

Title: The Beauty of the Word

Scripture: Nehemiah 8:1-12

Series: The Word

1. Introduction –

- a. The passage that lies before us today is post-exilic writing. In other words, it was written during the time that the Jews had returned from exile.
 - i. As you remember, God had delivered His people from Egypt and brought them forth to the Promised Land.
 - ii. After this, God establishes the Kingdom of Israel. The Kingdom was to prosper as long as the people walked with God. The people quickly turned from God, and what followed was 490 years of God, sending prophets to them to effect repentance.
 - iii. At the end of the 490-year mark, God sends the people into captivity. There they remain for 70 years as prophesied by God. Jerusalem had been destroyed along with the temple and the walls that surrounded the city.
 - iv. At the end of the 70 years of exile, God brought forth a small group of Israelites back to the Promised Land. This is where our story takes place. Nehemiah is sent to rebuild the wall, and the people, after much delay, rebuild the temple.
 - v. In an effort to bring back the people to God, the Word of God was read in a public gathering. The Word heard for the first time by most, had the effects that are recorded for us here. Let us look at this beautiful scene in redemptive history.

2. Verses 1-3: Coming to 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. (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 those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

- a. Our first point of consideration is found within this portion. We see a people desirous for God's Word. They had abandoned God's Word at one point in their history and had suffered the terrible consequences of

living in disobedience. The Word had become commonplace and completely ignored.

- i. But now the people are fully aware of their terrible mistake. To abandon the Word of God is to leave God Himself. To abandon the Word of God is to bring ruin upon oneself. Therefore, they now turn to the Word of God.
 - b. **...and all the people gathered as one man:** This is beautiful. The people, moved by God, all turned to the Word of God. There is unanimity in purpose. The people reason that their community must now be founded upon God's Word.
 - i. Included in this group were the men and women but also **all that could understand**. The people were desirous for their children to hear God's Word.
 - c. **...And he read from it...from early morning until midday:** An incredible amount of time was given to the Word of God. The preeminence of the Word became evident. The Bible was read in large portions for the edification of the people.
 - d. **And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law:**
 - i. The people came with the intent to hear the Word. They came with a desire to learn how to live pleasing and holy lives. They went intending to be transformed.
 1. The people did not want to live as their fathers had lived. They want to be different people, a people that live for the glory of God. This can only be accomplished in knowing God through His Word. Because they knew this truth, the people give all their attention to the Word being read.
3. Verses 4-6A: The Importance due to the Word of God: 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...
- a. **Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people:**
 - i. By opening the book in the sight of all the people, it was understood that this book was of the utmost importance. The

Bible was elevated to its proper place. It was understood that the Bible is the rule of life for the Christian. There can be no other authority.

- b. ...**for he was above all the people:**
 - i. The people had to look up to the Word of God. The Word of God was and continues to be above them in all respects.
 - ii. Again the people recognize the sole authority of the Word of God over the believer.
 - c. ...**and as he opened it all the people stood:**
 - i. The people demonstrated two things:
 - 1. Respect: The people standing showed that they now had a deep and abiding respect for the Word of God. This was unlike their fathers that had cast the Word aside.
 - 2. Willingness to hear: This standing demonstrates a desire to go and put the Word of God into action. It reflects a desire to live according to its demands.
 - d. **And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God:**
 - i. Ezra demonstrates his gratitude to God.
 - 1. He was grateful for another opportunity as a nation to live for God's glory.
 - 2. He was grateful to God for once again giving the Word to His people.
 - 3. He was grateful to God for giving the people a heart to honor God's Word.
4. Verse 6B: A Godly Reaction to the Word: ...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.
- a. ...**and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen:**
 - i. The people agree with Ezra's prayer of gratefulness. The meaning of the word "amen" is assuredly; so be it, truth. By this, the people agree with God that His Word is truth; that His Word is always right! This is a necessary component of true belief. There must be bowing to the truthfulness of God's Word!
 - b. ...**lifting up their hands:**
 - i. The lifting up of hands is an act of worship. It is akin to reaching up or reaching out towards God. Their hands went towards God as if they wanted to grab ahold of Him.
 - 1. This is an outward sign of what is occurring within.

c. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground:

- i. The bowing of their heads towards the ground takes the posture of humbleness.
- ii. It shows that they were not worthy of looking up towards God.
 1. Their sins compounded by God's holiness made it impossible to look upward towards God.
 2. This is a good posture for every believer to take.
- iii. Noticed that they worshipped. Their hearts began to praise and glorify the God of such incredible grace and mercy.

5. Verses 7 and 8: The Minister's Role: 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. God's love returned the Word to His people. This same love appointed ministers to teach the people how to understand the Word.

i. Notice that these men ...**helped the people to understand the Law**. These ministers wanted the people to understand the Law. They knew that a people that followed the Word of God was a people that could:

1. Accurately worship God
2. Walk worthy of God
3. Detect falsehood
4. Live in harmony with God.
5. Therefore, they read the Word of God ...**clearly**.

b. ...**they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading**.

These men plainly and at the people's level taught them the Word. This is one of the primary responsibilities of any minister. We are to teach plainly so that the people can understand. The best ministers are the ministers that the people can understand.

6. Verses 9-12: Understanding Often Produces Sincerity: And 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. (10) 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. When we understand the Word of God, we become privy to two great truths. First, we see the absolute holiness of God. Secondly, we see how sinful we are within his presence. Understanding usually produces mourning. This was the case for the people.

i. **“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.**

1. The people were overcome by how far they had genuinely descended into the abyss of sin. The reading of the Word had made them understand how they had transgressed God’s Holy standard.

ii. The fact that they were ready to mourn for their sins and those of their ancestors was divine grace. It meant that God was opening their understanding. It said that God was drawing them as a nation back to Himself. Therefore, in verse 10, the people are commanded to rejoice instead of mourn. God had given them tender hearts!

1. When the reality of their sin overcomes any person, this is good news. It means that God is quickening that person’s soul.

b. **And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength:** This realization of sin is a reason for joy. Joy, for God, has touched the heart. A joy that the individual truly sees their need for God and for forgiveness.

c. **And all the people went their way...to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them:** I pray that this would be indicative of our hearts when we leave this place. I pray that we leave this place rejoicing for having understood God’s Word.

7. Understanding Should Produce Action:

a. In Verses 13-18, we see that the people begin their obedience by participating in the Feast of Tabernacles. They worshipped God according to His Word.

- i. We read: **Nehemiah 8:13** On the second day the heads of fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the Law.
 - ii. Furthermore, in verse 18, we read, **“They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the rule.”**
 - b. Chapter 9 informs us that: **Nehemiah 9:1-3** Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. (2) And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. (3) And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God.
 - i. Do you see the fruits of their understanding? They declare a special occasion to continuously hear the Word and then repent for every sin that they and their ancestors had committed.
 - ii. They separate themselves from all that would contaminate.
 - iii. They stand to hear the Word.
 - iv. They make confession.
 - v. They worship the Lord.
8. Benediction –
- a. **Nehemiah 8:6** 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.

Public Reading of the Word of God

• Psalm 119:1-8