

# Rejoice Always

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Good morning, brethren! Thank you, Bonnie, for that beautiful special music. There is a tremendous amount of work that goes into the special music. It's just a couple of minutes of the service but there's just as much preparation and time and hard work that goes into getting it ready and performing as any speaker or any message. So, certainly thank you! Also, greetings to those behind the camera. Good to have you with us here today as well and special greetings to those back home in the Portland, Oregon metropolitan area who may not be here with us physically, but certainly, hopefully, in spirit. We miss you and certainly hope you're having a wonderful Feast of Tabernacles as it begins.

Now, last year I started the sermonette that I gave on the Last Great Day with a couple of questions. And I'd like to start what I'd like to share with you today with, actually, those same questions. So, here we are at the Feast of Tabernacles 2013 this time, and it's been about a year since many of us have been together. Some of us are meeting for the first time.

"So, how are you? How are you feeling? What's the state of your mind and your heart?"

Now, these can be easy questions to gloss over. "Oh, I'm fine." Or the classic redirect, "Oh good, and you?" I'd like to take a little bit of time here this morning to really think about this question. Ask yourself "How are you?" Reflect back on this past year and what's transpired in your life or transpired in the lives of the people that you may know. I personally don't know anyone who hasn't had to face some level of trial over this past year, some pretty severe. There has been loss of jobs and subsequent financial struggles for many as the economy continues to kind of sputter along. There have been health trials like I'm not sure I've ever seen before.

Now, it could be argued that yes, the Church is getting older and deterioration of physical health is one of those inevitable things, but many of these health trials that we've seen are falling to the younger or even the very young. And I think the most hard-hitting have been trials in relationships, even relationships in the Church. Many have had and continue to face very real struggles with friends, with family and with relationships, with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

I have a good friend of mine who recently mentioned to me that he's been feeling a lot like Job lately. And kind of thinking about that statement, well, Job losing his material possessions must have been very difficult and certainly losing his children, I honestly

can't imagine that myself. The real struggle for Job must have come, then, in the reaction, the pressure, the harsh treatment from his wife (Right? "Curse God and die."), and his friends over the rest of what's recorded in the Book of Job. We, as human beings can be pretty tenacious. We can endure quite a bit physically, but when those relationships are attacked, that's when things can become extraordinarily difficult for us.

So, I ask again. "How are you? Really, how are you?" I'll be honest. For me and my household, it's been kind of a brutal year. And for many, if not most of you out there, it's been about the same, but ... but we are here at the Feast of Tabernacles in large part to shift our focus and to shift our mindsets. We have this opportunity together to participate in a time that for a multitude of reasons should lift our hearts and lift our spirits. Brethren, this isn't just an opportunity. This isn't just an optional event or an activity off to the side, but we are commanded to do this.

We're all familiar with it; turn with me please to Deuteronomy 16 and we will again review the command here in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles. Deuteronomy 16, we'll read verses 13 and 14. And, by way of reference, most of the scriptures I'll be reading out of the New American Standard Updated Edition of the Bible, unless otherwise noted. Deuteronomy 16 starting in verse 13:

***Deuteronomy 16:13:*** "You shall celebrate the Feast of Booths seven days after you have gathered in from your threshing floor and your wine vat; (NAU)

And notice verse 14:

***Deuteronomy 16:14:*** and you shall rejoice ... (NAU)

Not, "Ah, think about rejoicing or there's a rejoicing event happening during the Feast." No.

***Deuteronomy 16:14:*** and you shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female servants and the Levite and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your towns. (NAU)

Now, over the course of any given year, one of the greatest struggles that we can face is carrying this state of rejoicing from the Feast and into our lives from there and sustaining that momentum that we can build here to carry us through the year into the next Feast of Tabernacles. We have these seven days together and the Last Great Day, the eighth day, as focus time together to rejoice, to enjoy. Then, we step back into the world and the darkness of what's around us or perhaps even the darkness that's within our own lives. And that rejoicing, that joy tends to fade away.

What I'd like to share with you this morning is actually the result of my own personal experience and introspection in putting together this very message that I'm sharing with you this morning. Now as a speaker, I spend—and I think all of the men that get to

have this opportunity spend—a great deal of time in prayer and in meditation on what we’re going to share with you. And in preparing this year, in all honesty, I really struggled to come up with a topic that kind of gelled well and came together. I had several ideas that seemed solid and scriptural and apropos to the Feast, but it just wasn’t coming together. Now there comes a point—and I’m sure we can all relate in the context of preparing for the Feast—that it’s time to get serious. It’s crunch time. Right? You’ve got to start getting prepared. You have to start getting packed and I was reaching that crunch time mentally and I was just really struggling to put something together. I started spending more and more mental time trying to figure something out; put pieces together; and come up with something that’s memorable and hard-hitting, life changing and worth your time.

You’re probably familiar with those Chinese finger puzzles. Right? Where you put your two fingers in and then you try to get them back out? Well, that was going on in my head. The harder I was pulling on trying to do something, the more and more stuck I was getting.

Now, the breakthrough moment for me was on a Sabbath walk recently and I was just praying about this. Two things really struck me.

The first one was I was trying to do this—emphasis on that little word “I”. I may have been praying for help, praying for inspiration, and then I would summarily turn and try to do it myself. We’re going to visit that in a little more depth here shortly.

The second thing was that all of the ideas that I was coming up with were all negatively motivated. Again, while maybe Biblical sound, I found that I was looking at conditions in the Church and crafting a message that was harsh, corrective.

These two barriers coupled with what we just read in Deuteronomy 16 about rejoicing led me to the conclusions that I’d like to share with you today. What I’d like to focus on is how we can create and sustain a more positive perspective in our lives. Now, while we’ll talk about this in the context of the Feast and we’re going to talk about it in the context of the millennium (what we’re here foreshadowing), my hope is that we can take this topic and apply it again to our lives year round. It’s been my observation that more than additional knowledge, points of data, abstract correction, condemnation, we need through the power of God’s spirit dwelling within us to be and remain positive. If there is one take-away for you here this morning for what I’m sharing, you can find it in 1 Thessalonians 5:16. Don’t need to turn there. It simply reads:

***1 Thessalonians 5:16. Rejoice always; (NAU)***

We’re here at the Feast to rejoice. We’re commanded to do so. Let’s carry that rejoicing beyond these Days and into every day of our lives, and beyond, as we’ll see.

Now to do that, I’d like to share a three-step process. And to demonstrate this process, we’re going to walk through a little bit of a Biblical case study on the application of these

steps to help us maintain or perhaps restore a more positive perspective and a frame of reference, again to enable us to rejoice always.

So first, let's talk about the case study. Turn with me please to the Book of Nehemiah. If you have a bookmark, you may want to shim it in there. We're going to flip around a little bit over the course of our time here. I think most of us are familiar with the historical account of the Book of Nehemiah and what transpires here. So, I'm not going to take the time to build a lot of context, but I'd like to explore what to me are some interesting parallels to our lives contained in a little bit of the "back story" here in Nehemiah. So, the Book of Nehemiah chapter 1, we're going to start right in verse 1 and we'll read the first three verses. Nehemiah 1, starting in verse 1:

***Nehemiah 1:1.*** *The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capitol,*  
2) *that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped and had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.*

3) *They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in great distress and reproach, and the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire." (NAU)*

Now let's stop here and consider this in the context of our current day and age. For those here listening, watching behind the camera, wherever you're keeping God's Feasts this year are we not the remnant? Have we not survived what's transpired over the past twenty, twenty-five, thirty-ish years or so? What have we had to endure over this period of time? Do the descriptors "great distress and reproach" maybe resonate? Probably do.

And not just in the context of the Church or what's transpired kind of the post-Worldwide Era, but just in general in just living in this world. Ken talked about the conditions extant in this world today. Harken back to the question that we started with. How do you feel? How do you feel just living in this world trying to live God's way of life? That can be pretty distressing. Can't it? Can the way of life that we are trying to live make us a reproach perhaps to those that don't understand? Well, ask anybody who has lost a job over the Sabbath or has lost a close relationship with a loved one over standing up for God's way, for standing up for what's right.

So, perhaps not in a physical sense but certainly in an emotional sense, a spiritual sense, we see ourselves in a similar situation and circumstance as these Jews in Jerusalem coming back from captivity.

Now, let's consider this in the context of the millennium, the time that we're here picturing, again foreshadowing. Could this not be too terribly far off from what physical, mental, and emotional conditions may be extant on millennium day one? The world as humanity knew it will be for all intents and purposes gone. It will no longer exist. Much, if not all, of what was known of the material physical world will be in using the words here of Nehemiah "broken down and burned with fire" quite literally.

On the Feast of Trumpets, we talk about Trumpet plagues, the woes, the bowls in Revelation. We read passages from Joel 2, Zechariah 14. I'm not going to go through all that, but with that backdrop, let's think about the human beings who will have lived through that tribulation, through that time. Are they who lived through the great and dreadful Day of the Lord, the destruction, the war, the terror, are they going to be feeling pretty emotionally and mentally distressed, reproachful? Fair chance of that.

Now, with that in mind, let's take a look at Nehemiah's reaction. So, he hears this news. Let's look at his reaction to this information. Back to Nehemiah 1; we'll read verses 4 through 8. Verse 4 of Nehemiah 1:

***Nehemiah 1:4.*** *When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. (NAU)*

Now I just want to stop right there for a quick aside. When we look at the conditions in the Church, what's our reaction? When we see the tragedy and the suffering that's happening in the world at large, how do we respond? How about (God willing!) when we return with Jesus Christ to this world at the beginning of His reign and His rule and we look around at what's happened and what's transpired, how are we going to feel? This was our home? How are we going to feel when we see it? Do and will these conditions move us? Will they touch our hearts? Will they stir our sympathies? Will we have this type of reaction?

Let's continue here in Nehemiah 1 verse 5. So now, Nehemiah prays.

***Nehemiah 1:5.*** *I said, "I beseech You, O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments,*  
*6) let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned.*  
*7) We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.*  
*8) Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; (NAU)*

**So, the first step then to staying positive or having a positive frame of reference is acknowledgement.**

In this particular example, we see acknowledgement of the condition of the nation of Judah as a result of the lack of obedience and infidelity to God. Now, this principle may seem like a no-brainer, but I think we can all agree that's it is much more difficult to do than to say. You can think of it in terms of the concept of not being able to

help someone who has a problem until they actually see that they have a problem in the first place.

Now, let's look at another example of acknowledgement, again from our case study here from Nehemiah. You may not even need to turn to it. Let's go down to chapter 2. We're going to read verses 17 and 18 here in the Book of Nehemiah.

Now catching the story up, Nehemiah has gone before King Artaxerxes. He's asked for permission to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. He's kind of done a perimeter check. He's walked around. He's assessed the situation. He comes back to the leadership of Judah and Jerusalem and the officials and this is what he tells them. Nehemiah 2, starting in verse 17:

***Nehemiah 2:17.*** *Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach."*

*18) I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. ... (NAU)*

So, again what do we see here? We see Nehemiah acknowledging, this time focusing more on the tactical reality of the situation. And once again, this may seem obvious, but human nature often compels us to bury our heads in the sand and not only refuse to see the root of the problem but how the problem is even being manifest in the first place, to just completely shove the whole thing off to the side.

Now, verse 18 here in Nehemiah 2 is also an acknowledgement. And it's a positive acknowledgement. Nehemiah is acknowledging God's favor on him in this effort. You could call him a witness of God's graciousness, of God's mercy to the leaders of Jerusalem to which he was speaking.

So, what does this mean for you and me? We started with the question "How are you? How are you really?" Brethren, we can't be afraid to tackle that question truthfully. Taking that first step to rejoicing always means that we have to acknowledge that we don't rejoice always. Do we? And we have to acknowledge the reasons that we don't rejoice always—the pressures of Satan's world, our lack of faith, our lack of trust, idolatry. The list goes on and on and on.

But then we also have to acknowledge that there is a power far greater than ours that has been and will continue to be favorable towards us and provide us with the resources that we need to grow and to change and to become more like Him.

Let's continue reading here in Nehemiah. We'll pick it back up in verse 18, chapter 2. So the leadership responds to what Nehemiah says and:

***Nehemiah 2:18b.*** *... Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work.*

*19) But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, "What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?"*

*20) So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem." (NAU)*

So, Nehemiah doesn't fret under the pressure. He doesn't jump to his own power, authority. He doesn't grab a sword and start swinging, but we see here in verse 20 that he goes right to the source. He acknowledges the source—"The God of heaven will give us the success in our efforts."

Let's apply that concept then to the millennium. For those human beings that live through for that healing process to start, there first has to be an acknowledgement of God is sovereign, that the way of Satan, the way of life that permeated this planet was contrary to that sovereign God, and that only through God and Jesus Christ can true life be attained.

Now while Satan will have been put away at this point, for those that live through that tribulation, do you think there still might be some discouragement? Do you think there might be a chance that there could be a Sanballat or a Tobiah running around questioning what's going on? Considering what will have happened, I'm sure that people will, especially initially, struggle to kind of put the pieces together—what's going on and why and there may be some resistance.

But who do you think is going to be intimately involved in guiding those human beings through this process of acknowledgment? Who do you think will be there applying this principle based on the lives that they lived in example and in instruction? Who is going to be there, yes, looking around, perhaps shedding some tears at the sight of it all, but will then say, "Yeah, this place is a wreck. Humanity really, really messed it up, but we've got a good work to do and our God will give us success." Well, brethren, God willing that's going to be you and me.

We are learning this now as part of the witness we will be able to provide to those that we're going to be helping. Turn with me to Philippians chapter 4 please. Philippians chapter 4, we're going to read verses 11 through 13—kind of the end of Paul's words here to the Church in Philippi.

Rick talked about Paul yesterday and a lot of what he went through—tremendous distress in his life. He's kind of encouraging the Church here with his experience. Philippians chapter 4, starting in verse 11:

***Philippians 4:11.*** *Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.*

*12) I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.*

*13) I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (NAU)*

Now picture saying this to those physically, emotionally, and spiritually battered, bruised human beings at the start of the millennium. “Hey, Paul did it. I did it. And you can too! You can do all things through Him that strengthens us.”

For us now, through our own lives’ experiences, we have to see it. We have to take that first step again in acknowledging. And for those that we’ll help in the millennium through the tragedy, through the horrendous suffering, we will be there as living examples that God is in control, and that no matter what, He will provide the resources to endure and in the end thrive (in spite, again thinking about the conditions extant physically looking around), that He’ll provide what is needed so that life will continue and people will grow in grace and in courage.

Now let’s go back to chapter 1, Book of Nehemiah and we’re going to pick up now on the second step. So, we’ve talked about acknowledging. Let’s pick up on that second step. Again, we’re talking about rejoicing always and being positive. Nehemiah chapter 1, we’re going to finish out his prayer here in verses 9 through 11. I’m going to back up to verse 8 just to get a running start to it. Nehemiah chapter 1 starting in verse 8:

***Nehemiah 1:8.*** Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; 9) but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.’

10) They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand.

11) O Lord, ... (NAU)

Let’s notice this, verse 11.

***Nehemiah 1:11.*** O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man.” (NAU)

And he’s talking about King Artaxerxes.

***Nehemiah 1:11b.*** Now, I was the cupbearer to the king. (NAU)

Now before we get into this second step, I want to briefly call out that very last sentence there in verse 11, that Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the king. I’d like to read just a short quote from New Unger’s Bible Dictionary defining what a cupbearer was. Quoting:

He was often chosen for his personal beauty and attractions. And in ancient oriental courts was always a person of rank and importance. From the confidential nature of his duties and his frequent access to the royal presence, he possessed great influence.



So, in my mind at least, kind of thinking about a cupbearer I almost think of the canary in a cage in a coal mine. Right? “Here, try this wine. Make sure it doesn’t kill me first.” But he was actually an individual of tremendous influence and a very special person in the court.

So, when I read this, what came to my mind were the parallels to the position that we will have ourselves as the Bride of Christ—beautiful and of great value to our husband Jesus Christ. Right? You can see that in Ezekiel 16:9-14, Revelation 19:8. And well, the Book of the Song of Solomon certainly tells us that. Having constant access to the throne and with all of this of tremendous influence in the world with Christ when He returns.

Now, I call this out because for me it made our case study here, the person of Nehemiah, just that more relevant and a comparative character to what we’re striving to become, to what we’re learning and looking to achieve. So, back to the second step then.

**Once we have acknowledged the state of the condition that we’re in, that second step is surrender—surrender. Or to use the term that Rick used in his sermon yesterday, to yield. It’s the same concept, just a different word.**

We see in verse 11 of Nehemiah 1 that Nehemiah puts the entire situation into God’s hands to guide knowing that if there is repentance, there will be success in the endeavor.

I mentioned earlier that one of my personal struggles was praying about this message (what I’m sharing with you here today), putting it in God’s hands (at least saying the words), and then trying to do it my own way, my own style. For me it’s about the struggle of reconciling the old “God helps those who help themselves” and God being sovereign in my life.

Now, Romans 12:1, and this was read yesterday as well, tells us that we’re to be “living sacrifices.” But, (And I read this in a book once so I don’t take credit for it, but I thought it was very clever.) the trouble with a living sacrifice is that it tends to want to crawl off the altar. Surrender, brethren, is not a one and done. It must be a state of existence. We must live a life of surrender.

Notice that the prayer that we just went through here from Nehemiah, it’s not the only time that he also goes through this surrender process. Turn over to chapter 4, same book, Nehemiah chapter 4. We’re going to read the first five verses and again see another example. Nehemiah chapter 4, starting in verse 1:

***Nehemiah 4:1.*** Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews.  
2) He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, “What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for

*themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?"*

3) Now Tobiah the Ammonite [There's those two guys again.] was near him and he said, "Even what they are building—if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down!" (NAU)

Notice Nehemiah's response, verse 4.

**Nehemiah 4:4.** *Hear, O our God [Hear, O our God], how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity.*

5) *Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders.* (NAU)

So, what we see in each of these examples, then, is Nehemiah again surrendering the situation to God. Even though discouragement, demeaning was happening all around them, Nehemiah chose to put the situation in God's hands as a source of justice, encouragement, fortitude, and strength.

How about you and me? How about us? Are we, as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 15:31, are we "dying daily" in surrender to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? And, if we're not, how can we do that? How does that happen?

Well, let's tie that first step back in that we talked about. Surrender is the response fully internalizing what you previously acknowledged.

In a sentence, it's allowing God to be sovereign in your life. Frankly, He already is. He will, because of His love for us, do everything in His power to bring us to salvation. We know this. John 6:44.

**John 6:44.** *No man can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; ...* (NAU)

That word "draw" in the Greek means literally *to drag*. So, then the question becomes "What is our salvation process going to look like?" Are we going to, if God speaks, are we going to walk as Abraham did? Or what about like King Manasseh? If you're not familiar with that story, 2 Chronicles 33 will give you that. King Manasseh was a pretty bad guy at the start. He had to get drug off, drug off into captivity before finally, finally he surrenders. It's a wonderful story of redemption. But the question, again, for us is "Which path are we going to go down?"

Now do we think that this concept, this surrender concept, is something that will need to be taught in the millennium? Well, let's take a look; Zechariah 14, please. Zechariah chapter 14, we'll read verses 16 through 19. And, again, we're asking the question "Will surrender need to be taught in the millennium? Zechariah 14, starting in verse 16:

**Zechariah 14:16.** *Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.*

*17) And it will be that whichever of the families of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, there will be no rain on them.*

*18) If the family of Egypt does not go up or enter, then no rain will fall on them; it will be the plague with which the Lord smites the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.*

*19) This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations who do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. (NAU)*

So, I feel that this passage here demonstrates that even though Satan is going to be put away in the Millennium that humanity will not instantly switch over from bad to good. There is still going to be a bit of resistance. Surrender is still going to need to be taught. And by this account, it looks like Egypt may need a little bit of extra coaching.

And whose rule, then, will it be through their examples, the witness of their lives of the power of surrender? Yep, that's again, God willing, that's going to be you and I.

So, we talked about acknowledging the situation, acknowledging God's sovereignty. We've talked about surrendering ourselves to His sovereign will. Now, let's take a look at the third step. We can find this back in the Book of Nehemiah, this time chapter 5, please. Nehemiah 5, we're going to read verses 14 through 16.

**Nehemiah 5:14.** *Moreover, from the day that I was appointed ... (NAU)*

And this is Nehemiah speaking.

**Nehemiah 5:14b.** *... appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, for twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor's food allowance.*

*15) But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God. (NAU)*

Now notice verse 16.

**Nehemiah 5:16.** *I also applied myself to the work on this wall; we did not buy any land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. (NAU)*

So what we see here is that Nehemiah sets a powerful positive example for the people of being in the trenches, working with the people as the work was being done. As an old friend of mine used to say, "Nehemiah was in the mud and the blood and the beer with all of rest of them."

**Now when we reach this point of surrender, we put our lives into God's hands. Then, we can take action and that's the third step but notice what type of action. This action (And this was covered in yesterday's sermon.), this action is service to others.**

Now, why is this important? Let's consider another example. How about the most perfect human being who ever lived, in that of Jesus Christ? What did He spend His entire life doing? From the earliest accounts of His life all the way to the very end as He's hanging, dying on the cross, what did He do? He was constantly serving—and this is key—He was constantly serving in accordance with the will of His Father.

We cannot appropriately serve unless we're surrendered to that will and we cannot be fully surrendered until we acknowledge His power and that gap between our righteousness (We know what the Bible has to say about our righteousness.) and His holy, perfect, pure righteousness.

Now, this is really the crux of a positive joyful life. Why? Because it's a direct reflection of how God lives. God is joy. Right? That's one of His core characteristics. Giving, sharing, and serving one another takes the focus off the self (like we heard yesterday), off of our problems, frets, worries, concerns and puts God's destiny for us as firstfruits front and center, being the Bride of Christ.

And in the millennium serving millions, billions of human beings and not just teaching from afar. We're not going to be like those former governors that Nehemiah was talking about here, just sitting there barking orders and extracting payments from the masses, but I personally feel we're going to be right there, sleeves rolled up spiritually, right there in the trenches working with humanity, leading by powerful example. And, all the while, pointing back to our husband Jesus Christ exemplifying what it means to be a Proverbs 31 wife.

Let's explore that a little bit. Turn with me to Proverbs 31. Proverbs 31, we're going to read verses 13 through 20 and I'm going to read this from the NIV. And, as we go through this, let's think about this in the context of being the Bride of Christ and the Bride of Christ and our role in the context of the millennium and what we're going to be doing. Proverbs chapter 31, starting in verse 13:

***Proverbs 31:13.*** *She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands. (NIV)*

Are we eager? How eager are we to serve? To give? And to share? Verse 14:

***Proverbs 31:14.*** *She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar.  
15) She gets up while it is still dark; ... (NIV)*

The work's never done.

**Proverbs 31:15b.** ... she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls. (NIV)

I think that is interesting that even those that serve are served by the Proverbs 31 wife. Verse 16:

**Proverbs 31:16.** She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.

17) She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. (NIV)

Now you might be thinking—thoughts cross my mind—having this responsibility in the millennium—whoa! How? Really! But in this life now, we are being strengthened. Our character is being built and we're being educated for this task so that our arms will be strong for the task that is ahead of us. Verse 18:

**Proverbs 31:18.** She sees that her trading is profitable, ... (NIV)

Hold onto that.

**Proverbs 31:18b.** ... and her lamp does not go out at night. (NIV)

And I have to chuckle at that because any mother out there with young kids I know for us in the past, it's like Motel 6—"Light's always on." There's always activity around the clock in the house. Verse 19:

**Proverbs 31:19.** In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers.

20) She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. (NIV)

Brethren, in the millennium, will there be needy? Will there be poor? Will we be there with arms open? Serving? Giving? Sharing with them? Won't it bring us joy, brethren, if our children, in context, call us blessed and our Husband tells us that we've exceeded them all and that He has full confidence in us? It's pretty great.

Now, we've historically spent a great deal of time on the physical imagery of the millennium—things like swords being beaten into plow shares, every man under his own vine and his own fig tree. And I'd like us to consider that these things may in part be an effect or a result that we will be able to appreciate as spirit beings but those things really aren't for us. If anything, they're, again, going to be those results of the service that we're going to be providing to empower humanity to live God's way of life. Like the Proverbs 31 wife in verse 18, we will see that our "trading has been profitable." Right? We'll see a return on the time and the investment that we are making with humanity. And you couple that with the fact that by this point, we'll have our inheritance. We will have eternal life. We will be married. Does it get any better than that? It's very, very exciting, very positive, very powerful.

Now, I'd like to start wrapping up here this morning by going through the account of the celebration of the Feast of Trumpets and Tabernacles by Nehemiah and the remaining peoples in Judah and Jerusalem. I feel that this neatly ties these three steps together that we've been talking about this morning—acknowledging that we're off track, that God has the power to change us, surrendering our lives to that power, and then channeling that power in obedience to service to one another. And the result? Tremendous, tremendous joy! The power to rejoice always! The ingredients to living a positive life! And in the millennium showing those that remain how to have this positive perspective.

Back to the Book of Nehemiah chapter 8; we're going to go through a good portion of the chapter here. I'm just going to read through it. I'm not going to provide a whole heap and ton of commentary, but just kind of point out the steps that we've talked about that are in action here in this account. Nehemiah chapter 8, starting in verse 2:

***Nehemiah 8:2.*** Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month.

*3) He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. (NAU)*

I'm going to skip verse 4 for your sake. Verse 5:

***Nehemiah 8:5.*** Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. (NAU)

What do we see here in verse 5? We see acknowledgement. Verse 6:

***Nehemiah 8:6.*** Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. (NAU)

What do we see in verse 6? Surrender, very literal surrender happening there. Let's skip verse 7. Let's go ahead and skip down to verse 9.

***Nehemiah 8:9.*** Then 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 were weeping when they heard the words of the law. (NAU)

We see again acknowledgement.

**Nehemiah 8:10.** *Then he said to them, “Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” (NAU)*

In verse 10, we see service. We see the instruction to go out and help those in need to celebrate and to rejoice.

For the sake of time, let's go ahead and skip forward here. Let's skip forward to verse 13.

**Nehemiah 8:13.** *Then on the second day the heads of fathers' households of all the people, the priests and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law.*

*14) They found written in the law how the Lord had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel should live in booths during the feast of the seventh month. (NAU)*

Let's go to verse 16

**Nehemiah 8:16.** *So the people went ... (NAU)*

They brought with them the leaves that they had collected and the branches in verse 15. They brought them in.

**Nehemiah 8:16b.** *... [they] brought them [in, they] made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim.*

*17) The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them. The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day. And there was great rejoicing. (NAU)*

So, brethren, we started with a question this morning. “How are you feeling? How are you doing? What's the state of your mind and the state of your heart?” And I sincerely hope that the answer to these questions, either now or by the end of the Feast, will be positive. Let's strive, brethren, over the course of the remaining days of the Feast that we're here and into this next year to build and maintain positive momentum that we're creating here by acknowledging, coming back, acknowledging where we stand, acknowledging who God is, by surrendering our lives to Him, His power and His will and His work within us, and, then channeling that in service to one another.

Brethren, let us rejoice at the Feast, but let's not stop there. Let us rejoice always, now, into this next year, and into eternity.