

Time for a Fresh Start
Nehemiah 8

By Dave Urbanski

What do these likely familiar phrases say to you?

"Life is short; gotta grab all the gusto you can."

"Live for today."

"Look out for #1."

To me, they say ... "There is no God. There is no heaven or hell. There is no afterlife. There is only THIS life. When you die, it's 'game over.' Therefore, since there's nothing to look forward to after your heart stops beating, why not do everything you can to grab all the thrills you can while you still can? There are no morals. There is no standard. There's just you and your wants. If you're living for any other reason than your own pleasure and comfort, you're a fool."

In our study this past Sunday of Nehemiah 8, Pastor Scott took us through quite a poignant moment when the people gathered to hear a reading from the Book of the Law of Moses and worship the Lord — not unlike what we do together when we gather for church.

And what was that poignant moment? Verse 9 says "all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law." Wow! In fact, the crying and weeping represented such a dominant reaction that "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.'"

The question is WHY did they weep? Why were the people crying over the words of the Law of Moses? Pastor Scott explained that — as we all can relate to — the mere reading of Scripture led the people to conclude that "we have really messed up!" Such loss! Loss of opportunity. Loss of time. Loss of a chance to live completely for the Lord. Loss of a chance to see God work in their lives. Deep, deep regret.

Now juxtapose that emotion of regret with the sense of loss described at the start of this writing — the loss many people outside the church may feel when they conclude they haven't "grabbed all the gusto" they could before dying. What a contrast!

Hopefully for all of us — believers in Jesus who aren't living for the temporal or perishable things of this world — any regrets we may carry are going to relate to not doing all we could in this life to give all our energy for ETERNAL things.

Do you have regrets? If so, what are they? Are you bummed because you didn't have all the "fun" you could've had to this point in life? Do you regret not working toward that job that would have rewarded you with a lot more money? If that's part of what's bugging you, acknowledge that shortcoming and ask the Lord to help you reorient your heart and mind and soul to the eternal perspective he wants us all to operate in.

And if you regret not living for Christ as much as you could have to this point, stop right there — because Pastor Scott shared some incredible news with us, the central theme of Sunday's message: God is in the business of giving us a fresh start! In fact, as we allow ourselves to experience the joy of the Lord as our strength and open up our hearts to him, we will understand more each day that his mercies are new EVERY MORNING.

That's right. Each rising of the sun represents a chance for each of us to live for Jesus more than we did the day before! What a gift!

So, let us all push away the temptation to make important our bank accounts, our jobs, our accomplishments, what the mirror reflects back at us — good or painful — and especially whether or not we "grabbed the gusto" this side of heaven. Instead, let us receive the fresh start the Lord offers us each day, bury regret with God's grace, and let Christ have his way in our lives.