

Title: The Reviving Word of God

Scripture: Nehemiah 8:1-12

Series: Bilingual

1. Introduction:

- a. Our Chapter today teaches us that spiritual revival among God's people is only accomplished through the reading and teaching of the Scriptures.
- b. Only the Holy Spirit can remove the hardened heart and transplant it with a heart of flesh. The Spirit uses the living Word to accomplish this wonderful task.
 - i. **Romans 10:17** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.
- c. Today, we are privileged to experience this great grace as we study our passage.

2. Verses 1-2: Hunger for the Word: And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra 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.

- a. **The first day of the seventh month** was set apart as a day of rejoicing in the Lord. We read in **Numbers 29:1** “On the first day of the seventh month, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a day for you to blow the trumpets,

- i. It was an incredible sight to see Israel, after 70+ years of captivity and non-observance, once again gathered together in the city's great streets to hear the Word of God read to them by Ezra, the scribe. There was an excitement in the air and an anxious gratitude for the Lord's deliverance.
 1. The people had returned from captivity, and the walls had been rebuilt, even in the face of great adversity. The city was filled with a sense of God's great mercy and grace. This once hostile and disobedient people had been brought back and given another opportunity to walk with God.
- b. **They told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the LORD had commanded Israel.** The people had gone into captivity because they and their fathers had not kept the Law, now they have a divine desire for it. They were unsatisfied with their spiritual condition and desired to know the Lord as revealed in His holy Word.
 - i. Remember, as a nation, they had rejected God's Word for the 490 years that they had lived within Israel's borders. The price for such disobedience had been the destruction of Israel, the temple, and the walls of the city. Israel had gone into captivity in multiple waves. They were led to a godless and shameful nation to serve for 70 years. During this time, they experienced the consequences of their disobedience as they were separated from the land they loved.

- ii. Now that they had been led back home, they feared committing the same sins. They had learned their lesson. Therefore, they come to the Law with eager willingness. This time, they want to walk in faithfulness to the covenant.
 - 1. At this point, we must discuss the purpose of discipline. God does not discipline his children to destroy them but to correct them. He does not discipline his children because he hates them or their actions but because He loves them and would correct them.
 - a. **Hebrews 12:11** For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.
 - 2. Here, we see that peaceable fruit of God's discipline that had trained a wayward Israel. The Israel before us is very different than the Israel that had gone into exile. It is a humbler and more devoted nation. God's discipline, as it always does, had accomplished much among them.
 - a. Beloved, it does the same for you and me.

b. **Hebrews 12:5-6** And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. (6) For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”

c. Beloved, let us return to our scene. Look at the masses of Israelites gathered, from the oldest to the youngest (yes, even the children were present and expected to hear and obey the Word of God.) Listen to the crowd call for the reading of the Word. Feel the rumble of anticipation as Ezra comes down with the sacred book. Feel the hush that comes over the crowd when Ezra ascends to the pulpit and opens the Book.

- i. Oh, beloved of the Lord, how inexcusable are those who stay away from the house of God and neglect to hear the life-giving truths of Scripture?
- ii. Israel was starving for God’s Word! They had been in a wilderness of exile, far apart from God. God had condescended to draw them close, and Israel, because of the work of the Holy Spirit, was hungry for God. May God give us this same desperate hunger. Hunger for His Word! Hunger for God Himself! Hunger to know Him as truly and deeply as any redeemed man can. This has always been the desire of Godly men.

1. Consider Moses in **Exodus 33:18** Moses said, “Please show me your glory.”

2. It is the very word of God that reveals the glory of God. We read in **2 Corinthians 3:15-18** Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. (16) But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. (17) Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (18) And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

3. Verses 3-8: The Power of the Word: 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 those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. (4) And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. (5) And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. (6) And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. (7) Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the

Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. (8) They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

a. **And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday.**

From the oldest to the youngest, the people stood and listened to the reading and preaching of the Word. They listened for over six hours. Hungry people must eat. Starving people must eat a great deal and these people were starving for God!

i. Interestingly, all the people stood up when Ezra started reading. This was a sign of reverence for the word of God.

1. It is clear from this description that the congregation stood in awe and fear before God. They were supplicating, “Oh, God, reveal yourself to us!”

ii. Here, we find revival. Revival is not emotionalism! Revival comes in listening to God’s Word and being convicted by it. Revival is a desire to draw close to the revealed God of Scripture.

- iii. I pray that your hearts will long for such revival. I pray that we will not be complacent but hungry for God and His Word. The Bible tells us that the **ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.**
- b. The work of God the Holy Spirit is always wonderful to behold. The Word was read, and the people testified of their submission to it. How? **All the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.** These were sure signs of the genuine devotion of the heart. These were hearts turned to God by God.
 - i. This had all been promised long ago, and here we see its fulfillment. We read in **Ezekiel 36:24-27** I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. (25) I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. (26) And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (27) And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

- c. Here we come to another point of teaching. In our passage of Scripture, we find the true authority of ministers. Our authority, as ministers, is derived from no other source than the Scriptures. There is authority in the reading, expounding, and explaining the scriptures so that God the Holy Spirit would act in the lives of sinners.
- i. A minister brings the treasures of God in heaven to the people living on this earth.
 - ii. Our passage states that **they (the ministers) read from the book, from the Law of God, and they gave the sense so that the people understood the reading.**
 1. We must recognize that after 70 years, many of the Jews only spoke Aramaic and needed someone to translate the Hebrew of into their language. It must also be understood that most of these former exiles had never heard the Law of God or had it explained to them. They were weak in biblical knowledge.
 2. Here, we find the true aim of all preaching. The preacher is to explain in the simplest terms the greatness of God. Our goal is for people to understand the Word. When this is done reverently, the power of God's Word becomes visible in the church's life.

4. Verse 9: Repentance Caused by the Word: 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 wept as they heard the words of the Law.
- a. The effect of the Lord’s holy law was completely unexpected. Remember, the day was marked for feasting and joyous celebration.
 - i. But what happened instead? The congregation was overcome with the deepest of sorrows. The reading of the Word did what it always does. It revealed the depth of Israel’s disobedience and God’s justification for their exile. Israel saw its sinfulness and God’s holiness simultaneously.
 - ii. So, the people were overcome with mourning and bitterness instead of joy and laughter. They had sinned greatly.
 - iii. There can be no revival without repentance for sin. There can be no salvation without the mourning of our disobedience.

5. Verse 10-12: Joy Caused by the Word: Then he said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” (11) So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.” (12) And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

a. Brothers and sisters, observe how wonderfully genuine love is when mixed with wholehearted devotion. Ezra and the other ministers rush in. God had already forgiven His people. The time for mourning was over; now, the people were to rejoice because of God’s unconditional forgiveness. **Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.**

- i. God had indeed been their strength. He had kept Israel while in Babylon. They had not lost their identity as a nation but remained distinctly Israel. God’s strength had made promises and kept them.
- ii. **Jeremiah 24:5-7** “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I have sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans. (6) I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not pluck them up. (7) I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD,

and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

- b. The people realized that despite their sins, the Lord would always be their strength. God is always quick to forgive the brokenhearted.
 - i. **Psalms 51:17** The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
6. Benediction:
- a. **Psalms 147:2-3** The LORD builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel. (3) He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

Public Reading of Scripture Psalms 147:1-6