

January 27th, 2013

Can you imagine what it might be like to spend a Sunday in a place where there were no Christians...no churches...not a word about Jesus?

Nehemiah 8: 1-3, 5-6, 8-10

Even after the Jews returned to Palestine from their exile in Babylon, many of them did not return to observing the rules of their faith. This passage centres on Ezra who was a Levite, a teacher of Torah, in Jerusalem. He was revered as the man who shaped modern Judaism. Here he sets out the importance of marking the Sabbath. In Alan Richardson's book, A Theological Word Book of the Bible, keeping Sabbath was the way Jews "distinguished themselves from aliens". We're not talking space creatures here but, rather, people who are different. As Christians, keeping Sabbath is part of how we distinguish ourselves from the world. Listen as God speaks to us.

¹By the time the seventh month arrived, the People of Israel were settled in their towns. Then all the people gathered as one person in the town square in front of the Water Gate and asked the scholar Ezra to bring the Book of The Revelation of Moses that GOD had commanded for Israel.

²So Ezra the priest brought The Revelation to the congregation, which was made up of both men and women—everyone capable of understanding. It was the first day of the seventh month. ³He read it facing the town square at the Water Gate from early dawn until noon in the hearing of the men and women, all who could understand it. And all the people listened—they were all ears—to the Book of The Revelation.

⁵Ezra opened the book. Every eye was on him (he was standing on the raised platform) and as he opened the book everyone stood. ⁶Then Ezra praised GOD, the great God, and all the people responded, "Oh Yes! Yes!" with hands raised high. And then they fell to their knees in worship of GOD, their faces to the ground.

⁸They translated the Book of The Revelation of God so the people could understand it and then explained the reading.

⁹Nehemiah the governor, along with Ezra the priest and scholar and the Levites who were teaching the people, said to all the people, "This day is holy to GOD, your God.

Don't weep and carry on." They said this because all the people were weeping as they heard the words of The Revelation.

¹⁰He continued, "Go home and prepare a feast, holiday food and drink; and share it with those who don't have anything: This day is holy to God. Don't feel bad. The joy of GOD is your strength!"

Luke 4: 14-16

These few short verses demonstrate that the instructions of Ezra about keeping the Sabbath were very much in place in the time of Jesus. He showed himself to be a faithful and observant person by going to church on the Sabbath. Imagine why this might be a big deal?

¹⁴Jesus returned to Galilee powerful in the Spirit. News that he was back spread through the countryside. ¹⁵He taught in their meeting places to everyone's acclaim and pleasure.

¹⁶He came to Nazareth where he had been reared. As he always did on the Sabbath, he went to the meeting place. When he stood up to read, ¹⁷he was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church. THANKS BE TO GOD

Being Christian in a Non-Christian World

Mark San Filippo was our guest speaker. He spoke and showed many beautiful pictures of his time in Japan where there are few Christian places to worship.