

Nehemiah Sermon #18

Nehemiah 8 – Last week’s message was entitled “Bring the Book”

The wall was built and a pulpit was erected.

Ezra had come to the platform and began the reading of the Word of God.

The people were attentive and responsive

I’ve entitled today’s sermon “**Rejoicing in the Book**”

Nehemiah 8:7

Let us stand for the reading of God’s Holy Word.

Nehemiah 8:7-12

Let us pray.

You may be seated.

“Rejoicing in the Book”

Ezra brought the Book, opened the Book, and began to read.

The common people didn't own copies of the Scriptures, so they were thrilled to hear the Word of God.

Just because they heard it – doesn't mean that they understood it.

The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language.

Since the people had lived in a foreign country all of their lives, they may have lost some of their ability to understand Hebrew.

God's Word is authoritative for life and faith and all matters of knowing God, however it frequently takes hard work to understand the message of God written in a foreign language in a distant time and place.

So in Vs.7 the Levites caused the people to understand – they gave the sense in Vs. 8.

The Word was translated and expounded in such a way that the people were able to apply it to their own lives.

The truth was explained so that all who heard understood.

Six times in this chapter you can find the word “understanding” mentioned (vv. 2-3, 7-8, 12-13).

If the Bible is not read distinctly, and the sense of it is not given so that the people understand, the service is of no avail whatsoever.

God wants understanding to come from the reading of His Word.

We must understand the Word of God

The Bible is an intensely practical book; it was written to be obeyed as well as understood.

The Bible is not a “magic book” that changes people or circumstances because somebody reads it or recites it.

God’s Word must be understood before it can enter the heart and release its life-changing power.

Jesus told a story of the sower, the seed, and the soils in Matthew 13.

The seed is the Word of God.

The soils describe 4 different types of people who hear the Word:

1st people heard the Word – but didn’t understand and Satan, like a bird, came and ate the seed.

2nd people heard and were excited, but decided to not obey it when things got tough.

3rd people heard and were distracted by the cares of the world and it was choked out.

4th group of people heard it, understood it, and it transformed their lives.

There was nothing wrong with the seed – and today there is nothing wrong with the seed.

The problem lies within man and what he does with the Word.

Now notice how the Word of God was sown – Vs.7e, 8b

Ezra read and →

The Levites assisted Ezra in teaching the Law, this was one of their God-given ministries.

Deuteronomy 33:10a, *“They shall teach . . . Israel Thy law.”*

Malachi 2:7, *“For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.”*

These thirteen persons of Vs. 7 were Levites who were responsible for the interpretation of the law. . . . 2 Chr. 17:7-9 . . . interpreting.

These Levites are the men who will explain God’s Word to the assembled people. They are very important individuals.

Vs. 8 – Distinctly - clearly
Sense – intelligence

They caused the people to understand – it is every teacher’s and speaker’s responsibility – to cause the people to understand.

How did they do that?

They probably mingled with the people and, when there was a break in the reading, they answered questions and told them how to apply the Law to their own lives.

Here we have a balance between the public proclamation of the Word in the large assembly and the personal application.

Both are important.

We have pastors, teachers, and evangelists today.

Men and women must be called to conform to Biblical truth

“Relevant sermons”

Ultimately the authority behind preaching resides not in the preacher but in the Biblical text.

For that reason the expositor deals largely with an explanation of Scripture, so that he focuses the listener’s attention on the Bible.

Yet when a preacher fails to preach the Scriptures, he abandons his authority.

God speaks through the Bible.

Through the preaching of the Scriptures, God encounters men and women to bring them to salvation

(II Timothy 3:15, *“Holy scriptures are able to make thee wise unto salvation”*) and to richness and ripeness of Christian character

(II Timothy 3:16-17, *“That the man or woman of God may be perfect [mature] thoroughly furnished unto all good works”*).

Something tremendous happens when God confronts an individual through the Word and seizes him by his soul.

For some preachers, fads in communication become more stimulating than the message.

No doubt, modern techniques can enhance communication, but on the other hand, they can substitute for the message.

Multimedia presentation can cover, disguise, an empty message.

Scripture needed to be explained then and now.

Some preachers teach the Word of God like the national anthem of a football game.

It gets things started, but is not heard from again.

They have no thought of ever coming back to the Scriptures to explain them.

I believe God intends for us to read the Bible and attempt to explain it as we go along
– explaining it verse by verse.

This is called the expository method – there are other methods

★The primary task of any teacher of Scripture is to explain what the text means.

Exegesis is the careful, systematic study of the Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning (A.I.M. – Author’s Intended Meaning). The Word of God has only **one** interpretation.

There is an enemy of exegesis and that is the term eisogesis.

If exegesis means “to lead out”, then eisogesis means “to lead into.”

Exegesis means to explain what Scriptures say. To exegete Scriptures is to get out of the words the meaning that is there, no more and no less.

Eisogesis involves reading into the text something that isn’t there at all.

John MacArthur notes, “The preacher’s proper task is to deliver the goods, not to manufacture them. He is the waiter, not the chef.” Communicator not originator!

Because the Bible is God’s Word, it has eternal relevance; it speaks to all mankind, in every age and in every culture. Because it is God’s Word, we must listen – and obey.

We need to understand what God is saying in His Word.

The Word of God is crucial to building a strong foundation for our lives and church.

A strong church is a place where the Word of God is preached and taught.

II Timothy 3:16 – All scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for doctrine (what is right), for reproof (what is wrong), for correction (how to make the wrong right), for instruction (keep it right)

What's best for the church – bring them back to the Word of God

Not a ritual – genuine respect for the Word

Honor the Word

There is a battle over the Bible

Many try to discredit it, criticize it, to render it useless.

The decadent periods and eras in the history of the church have always been those periods when preaching and Word of God have been shelved.

The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to cleanse and revive the hearts of the people of God.

Vs. 9a, b, c

Vs. 9 mentions Nehemiah and Ezra, and thus shows that they were contemporaries.

Both Nehemiah and Ezra are mentioned in this text

Nehemiah, the governor, was right in the middle of the revival.

Nehemiah was unselfish. Nehemiah took no thought of himself or that wall.

He stepped aside and let Ezra lead in spiritual matters.

- He cared for the people who didn't have any thing (vs. 10)
- He cared that the people heard Ezra and responded correctly to it.

It is important to note that both *Ezra and Nehemiah put the Word of God first in the life of the city.*

As Ezra read and explained the Word, the assembly's first response was one of conviction and grief – vs. 9e

The truth was applied. Those who heard it responded.

The reading of the law and its explanation to the people had its effect.

When God speaks, He addresses men and women as they are – where they are.

They became aware of their sins and wept.

They were mourning.

What they heard touched their emotions.

When the searchlight of Scripture fell on their lifestyles, the children of Israel quickly discerned they had fallen far short of God's standard of righteousness.

They were overcome with godly sorrow.

They mourned over their sins, *"for by the law is the knowledge of sin"* (Rom. 3:20).

The law can't save us; it can only convince us that we need to be saved and then point us to Jesus Christ the Savior (Gal. 3:24) – so that we might be justified by faith.

Weeping on this occasion was the result of true repentance before God

The clear reading and teaching of the Law caused them to be convicted of sin.

It caused a great emotional outburst and the tears of repentance to flow.

Why were they crying? They knew they were guilty.

And that's a good sign, by the way.

Brokenness is what God uses to bring people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and to restore right fellowship with Himself.

In this moment of guilt, Nehemiah stood and said, “No, stop that. God is forgiving.

This is a holy day. This is a day not to cry but to celebrate.”

The sequence is important: first conviction, then cleansing, and then celebration.

The Word of God brings conviction and leads to repentance, but it also brings us joy; for the same Word that wounds us also heals us.

The Word of God eventually will bring rejoicing to the submitted believer.

Jeremiah 15:16, *“Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.”*

Psalms 19:8, *“The statutes (commands) of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure (clean cut), enlightening (giving light) the eyes.”*

Assisted by the Levites, Nehemiah convinced the people to stop mourning and start celebrating.

It is as wrong to mourn when God has forgiven us as it is to rejoice when sin has conquered us.

The sinner has no reason for rejoicing and the forgiven child of God has no reason for mourning.

Vs. 10E

It was not their joy or even their joy in the Lord, the phrase should be understood as referring to the Lord’s own joy – the Lord is pleased.

Therein is the secret of their strength.

The Lord always delights in an obedient people – people who respond correctly to the Word

Just as their disobedience had occasioned the captivity, so now their obedience had brought joy to the heart of God and blessing and power to themselves.

It is always like that. Obedience will ever bring joy to the Lord and blessing to His people.

To an obedient people this word is still true, “The joy of the Lord is your strength.”

The more the children of Israel learned from the law of God, the more they understood how displeased God was with their sins.

But they also began to understand God’s long-suffering, His patience, and His willingness to forgive and restore them if they responded in obedience.

Moving from sadness to joy takes time.

In fact, Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites had to actually encourage the people to stop mourning and weeping and to begin to rejoice and celebrate the Lord’s forgiveness (**Vs. 11**).

The secret of Christian joy is to believe what God says in His Word and act upon it – respond to it

Faith that isn’t based on the Word is not faith at all; it is presumption or superstition.

Joy that isn’t the result of faith is not joy at all; it is only a “good feeling” that will soon disappear.

Faith based on the Word will produce joy that will weather the storms of life.

Vs. 10e

Strength – fortress, rock, defense

It isn't enough for us to *read* the Word or *receive* the Word as others expound it; we must also *rejoice* in the Word.

"I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure" (Ps. 119:162).

In Bible days, people sometimes hid their wealth in jars buried in the ground (Matt. 13:44; Jer. 41:8).

If a farmer plowing his field suddenly discovered a jar filled with gold, he would certainly rejoice.

There are great treasures buried in God's Word, and you and I must diligently "dig" for them as we read, meditate, and pray; and when we find these treasures, we should rejoice and give thanks.

If we read and study the Word of God only from a sense of duty, then its treasures may never be revealed to us.

It is the believer who rejoices in the Word, who delights to read and study it day by day, who will find God's hidden treasures. (Ps. 112:1; Ps. 1:2)

The Word of God is supposed to bring us joy.

In I John 1:4 he says, *"And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."*

God doesn't want us to have a little fun; He wants us to have a whole lot of fun reading and studying His Word.

Studying the Bible ought to bring joy into our life.

If it doesn't, we need to face up to it; something is radically wrong with us.

Have you ever seen a crowd going to a football game?

My, it is like a holiday, with all of the rejoicing that goes on.

Have you ever watched people coming into church on a Sunday morning?

Boy, what a duty! What a burden!

There are lots of folks with burdens, but the burdens should be lifted in the service.

People should come out of the service with joy in their hearts.

Now, I know the messages/sermons are pinpointed, but if we will deal with the truth honestly, repent, confess, get right with God – that is what will bring joy.

“Restore the joy of my salvation,” David said.

What a difference it makes when God’s people “understand” God’s Word and apply it to their particular situations (**Vs. 12**).

Verse 12 tells us that they applied the message personally . . .

This was a revival! The Bible had been proclaimed and the people were mobilized.

They rejoiced in the Book.

Let us stand for closing invitation

Believers, do we allow the truth of this Book to override any of our sins?

Do we have a mindset that “Thy Word is Truth” as I understand it?

I will do what it says.

I will line my life up with it.

Do we respond to the Bible?

Does it bring conviction?

Does it point out areas in our live that need surgery?

Do we allow it to operate in us?

There will be no revival, no joy, until we give heed to the Book!

The Bible says we are all sinners.

We have a sin problem and the only remedy is Jesus Christ – He is the medicine

He died on a cross – suffering and supplying the blood sacrifice for man’s sins

He died, was buried, and rose again.

He paid the price for us.

Have you accepted His free gift?

Rear of Document

The Bible convicts, changes, and guides lives.

The living power of the Word of God still liberates people from their own various forms of captivity.

Leaders pointed out God's mercy to the people.

Those who teach must show God's justice and the need for repentance but must not forget to emphasize God's love and mercy.

Real joy is an expression of faith in what God can do and is doing.

Pages 25-28

. . . since the Holy Spirit confronts men primarily through the Bible . . .

Dull preaching usually lacks personal applications.

May the Holy Spirit apply this truth to our lives.

What difference does it make?

On the outside, people lose jobs, worry about their children, and find moles, gophers and crabgrass invading their lawns.

Seldom do normal people lose sleep over the Jebusites, the Canaanites, or the Perizzites, or even about what Abraham, Moses, or Paul has said or done.

They lie awake wondering about grocery prices, crop failures, rain, quarrels with a girlfriend, diagnosis of a malignancy, and a frustrating sex life.

If the sermon does not make much difference in their world, they wonder if it makes any difference at all.