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**My God:
How I Can Enjoy His Presence**

Nehemiah 8

November 19, 2006 - 11:00 AM - Dr. David H. McKinley

[Dr. McKinley, message, My God: How I Can Enjoy His Presence]

... declaring it for all of us here today, that Prestonwood choir and orchestra, you make every Sunday like Easter Sunday in celebration and we thank God for you [applause] and for the incredible realization every time we gather that Jesus Christ is risen, that He is alive and that one day He is going to rule and to reign on this earth and for all eternity. And we thank God for our Lord Jesus Christ.

This has been a great hour of celebration through prayer and through song. And now we have the privilege of celebrating the presence of our God through His word. And I would invite you to take your Bible and open it to Nehemiah chapter 8.

I want to ask you a question this morning. We're talking about celebrating, and obviously we have had a great service of celebration this morning through worship. We're going to have an incredible week of celebration with Thanksgiving, Amen? [Amen!] I know you love Thanksgiving, I do. Thanksgiving's about so many things that I love. It's about ah... feasting, it's about faith, it's about family, it's about fun, it's about football! I don't know what else! It's just fantastic, wouldn't you agree? And you've just got to love Thanksgiving. And ah... it's a great traditional celebration for us as Americans. And I'm grateful for a time when we pause to give thanks.

But when you have a celebration in your life... a personal celebration... an anniversary, a birthday, something of that sort, how do you celebrate? How do you do it? Well, if you're like me, you probably have a special place that you like to go, a special meal that you like to enjoy.

I want you to imagine with me for just a moment this morning that it is a special time in your life and you go to your favorite restaurant. I want you to imagine opening the door and as you step into that place, the atmosphere and the aroma is captivating. You're thinking in your mind, "I'm here and I'm going to do it again." (Pig out, of course.) And ah... so you're thinking to yourself, "this is going to be an incredible experience."

The maître d' meets you at the door and he walks you across the restaurant and, lo and behold, guess what? They seat you at your favorite table. And as you take your place there all of that fine linen is laid out; a

beautiful spray and bouquet of flowers are there in front of you. There are more utensils than can be found in the Craftsman tool collection at Sears. I mean you know it's... it is a place! The stemware is there. And you're ready for the night of your life. They bring a menu and put it in your hand and you open it as you turn the pages you're just thinking, you know, nothing's going to be bad but what's going to be best.

And just about the time that you get ready to... to settle on a decision the waiter comes to the table and says, "Now before you settle, let me tell you about the chef special." And you listen for just a moment and you think boy that's it! For all the things that are here that are great, that's even one more step above! Hey, I'm here to celebrate! I'm doing the chef special tonight."

And so the waiter walks away and you begin to enjoy the water and that hot bread. You're eating real butter, you know. You're not... none of the other stuff tonight. It's butter night. You're enjoying every bite of it. And then comes that anticipated and awaited moment when they come to the table with you and those who are there with you. They place, as thought it were, this incredible plate on the table under one of those silver covers. And in one moment they remove it to reveal your feast. I want you to imagine reaching over and taking the appropriate fork. (Joey, I know you're here) The appropriate one. (We have a Miss Manners down here on the front row and I've very conscious of those things.) You take the appropriate one and you get ready to take your first bite. All the sudden you notice the chef special looks great but there's something there that doesn't look like it should be.

In fact, as you look at it and sort of poke and prod you suddenly realize that there in the midst of your chef special is an extra little surprise. It's the tip of a latex glove... the finger tip. Suddenly a moment of anticipated celebration becomes a moment of horrific shame and scandal. You call for the waiter to come over.

Well, guess what? That actually happened to a couple in Toronto, Canada by the name of Richard and Kate Potter. They went out to celebrate their anniversary. They went to their favorite restaurant. They went through every step of the experience that I just described to you, and yes, when it was all said and done, what they found was something there... the fingertip of a latex glove ruining the chef's special.

Well, I'll get back to what happened to the Potters in just a few moments but I want to take you to one of my favorite places in the Bible this morning, the eighth chapter of the book of Nehemiah. And I want to take you to a place that when I read it to you, you will immediately in your mind think of a place of shame and of scandal. Why? Because this place is synonymous with shame and scandal in American life. But it was anything but that kind of a place in the lives of the people of Israel on this day, on this occasion, in this moment as God moved and worked in their lives.

Let's read together beginning in Nehemiah chapter 8 and verse 1:

1) *And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate...*

Water Gate! That's a place of shame and scandal in American life. But this was a gate that had been rebuilt as a part of the building of the walls of the ancient city of Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah. The building of the walls had been an incredible, miraculous thing that God had done! Fifty-two days from a city being in shambles to being raised again. But God was about to do something even bigger than the miracle that was done with the building of the city, and that is what we continue to read. It says:

2) *And they told Ezra (verse 2) [verse 1] the scribe to bring the book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. 2) 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. 3) 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 all who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book.*

Then look just quickly at what it says in verse 4.) It says:

4) *Ezra stood on a wooden platform that had been made for that purpose.*

I love it because it's as though he was in a... on a platform... at a pulpit, as though it were, just like I'm standing at this morning. And then the Bible says there were a whole bunch of people there with him. I'm not going to try to read all of those names. They're hard to read. But maybe if you're looking to name a child or a grandchild you might look there. Might get a good idea [laughter] Hilkiyah and Maaseiah-sijah, and all those. But look in verse 5:

5) *Ezra opened the Book in the sight of the people, for he was above all the people; and when he opened the Book, they stood up.*

I'm grateful for moments when God moves and works and we stand in worship because of a response to a song we just can't stay down. But you know just as much, we need to stand up when we hear the Word of God. I'm not talking about literally; I'm talking about attentively. There needs to be a sense of coming to attention. That's really what the Bible's talking about here. It's almost as though they snapped to attention and said, "We need to hear what's about to be said, because the reading of the Book is listening to the very voice of God.

6) *And so Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God (it says in verse 6) And all the people answered, "Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord and put their faces to the ground.*

And the Bible says that he read the Book and he made great sense out of the Book. But then look down in verse 9:

9) And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra, the priest and the scribe, 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. 10) And then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet wine, and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready; for this day is holy to the Lord. And do not be grieved" (Why? Let's all read it out loud together) "for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

When the people gathered on that day, there was no mention of the wall. All of Nehemiah, chapter 1 through chapter 7 is focused on the reconstruction of the wall. That had been the focus of them coming back from captivity and building this wall, because the walls of Jerusalem were a symbol of the witness of the people. And the walls were down and there was shame, and there was a sense of complacency and... and really a sense of apathy in the people of God. But God sent a leader; God sent a man, Nehemiah, to bring the people together and to rebuild the wall.

But after the reconstruction of the wall, now God was interested in something else, and that was the reinstruction of the people. It wasn't enough to just have walls on the outside; there needed to be a firewall of faith on the inside. And God's people needed to rise to the occasion of a new day and a new hour! God's people were being called to renewal, and yes, to revival.

And while Watergate in American life is associated with scandal, in the Bible the Water Gate was a place of incredible revival. And I believe that God is wanting to take us... God is wanting to take our church... God is wanting to work in our lives individually and collectively, to take us to a place of revival and of renewal. I believe God wants us to experience His presence and power to celebrate Him in new and fresh ways in our lives!

But how's that going to happen? How do we have new beginnings in life? How do we, like Israel of old, begin to experience God and to express our faith in new and wonderful ways?

Well, let's look at this passage of Scripture this morning and let me point out to you several things that I believe are vital principles... vital principles for experiencing God's presence and power in your life and in mine. I'm going to speak to us collectively this morning as a church. I know God works in our lives individually and certainly we worship God individually. But this message is a corporate message to a corporate gathering, and therefore, I want to draw the principles from that perspective.

First, if we're going to experience God's presence and power in our lives, we must assemble with sincere spiritual intentions... assemble with sincere spiritual intentions! I love the fact that in chapter 8, verse 1 it says:

1) *And all the people gathered as one man in the square.*

They came together but they came together with a purpose; for a reason. And the reason was a spiritual reason. I think that's important to say to any congregation because I believe that all across America today there are congregations that are meeting in houses that are commonly called churches, but really there's not anything spiritual happening there. Many people go to church for other reasons.

Sometimes we wonder about why people don't go to church, and studies are done to try to help us understand reasons why people don't go to church. But I can tell you that I know of at least 3 reasons why people go to church but they shouldn't go to church. One of those is social. They just come together to get together. Some people believe that the church is simply a social institution; it is all about social needs and social issues.

Now certainly I love the fellowship of the people of God and I can tell you right now that one of the things that I will thank God for with my family when we gather this week is this incredible fellowship called Prestonwood. I am thankful for you. And yes, we are grateful for occasions that allow us to come together. But this gathering is not simply a social gathering. It's not just about who's here and who's wearing what and who's doing what and keeping up with one another. Yes, there's a relational component, but it's so important that we understand that God's purpose for His people is even a higher purpose and it's not just a social one, there is a spiritual one, a renewal that needs to go on on the inside.

Other people go to church for... well, for the reason of criticizing. That's right! Some people go to church to criticize. I'm absolutely convinced of it 'cause I've been in the ministry long enough to hear what people say after church. And some people have what they believe to be the spiritual gift of criticism. [laughter] I didn't know it was a spiritual gift, but some people apparently seem to think that they have been well endowed with that gift because they are so prolific in its use. And they constantly find fault; they constantly criticize. And that is the focus of their gathering.

And then other people go to church just to see what's going to happen at church. I mean, it's hard for me to believe that some people go to church for entertainment. They want to see what's gonna happen; what gets out of order.

There's a little ah... video vignette floating around on YouTube right now. It's a picture of a pastor who is standing in a baptistery like our baptistery. He's just finished baptizing the first candidate and he reaches up, waiting for the next one when all the sudden about a 9 or 10 year old boy just does a big cannonball from the top step into the middle of the baptistery in front...! [laughter] He lands in the cannonball... in the tuck position. The water splashes and comes over on the choir sitting there in the choir loft. The pastor is splashed and shocked. And he looks at the congregation and he says, "I've been a pastor for 25 years and that is the

first time that has ever happened to me." He said, "And I guarantee you it will be the last time it ever happens to me, too!" [laughter] See, some people come to church just for the spectacle... just to see what might kinda get out of the margins of what's expected and predicted.

But none of those things were a part of this gathering [tap,tap,tap] The people that gathered on this day and in this moment had come for one awesome purpose, to meet God, and to collectively and individually connect with Him. They assembled with sincere spiritual intentions. And any revival and any experience of God's presence has everything to do with our motive and with our purpose.

But there was a second thing that is observed in this passage of scripture, and that is not only that they came together with sincere spiritual intentions, but they acquired sound biblical instruction. We must acquire sound biblical instruction. God is speaking in this world today just as He has spoken in every generation across the corridors of time. But God speaks in this day and in this hour through His Word. This is the Word of God! And this generation is desperate to hear and to receive the clear sound instruction of the authoritative [tap], inerrant [tap], Word [tap] of God [tap]!

You're not here this morning to hear me. Frankly, I don't have anything to say to you. I am a person of need just like you are. And when we gather, we're not here to espouse our philosophies, or even to simply construct our theologies. We are here to listen to the Word of God! The question is: are you listening? I say are you listening today?

A little over a year ago I got a new automobile and in that car there's a satellite radio. I had a little test time where it was provided as sort of a little package on the front in with the automobile, and then after about a month the subscription went out and I had to actually establish my own subscription. And I just simply didn't do it. I... waited for a while. I had enjoyed it for a little while but ah... had lived a long time without it, so I guess I just went on. And so for about a year I've driven this vehicle without the satellite radio. But on my birthday this year my wife gave me that subscription as a little gift so that I could enjoy it. And I have very much enjoyed it.

But you know something I've found about satellite radio? I found that I'll be riding along in the groove enjoying the sound of music when all of a sudden [snap] it just goes silent. And if I look over on the dash, you know what I see in the digital display? It simply says *acquiring... acquiring*. It's waiting to get the signal. Somehow there's been a cut-off between what's being broadcast from the satellite and what's coming in at the receiver. And so I have to wait until I get to a point where I can acquire again.

Well, in much the same way many of us live life. God is speaking. The satellite signal from eternity has been given to us in His Word. It is absolute and inerrant as I mentioned a moment ago. It is sufficient! But

the issue is that we're not acquiring. And we need to be serious and we need to be diligent and we need to be heartfelt about acquiring the signal of the Scripture.

I love the picture that's here. The Bible says that when he stood and he opened the scroll that the people stood up. And then as he started reading, they started shouting amen! Now that's a significant thing, because if I remind you, the scroll was made up of 5 books... Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy... the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Old Testament. Now I have to admit to you I don't always get a lot of "amen's" which I speak from Leviticus. [laughter] The Bible says that they stood up about 6 hours, from morning to midday. Think about standing through the whole reading of Leviticus.

But let me tell you something, they got the signal. They honored the Word. And as they listened line upon line, precept upon precept, not only to what was being read, but listen to what it says in verse 8... chapter 8, verse 8 says:

8) And they read from the Book of the Law, and clearly they gave the sense so that the people understood the reading.

They would read and they would explain, and they would read and they would explain. And as the people were acquiring the signal, they began to realize that there were all kinds of things that were out of order in their lives.

So great was the impact of what they were hearing and what they were receiving that the Bible tells us that they began to grieve. Verse 9 says the people were weeping. Verse 9 says that the people were broken, and broken down, and they realized that the greatest issue in their lives had not been the broken walls of the city; it had been the brokenness of their spirit, it had been the ... the fact that there was no alignment... that there was no purity in their lives. The people began to breakdown.

But I love what happened in this moment because the Bible says that Nehemiah and Ezra stood in front of the people and they looked at the people and they said, "Hey, God has not called you to this day to grieve. This is not about breaking down; this is about building up! What you see and what you're hearing certainly brings condemnation, but God's goal is not just condemnation; God's goal is correction! And the people began to understand that this reading and that this broadcast signal was one that was intended to bring positive correction in their lives. And so the corrections started being made.

That's the third and the important principle for us to see and to hear this morning. That is not only that we need to assemble with sincere spiritual intentions, and to acquire sound biblical instruction, but we need to align... to align with specific scriptural principles! There are a lot of people sitting in front of me this morning and there's a man standing in front of you today, who on a daily basis needs an alignment.

You ever had a problem with alignment on your car? Ever had that happen to you? Where it's pulling from one side to the other, where it's not quite right? Everything is being affected by your alignment on the vehicle. They tell us that when we have an alignment... when we have good alignment that there's less wear and tear on the tires, we get better gas mileage, there's improved handling and it's a lot safer driving. And you know, I believe that's what's true of a car... physically, mechanically is true of a person spiritually when we are walking with Christ.

You see alignment has everything to do with how the tires meet the road and how the tires relate to one another. And that's exactly what alignment has to do in my life spiritually. It's how my life meets the road compared with what God's standard is and how I'm related to others and other things in my life.

And therefore the people of God realized there was an issue of alignment that needed to be addressed, there was an adjustment that needed to happen and that's exactly what took place. How do I know? Look in verse 14. Listen to what the Bible says. It says:

14) And they found it written in the Law that the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month.

Now let me remind you. They were reading from the Book in the seventh month. So as they're listening to what should be happening in the seventh month, they suddenly understood, "Hey, this is the time when there's a special feast that we should be participating in!" And so here, as they heard about this special feast, called the Feast of the Booths, or as it's called today, the Feast of Tabernacles, still celebrated by Jews this many years later. The Bible says the people said, "You know what? We need to practice this feast."

Now what is the Feast of Tabernacles... what is the Feast of Booths? Well, you will remember that Israel was living in bondage in Egypt; and God called a man by the name of Charlton Heston to lead them out. Do you remember that? [laughter] (I just wanted to be sure you were still listening!)

God called Moses to lead His people out of the land of bondage... bondage. And as the people were getting prepared to leave, Moses said, "You're going to have a meal... a feast; it's called a Passover. You're to eat the Passover, fully dressed, standing, and ready to go; because when the Passover comes, we're going to need to get up and get out of here in a hurry. I don't have time for you to all go pack up and start figuring out what you need to take. We need to be packed; we need to be ready; we need to go!"

And the Bible says that after the Passover meal had been shared, and after the Passover had come, that God released the people of Israel and they left the land of Egypt... their homes, the familiar, the security that they had

had, and they went a day's journey out into the wilderness. When they got in the wilderness, they had a big problem: What do you do on your first night in the wilderness? A great idea to get out from under this bondage. But now that I'm out from under the bondage, I don't have a house; I don't have a store; I don't have the things that I normally have. What am I supposed to do to be protected?

Well, the Bible says that God gave them an instruction. That on their first night out in the wilderness what God wanted them to do was to go over and to pick some palm branches and some other pieces and to weave for themselves a temporary shelter... a booth, a tabernacle, a tent, a hut. And so they made these little lean-tos; and there they took shelter overnight.

And in order for them to remember what their forefathers had done, once they went into the land of Canaan and began to rebuild houses, God still commanded that one time every year for 7 days they were to come outside of their houses; they were to build a hut or a little tabernacle; and they were to live on the outside. Kinda like camping in the backyard. If you have Jewish friends, you know that today those who practice their faith, still build a little booth on their patio or somewhere and they will have their meals out there.

Why do they do this? Because God always wanted His people to remember that they were pilgrims. God always wanted His people to understand that this world is not permanent and that this world was not their home. He wanted them to know that while they may at times be frustrated about the issues of life and the burdens that they bear and some of the things that they lack, He didn't want them to focus their attention on here and now; He wanted them to always remember that He was their God and He met their needs. Therefore, God wanted them to understand that many of the distresses of life... many of the pressures of life come because we get the wrong value system. And therefore, God said, "I want you to always know you're a pilgrim."

I believe with all of my heart that our founding forefathers built our Thanksgiving celebration on this feast. Thanksgiving is more like the Feast of Tabernacles than anything else that you read about in the Bible. It's when we go back in time to the same kinds of foods and the same kinds of moments to remember that people who had little were able to survive by the grace of God, and we pause and give thanks to God for everything that He has given to us.

But let me ask you something: Have we begun to despise our blessings? Have we come to the place that we take for granted what we have and we think that what we have is just ours to hold onto and ours to keep? So much of the stress of life is because we're living with a clinched fist. Just like everyone else in the world, we're trying to gain and get and grasp and hold! And we live stressed and we live frustrated and we live feeling deprived, because others are holding something we're not holding.

No, God calls us to remember that we are pilgrims. God wants us to understand that, yes, He makes provisions for us, but these provisions are not just to grasp and to hold and to hoard.

I love the words of C. S. Lewis who said, "Our kind heavenly Father has provided many wonderful ends for us along the journey, but He takes special care to see that we never take any of them or mistake them for home." God wants us to go through this world, but He wants us to remember that we are constantly aligning ourselves, not with this world... not with these values... not with this culture, but with a God and with His values and His purposes for our lives. We need to align with specific scriptural principles.

And then... and then we will have happen to us as happened with Israel, and that is that we can anticipate strength from a supernatural source... anticipate strength from a supernatural source.

The Bible says that when the people broke down... when the people were struggling, they began to correct things. And then the Bible says that as they brought their lives into alignment with God's plan and purpose, that Nehemiah reminded them that this process of correction... this process of releasing... this process of movement would all have to do with one thing: It would bring them into a relationship with God where they had joy. And he said, "The joy of the Lord is your strength... the joy of the Lord is your strength." Would you say that with me? "the joy of the Lord is your strength!" Not the strength of the Lord is your joy. No, the joy of the Lord is your strength.

You see, when I'm rightly related to God in obedience... when I'm rightly related to others in holiness and purity and righteousness... when I'm rightly related to things in my life, I'm not constantly living, clenching; I'm living open and I'm living with joy, and that joy becomes a source of strength in my life.

Too many people think that joy is an emotion... it's a feeling. It's kind of like a little happy spiritual hiccup that we're supposed to have; just sort of going through life and just sort of zippity-doo-da joy!

No! It's not an emotion. Joy is a source of energy. Jesus said as He faced the cross [John 14:27]:

27) "My joy I give you, not as the world gives you. I give you a joy and make it full."

And it is the joy of the Lord that gives strength to your life and focus to your life and power to your life.

And when you are living in the presence of God and when you are celebrating God as first and foremost, preeminent in your life, then I can promise you God's going to fill your life with joy. You can anticipate a strength that comes from a supernatural source.

You know what the Holy Spirit gives us when He comes to live inside of us as believers? He gives us love, joy and peace. And God is the One who becomes the source of joy in life. And joy begins to be the expression of a life that is being lived in right relationship with God.

I read just the other day that new technology is coming out and apparently our cell phones are soon going to be... listen this... smell phones. Yeah, I know we got all these cute little ringers going. Well guess what the next wave is? They're going to be able to transfer sense over your cell phone. You're going to be sitting there and you're going to start smelling, you know, maybe a good apple pie from the dinner table at home, wife calling her husband saying come home for dinner. I mean this is really crazy, but it's new nano technology. There was a whole... ah... review on it this week about they're going to have ah... smell phones. Well, that could be good or bad as you can recognize very quickly. [laughter] right? "Is that you? No, that's your phone? Okay, gotcha. You know..." [laughter] (I know that was tacky, wasn't it?)

But you know what? The scent of a life that is rightly related to God is the smell of joy, the aroma of joy. And when I think about sights and smells and scents, we probably need to go back and find out what happened at that table with the Potters. Would you like to do that?

They're sitting at that table in that restaurant in Toronto, Canada and guess what happened? They called the waiter over and they said to the waiter, "Ah... sir, is this supposed to be here? It looks like a glove." The waiter was aghast. He immediately took the plate of food from in front of Mrs. Potter where it was sitting. He went back to the kitchen but before he could return, immediately the maître d' was there. He said, "Oh dear friends, I am so sorry. I am so embarrassed. This is a shame and a scandal to our restaurant. But I want you to know I would like to have the opportunity to begin again."

And so just like that [snap] he snaps his fingers. They came to the table, they took away the flowers, they took away the salt and pepper, they removed every piece of utensil, they even stripped all the linens off the table. There sat Mr. and Mrs. Potter at a bare table in an elegant restaurant. And then they came and redraped all the linens, they put the flowers back in place, they replaced every utensil, every plate, every stemware. They put the salt and pepper back there and then they handed them brand new menus and the maître d' said, "Now, let's start over again." And with that, they had the meal of their lives.

In fact I love what Mr. Potter said. Listen to this. He said, "The maître d' took a bad experience and he replaced it with an outstanding one. He did not deny the experience, but substituted a higher, richer one in its place. The service was incredible, the food was delicious and the best part of all, the meal was complimentary." Ha. [laughter] [He] Said, the amazing thing is he didn't just want to fix the problem; he wanted a complete, new start.

You know why God met the people at the Water Gate? He didn't just want to fix the problem of broken down walls; He wanted a complete new start in the hearts and the lives of His people.

Ladies and gentlemen, what God is doing in our hearts and in our lives through this church and through this ministry today is taking person by person, life by life. Never denying the things that may have happened that have been a part of the past. But He wants to change us in the present that He may give us a glorious future. And God wants to take you to a place of new beginning. Not just to be the problem fixer in your life, not just to be the one who bales you out, but the One who gives you new beginnings to start again.

That happens to any person the moment they receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came out of heaven, came to earth, lived a perfect and sinless life, and then died on the cross for our sins. Jesus paid for our sins through His death. He arose from the dead, He ascended to heaven and He offers to anyone and to everyone who will receive it, a gift called the gift of eternal life. In fact, the Bible puts it this way [2 Corinthians 5:17]:

17) If anyone is in Christ, they're a new creation. Old things have passed away, and all things become new.

And when you give your life to Jesus Christ, you can and you will become a new person. That's not my deal. That's God's promise. Today if you're here... man, woman, boy or girl, a single adult, a couple, a family... the greatest thing that can ever happen in your life is to realize that God wants to offer to you a new beginning.

Others of you are here and you have received that gift of life. But there's something that needs to be an alignment in your life. Maybe you need to follow Christ in baptism as these did earlier today. Baptism doesn't save, but baptism is a declaration that says, "I belong to Christ." It's the first step of Christian obedience. And if you've never taken that step, you need to take that step. And I want to invite you to take that step today.

Others of you need to align with this fellowship. You attend here; you're acquiring some signal from time to time. But you know what? It's time to really line up and line in and become a part of this fellowship. And I want to invite you and I want to appeal to you today, to not wait any longer but to say today this place, this moment, this is going to be my church.

And can I give you a promise today that's not my promise... it's God's? If you will hear and respond to the signal, the joy of the Lord will be your strength. You will walk out of here with joy and with blessing and peace as you begin to discover new obedience to God.

Charles Finney, the great revival preacher, simply said this: "Revival is nothing more than a new beginning of obedience to God." That's what it is:

a new beginning of obedience to God. And we can begin to see and sense revival in this place as we respond in obedience to Him.

If you're there in the balcony in just a moment I'm going to lead us in a prayer, but when I finish praying, ministers will be stationed right there in the balcony, and if you have a spiritual decision... a spiritual prompting... some spiritual questions today, I'm going to invite you wherever you are to just make your way to one of those ministers. Maybe you didn't come here planning to make any kind of decision, but God has spoken to your heart. We're here to receive you; we're here to pray for you and help you.

When we stand after we pray in just a moment, the ministers of our church are going to be standing here at the heads of these aisles and if you're here across the lower floor in the bowl, or here in the terrace, or here in on the lower floor, I'm going to invite you just to come and to let us speak with you and pray with you and celebrate with you the work of God in your life.

10) The joy of the Lord is your strength.

Father, give us joy today. Give us the joy of release, give us the joy of receiving Your grace, give us the joy of being right with You. Lord, give us the joy of responding to Your appeal. Thank You for this beautiful example of revival at Water Gate [music begins] God, would You let this place and this moment be a Water Gate moment in life? May it be a watershed of change from the past to a whole new present and future. Father, I thank You that You can do what we cannot. We know that when the people came to the city it seemed impossible that it could be rebuilt, but You rebuilt it, and then You rebuilt them. God, we need to be rebuilt... many of us today. I pray You would move and work in this place for the glory of Jesus in whose name we pray. Amen