant sinners and unrepentant sinners, but we just see a bunch of sinners. Now this takes away the self-righteous arrogance of religion otherwise a religious person walks up to somebody who's got a sin in their life and says, "I can't believe you're doing that. You know the Bible says not to do that. Do you know that I don't do that." Right?

No; that's pride. Pride got Satan kicked out of Heaven. Pride gets you cuts into the line to Hell but it's not a virtue; it's a sin. The response is to walk up to somebody and say, "I see sin in your life. Would you like to hear about the sin in my life. I'm not better than you. In fact, I may be worse. The only help I've ever found is Jesus. I'm sure He would help you too. We're both a mess. We both need Him." There's humility in that. There's humility that's not repugnant and repulsive.

Also, religion is about what I do. That's why religion loves lists of rules. Now there are good rules in scripture, but religious people for some reason because they have a copy of the Bible feel like they get to write additions. So depending upon what tradition, church, denomination or background you're in, there'll be this list of rules that aren't in the Bible and if you keep them and check the boxes then you get to say that you're a good guy, not a bad guy, that God loves you because you've been a good person.

So it all depends on what church you're in though, right? 'Cause in some churches speak in tongues, good; others, speak in tongues, bad. Some drink alcohol, good; some drink alcohol, bad. Some whatever it is, there's always different teams with lists of things that aren't in the Bible that people have made up saying, "If you check these boxes then you can tell other people 'I'm a good person. Here's my resume. Here's all the good things I've done and here's all the bad things I'm avoiding.'" Problem is everybody's list is different and religion tells you it's really about what you do.

Jesus says, "It's about what I've done." What did Jesus say on the cross? "It is finished." Well, that seems like it's all taken care of. I hate to point out the obvious, but when He says, "All done." It's all done. I don't think that's an exegetical stretch of interpretive process. Seems like I did everything. Hey, He did everything. That means there's nothing left for you to do to earn merit your salvation. It doesn't mean that your life doesn't change. It doesn't mean that you don't grow in your relationship with Jesus, but it means that your salvation is secure because of the finished work of Jesus. It's about what He did; not about what you do.

Here's the problem as well. That kind of thinking that religion provides gives you a lack of certainty regarding your standing before God because if you have to be a good person you have to try really hard and do your best to make God happy, which is what religion says. You never know. Am I good enough? Did I do enough? Did I try hard enough? Did I mess it up with that one bad thought or deed or word or if I mess it up tomorrow do I undo everything that I've already tried so hard to do. You live in this constant state of paranoia and fear. Am I good enough? Did I try hard enough? Where am I at with God?

Jesus provides certainty and assurance regarding your standing before God. John says this in 1 John 5, "I write these things so you may know you have eternal life. He who has the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, he has life. He who doesn't, doesn't." It's very easy. It's very easy.

There was a baptism up at the Shoreline campus recently. I got to attend when I took a day off from preaching. A man gets up. Best answer in the world. He says, "I became a Christian here. My wife became a Christian. We're getting baptized together. My wife's pregnant. We're having our first baby. As the husband and the father I know I need to stand before the Lord Jesus, give an account for myself, my wife and our baby." And here's what he said, "My answer is Jesus."

I literally – don't tell anybody, but I started kind of crying. I thought, "That's the best answer I ever heard." He's going to stand before God and God's going to say, "What is the ground of your assurance for forgiveness of sin and eternal life for you and for your family. What is your answer?" You'll say, "Jesus." It's not about what I do. It's about what he's done. It's not about me earning your love. It's about Him giving it to me as a gift of grace.

It's not about me taking confidence in the good things I've done and the bad things I've avoided. It's me taking confidence in His sinless life, His substitutionary death and his resurrection to conquer my enemies of Satan, sin and death. I thought that guy's going to be a good dad. That guy's going to be a great dad.

Religion doesn't provide certainty or assurance. You're never sure if you've done enough. Jesus provides assurance because He has completed the work of salvation.

Couple more. The problem as well with religion is that it sees all hardship in life as punishment. Some of you falsely labor under the myth that when bad things happen God is hitting you, God is abusing you, God is being angry and mean and violent with you. If you're a Christian He's not. He's already punished Jesus. He's not going to punish you. That would be double punishment. That's unjust.

When hardship and difficulty comes it is not that God is punishing you. Now He may be disciplining you, correcting you, growing you, but if you know that when you're suffering God isn't punishing you then you'll run to Him; not from Him. If religion tells you that God punishes you because God's mean and every time He sees you do something wrong He likes to hammer you when you're hurting you're not going to run to God because He's like that abusive dad that used to punch you in the mouth and that's the last guy you're going to go to in your time of need.

But if we realize that Jesus went to the cross and He suffered, He died, He took your punishment in your place and that God is a loving Father and He doesn't punish His children, you'll run to God instead of from Him. You'll see hardship as an opportunity to be more like Jesus and to get closer to God the Father and to be led by the Holy Spirit. You won't see it as an abusive reaction by a violent God to hurt you because it's not.

If you're a Christian let me just say this plainly. God doesn't punish you. He punished Jesus. You can trust Him. You can run to Him when times are hard and you're hurting and He is not going to be the God who abuses you. That's not who God is.

Last few. Religion is about me, my good works, my deeds, my efforts. Christianity, the good news, the gospel, it's about Jesus. And here's the real problem with religion. It doesn't work. It just doesn't work. Take it from a guy who was religious for now more than half his life. It doesn't work because it ends in pride or despair. Pride meaning you made a list, tried to please God, be a good person, earn your salvation and you thought you did a good job. So now you're just an arrogant, self-righteous jerk looking at other people saying, "Well, they don't have very good self-control. What kind of person is that? I'm so glad I'm not like them." Those are repugnant, self-righteous, smug, finger-pointing religious people.

And pride is a sin. It's a sin that got Satan kicked out of Heaven. And standing back and pointing fingers and judging people and thinking you're holier than everyone and looking down on them because they're not your peer morally. That's what religion ends up as. Or it ends up in total despair. Some of you were there. "I try hard. I tried to get up in the morning and read my Bible, but I just keep sleeping. I meant to pray and then I missed the 90s. I don't know what happened. I didn't get any prayer time in. I went to church that one time and then I forgot. I don't think I'm doin' so good." It leads to utter despair.

You know what Jesus leads to? Humble, confident joy. Humble; you know what? I'm not a good person. I'm a sinner. You know what? I didn't do anything to save myself. Jesus did everything. You know what? The ground of my assurance before God is not my life; it's his. It's about Him; not about me. It's humility. People come up and say, "Well just 'cause you're a Christian you're no better than me." "Oh I know. I'm probably worse." It freaks people out. You don't get defensive. You say, "Oh yeah. You want to hear about my thought life? You can't even see that." They're like, "No man, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. You're grossing me out."

Humble, but confident. God loves me. God knows me. God cares for me. All my sins are forgiven. My salvation is secure. My life can change, will change, is changing 'cause Jesus is my mediator. He's my sacrifice. He's my scapegoat. He forgives my sins, takes them away, connects me to the Father, lives to intercede for me. He's also my feast of booths. He'll never leave me nor forsake me even though I'm a disobedient person. He's never going to give up on me and He's going to walk with me all the way to the end to the land of promise known as Heaven. What that leads to is humble, confident joy. You're happy.

You know what religious people are? Happy. They're self-righteous or sad, but they never get joy. I want you to be happy. For that you need Jesus. You do. And so some of you are here today and you need to repent of your sin. And some of you here today, you need to repent of your religion and we all need to come to Jesus. That's what happened in Chapter 8 through the Day of Atonement, the feast of booths, the reading of scripture, God the Holy Spirit opened their understanding and it starts with us men saying we're going to repent, we're going to be responsible men.

By God's empowering grace we're going to be new kinds of men that love women, that do absolutely adore and care for children, that are not trying to take the path of least resistance, but trying to take the path of greatest responsibility. We're not going to raise our hands. We're not going to raise our voices to women and children. We will love. We will cherish. We will honor. We will protect. We will provide because God is a Father and that's how He treated us so that's how we treat our kids, because Jesus Christ treats His bride, the church that way so that's the way we treat our ladies.

It starts with us men practically implementing the functional truths of the gospel. Not so that we could be religious people, but so that we could be Jesus' people. That's what we're talking about. That includes the women, that includes the children, that includes the whole lot of us. My hope is that we see a day like they did where 50,000 meet Jesus and a whole city is transformed. Not told that they can sin and God will love them and not told that through religion they can fix themselves, but through the intercession, the substitution and the resurrection of Jesus, new life is made possible. Life that is so much better than a life of sin and life that is so much happier and more attractive than a life of religion.

When you're ready I call you to trust in Jesus. Become a Christian or renew your commitment. Many of you have some history with God as they did and they came back to a relationship with Him. When you're ready you can give your tithes and offerings. If you're not a Christian visitor don't give. We're going to celebrate communion remembering the body and blood of Jesus that takes away sin and we're going to pray and sing to Jesus, our high priest who lives to intercede for us until one day by His faithfulness we enter that eternal land of promise and we have our eternal feast of booths.

~~I appreciate you~~ listening. I will pray for you men. Paul says that he wants men to lift holy hands in prayer. So I'd encourage you men repent of your sins and then raise your hands in worship and prayer to Jesus. He will make them clean. He will make them clean.

Father God, we thank you for being a great Father, the perfect Father. And God, we thank you for adopting us into your family as sons and daughters. We thank you that you don't punish us as your children though you will discipline us to make us more like you. We thank you that your commands are good. They're not to abuse us or hurt us. They're to protect us and encourage us.

And God I thank you that when you show up the hearts of men are inclined toward you and women and children. God, we pray for that. I pray for that. I pray for that for the men in this room. I pray for that for those who would listen online. That Holy Spirit, you would grab the hearts of the men and that you would give them your Father heart, that you would give them your loving heart. God as well, we thank you that when you show up there is joyful obedience to scripture. That we understand that your commands are good and they're for our good.

And God we thank you that when you show up religion goes away and so does wicked sin and it's replaced with gospel joy, happy people living new lives; not because they have to but because they get to. Not so that you will love them, but because you already have. Not so that they could earn their salvation, but because it's already been given as a gift of grace. God, please keep us from the despair and the self-righteous pride of religion. Please give us the humble, confident joy that only Jesus gives as we ask this in his name. Amen.