

# A Booth on the Roof!

by David Wilkerson

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of revival and the five absolute evidences of revival, as seen in the book of Nehemiah, and encourages listeners to examine their hearts and focus on eternal values.*

**Scripture:** Nehemiah 8:1

**Topics:** "Holiness", "Revival"

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## Description

David Wilkerson emphasizes the need for a genuine revival characterized by holiness and a deep hunger for God's Word, as illustrated in Nehemiah's account of the Israelites returning to Jerusalem. He outlines five evidences of revival, including a desire to hear God's Word, heartfelt repentance, joy in the Lord, the significance of living in booths as a reminder of our temporary existence, and the necessity of separation from worldly influences. The sermon calls for believers to recognize their status as strangers in this world and to focus on eternal values rather than earthly possessions. Wilkerson urges the church to remove the rubbish of false doctrines and to rebuild the walls of holiness and true worship, preparing for the Lord's presence and glory.

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## Transcript

Here at Times Square Church we have designated this year as one of prayer for revival. By "revival" we are not thinking of some great emotional stirring, with people coming from miles around to see something sensational. Instead, we are wanting a prepared people - prepared in holiness! We want a revival of the Lord's holy presence, where things are so pleasing to God, that He will come down to meet every need - where His glory is revealed!

In Nehemiah, the eighth chapter, there are to be found what I call "the five absolute evidences of revival." It cannot be called revival or awakening unless all five of these evidences are present. Nehemiah is a revival book. It is the story of 42,360 Jews returning to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon to rebuild the walls and get back to the old paths of holiness and true worship. Their leaving Babylon is a type of believers leaving dead, compromising, worldly churches to go forth with a remnant to Holy Zion, to return to the old paths, and to go on with a people and shepherds who walk in truth.

This holy remnant rolled up their sleeves and worked in unity to remove the rubbish and filth that had polluted Jerusalem. They rebuilt the crumbling walls and put up the gates. That's what we are doing at Times Square Church: removing the rubbish that has accumulated, the rubbish of false doctrines, of materialism, of sin and compromise in the pulpit and pew! We are rebuilding the walls that had crumbled.

Hundreds of God's people have been plundered and ravaged by Satanic powers; homes and marriages have been in turmoil; many are backslidden, starving for God's Word. We've been working together to put up walls and gates to keep the enemy out. God has gathered together a remnant of all who have escaped Babylon and are ready to take the five great steps to restoration and revival.

The First Evidence of Revival

Is A Great Desire to Hear

and Obey the Word of the Lord.

"And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law... And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people... and when he opened it, all the people stood up" (Nehemiah 8:1-5).

The cry of their hearts was, "Bring us the true Word of the Lord!" Ezra stood on a raised, wooden pulpit and read God's Word for six hours while the multitude stood at attention, learning that the cause of their suffering was their own stubbornness and rebellion. The surest evidence of revival in a soul or a church or a city is a great hunger for God's Word. Backslidden Christians don't want to hear the Word - it bores them! What they want is excitement. Backslidden preachers don't preach much of God's Word - instead, they give short sermonettes. They don't preach the Law because that produces conviction and shakes up the church! It makes compromisers squirm!

Where the Holy Spirit is at work, the people in the pew are clamoring for the Word. I get hundreds of letters from famished saints crying, "We are so hungry. We don't hear the true Word. We get the dead letter with no anointing - soft soap!" Where God is at work there are Bibles everywhere. There's an excitement about preaching and teaching with a true reverence for the Word. The Word is loved and honored.

How sad it is that in many Charismatic churches, preaching is endured. They can't wait to get it over with, to get to the praise and worship. It is music, entertainment, and special singers that they want! When the Holy Ghost comes, there is no longer some star evangelist or teacher on center stage, but the Word being hailed. Their cry will be, "Lord, I want it all: the good, the bad, the commandments, the promises, the whole counsel of God!"

The Second Evidence of Revival

Is a Heart-Breaking Repentance.

"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 worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground... And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading. Then Nehemiah... 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" (Nehemiah 8:6-9, NAS).

Their first reaction to the Word was excitement and joy. They cried, "Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands." David said, "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord" (Psalm 134.2). But the Word soon brought them down on their faces. This is true repentance when we are brought by God's Word to the ground. "They bowed low and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground." "...All the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law." They trembled at God's Word, then took it to heart and repented!

When a Holy Ghost revival comes, Christians don't hold grudges - they don't gossip or backbite or find fault. They are not trying to straighten out the church or the pastors. They don't sit around like couch potatoes in front of the TV! No! They are on their faces before God, weeping, because the Word has smitten their hearts. They are not judging others or looking at others. They are being convicted by the Word for not measuring up themselves!

### The Third Sign of Revival Is

an Incredible Spirit of Joy and Celebration.

"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." So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." And all the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them" (Nehemiah 8:10-11, NAS).

Wherever the love of God's Word has been restored and repentance has resulted, and where there has been self-mortification of sin, there will always come forth a mighty wave of joy and celebration. But there is a kind of phony joy and false celebration in the land today: It is the celebration of self and idolatry - the dancing around the golden calf! We need great discernment to know the difference between the true joy of repentance and the false rejoicing of idolaters.

Moses and Joshua came down from the mount to a great shout in the camp: "It is not the sound of the cry of triumph, nor is it the sound of the cry of defeat; but the sound of singing..."(Exodus 32:18). They were shouting, singing, and dancing and Moses knew all along it was of the flesh. He knew they were a stiff-necked, rebellious people, full of lust, fornication, nudity, and sensuality. It was the shout of Idolatry!

Can you tell the difference? If there is no preaching of the Law to convict of sin - if there is no weeping or faces on the ground - if there is no love of God's reproof Word - if there is no repentance - then there is no spiritual shout, no godly song! Be careful! You may get caught up in the song of idolatry.

Why was there such great mirth, such a festive spirit of joy in this revival recorded in Nehemiah? They had a great happiness "...because they understood the words which had been made known to them" (Nehemiah 8:12, NAS). In other words, they discerned and took it to heart: they obeyed!

### The Fourth Evidence of Revival

Is a Booth on the Roof!

"On the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law. And they found written in the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month: and that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.

"So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness" (Nehemiah 8:13-17).

The Word of the Lord was restored and the repentance and obedience were genuine. The joy of the Lord had become their strength, but something was missing: the booths! There can be no real and lasting revival, no fullness of God, until we erect a booth! This is truly a message for these last days.

The leaders, the priests and the Levites gathered with Ezra to search the Scriptures to see what God wanted of them. They found something the Lord had commanded years before, a perpetual commandment that had been neglected since the days of Joshua. It was found in Leviticus 23:40-43: "Ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." For seven days God's people were to erect a temporary shelter (in Hebrew "Sukkah") made with a roof of various branches. They were commanded to live in their shelters for seven days.

The New York Times had an entire section devoted to building a Sukkah. In New York City they are constructed on tiny balconies, small yards, and rooftops at the end of September into the first week of October. Of the 613 Jewish commandments, this is still considered one of the most important. Orthodox Jews practice it rigorously. Living in the hut still signifies today: "We are just passing through this world - just spending the night - so we must not be concerned with it's pleasures and vanities." The Sukkah is so holy to a Jew that it is sinful to take even a splinter from it to use as a toothpick! Even a bad odor will pollute it. It is said, "If one cannot keep Sukkot [the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths], he can't keep any of the 613 Torah commandments!"

The leaders in Jerusalem at the time of Nehemiah made a proclamation: "We will again celebrate the feast of Sukkot! Go to the mountains and bring back olive, pine, myrtle, and palm branches. And make your Sukkah, as it is written." What excitement must have filled the air: children and families, all loaded with branches, building Sukkahs! What a sight it must have been from above: on every flat rooftop a little hut - in every empty lot or city Square, in the temple courtyard, visitors camping - even Ezra, Nehemiah, and all the priest! For seven days no one ate or slept in his home - no one slept in the lodges. The entire population lived in these temporary huts!

These were not seven sad days of hardship. Instead, they were seven days of mirth, of great gladness. "...Ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days" (Leviticus 23:40). "Seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto the Lord thy God in the place which the Lord shall choose: because the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice" (Deuteronomy 16:15).

There is much preaching today about this Feast of Tabernacles. It is said the church is entering its time of harvest, "a gathering of the corn and the wine," a time of blessing and increase - that we are in a time of great rejoicing and singing, a time of glorious joy in the Lord! What is missing from the message is the Sukkah, the moving into the hut! All the praising, worshipping, shouting, and gladness was to be under the booth, "in the place which the Lord shall choose."

What does it all mean to us today? What does the Sukkah have to do with walking with Jesus right now?

The Sukkah Signifies That

We Are Strangers Here,

Citizens of Another Country.

The seven days spent in the booth alluded to the human life-span of seventy years. The Sukkah was to remind them how temporary life is here. As the leaves faded, they were to see the fading of life, health, and strength. God wanted their hearts and minds set on eternity. They were to remind themselves and their children: "We are only camping here. We rejoice not only for all these temporal blessings, but our hope and joy is in the city coming down out of heaven, Zion!" In Nehemiah's day, this is what God had them to understand: "You have rebuilt the walls, set the gates, established homes, and planted gardens and vineyards. The Lord has been good, but this is not your resting place. You must look for a city whose builder and maker is God!" David loved his city, Zion. He wrote great poems and songs about its beauty: "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion... the city of the great King" (Psalm 48:2). David became wealthy and gave cartloads of gold and silver to the building of the temple, "of the gold, the silver, and the brass, and the iron, there is no number..." (1 Chronicles 22:16). Yet David makes this incredible statement: "...for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were" (Psalm 39:12). This was said after Israel was settled and prosperous. "Sojourner" means resident alien, one passing through. The word "stranger" in Hebrew comes from a root word meaning "to shrink back with fear, as in a strange place." All our fathers in the faith considered this world "a strange land." They were aliens, citizens of another world.

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.... These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" (Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16). They desired "a better country, that is, an heavenly..." There is a better country than America or whatever your native land. It is New Jerusalem -

heaven with Christ!

God Knows How Easily We

Are Blinded By His Blessings.

Why would God put the entire nation into tiny huts for seven days? Because He knows the terrible danger His children are in when blessed. He knows how easily we are swept away and forget Him, becoming blinded by ease and comfort. He knows how prone we are to pamper ourselves and become ensnared by the things of the earth.

The song of Moses was a prophecy, foretelling the eventual backsliding of God's people once they would grow prosperous. "But Jeshurun [God's people] waxed fat, and kicked [became unmanageable]: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation" (Deuteronomy 32:15). This is not a message only to the wealthy, but to us all. The more we are blessed, the more we tend to want, to dig in to this world, to get attached, to buy and spend more. Everything we buy is like another rope tying us to this earth! The Lord wants our hearts to be "in the hut, " in the Sukkah. Every single day, many times each day, He would have us remember, "I'm an alien! I'm just passing through! I've got no roots here. I'm going to a better country. Thank you, Lord, for all my blessings - but I rejoice that I'm a citizen of Zion."

We Own Nothing Here on Earth!

Everything God has given us is on lease! We are only caretakers. There is much written about the Promised Land. God promised to give Israel the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey, but God never gave up the title - he only leased it to them. "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me" (Leviticus 25:23). They could only sell the crop rights, and even the poorest had their land released in the year of Jubilee.

God owns everything we have. We keep saying, "Lord, I give this back to you!" But we have never really owned anything. "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills.... The wild beasts of the field are mine.... For the world is mine, and the fulness thereof" (Psalm 50:10-12). The Lord is saying to us, "Go to the booth on the roof - examine your heart!" Are you a just steward of His property? In light of eternity, in light of the frailty of life, how much do you spend on yourself, in comparison to His work?

The great effect of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the laying down of everything on God's altar, as we get our eyes off the things we possess. At Pentecost it was said, "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common"(Acts 4:32).

The Booth is a Reminder to

Abstain From All Fleshly Lusts.

"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul"(1 Peter 2:11). It is almost impossible for anyone under fifty years of age to think of eternal values because they assume they still have so much time left. When you get into your sixties and seventies, nature teaches you how short life is! It is much easier to think of being an alien here! But God would have

us all stop in the prime of life, rejoice, then take heed, asking ourselves, "Are our youthful, hurtful lusts worth the risk in light of eternity?"

Moses chose to "suffer affliction with the people of God, [rather] than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:25). So the Lord has instructed us to go to the booth, consider how short life is, suffer for awhile, endure for the joy that is set before us (see Hebrews 12:2). "...For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14). Try telling this to young people!

The booth is meant to get the world out of us. Go there! Smite ambition! Kill pride! All failed goals, set by ambition, are open doors to lust and sin of all kinds. People say, "What's the use? I'll never make it." So they indulge! They are listening to lying spirits. Recognize these voices for what they are: demonic.

The Final Evidence of Revival Is

Absolute Separation From the World.

Without a life of repentance and separation from the world there can be no true revival. "And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers" (Nehemiah 9:2). Wherever there is biblical restoration, there will be an ever-growing awareness of the Lord's call to separate from all that is worldly and sensuous.

I have observed over the years that it is the separated, Christ-consumed, holy-living Christian who most effects the secular world. The ungodly expect Christians to be separate and clean. They expect them to be totally "other" than themselves. On the crime-infested streets of New York, with demonic spirits raging on all sides - only a pure, separated, Christ-filled Christian can put the enemy to chase. Compromisers are frightened off and their own sins condemn them.

God is raising up a remnant of believers who want revival - but only as it conforms believers to the image of Jesus Christ. And when it comes in it's fullness, the majority of Christians will either not recognize it - or, if they do, they will reject it. The separated remnant will hear the trumpet sounding and will know what God is saying.

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