

**Surprised By Joy****Neh 8:1-12**

**Background:** We are coming out of the pandemic and can finally regather as a congregation in the auditorium without capacity limits! Praise God! We are all in the process of understanding the “new-normal” that we are returning to and are slowly changing rhythms and habits of isolation that were established over the past year. God is waiting to freely pour out His joy to us, to strengthen us in our weakness. Expect to be surprised by joy!

This week, we'll be concluding a short 2-sermon series entitled "Return, Rebuild, Rejoice" based on lessons from Nehemiah. As the Israelites returned from their Exile under the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra, they came together to Rebuild and to Rejoice. What can we learn from their story and example? Let's find out together this Sunday.

**Sermon Text: Nehemiah 8:1-12 (ESV)**

*<sup>1</sup> And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. <sup>2</sup> So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. <sup>3</sup> And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. <sup>4</sup> And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishaël, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. <sup>5</sup> And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. <sup>6</sup> And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. <sup>7</sup> Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. <sup>8</sup> They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.*

*<sup>9</sup> And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or*

*weep.” For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. <sup>10</sup> Then he said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” <sup>11</sup> So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.” <sup>12</sup> And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.*

## **Discussion Questions**

### **1. Preparation**

- a. As you reflect on the sermon, what stands out to you most?
- b. What is one thing you hoped to talk about today/tonight?
- c. What question(s) did you come away with from the sermon?

### **2. Sermon questions**

- a. When was the last time you were surprised by joy?
- b. What “arrows of joy” (surprising moments of joy during regular life) are drawing you to Christ and onto his way?
- c. What “signposts” have you seen on the road, and how have they encouraged you?
- d. Are you in a place where you can’t see any signposts? Explain. Could it be because you are feeling grieved, tired or weak?
- e. When you see a signpost, make a point share them with fellow travelers on the road, especially your small group!