

**PP** **Nehemiah: The Way the Word Works**

Nehemiah 8:1-8

Part 26, 2/2-3, 2013

Illus Spurgeon once tested the acoustics of an auditorium in which he was to speak by stepping into the pulpit of that large empty room and loudly quoting **John 1:29**, ***“Behold the lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.”*** Satisfied, he left and went his way, but unknown to him there two men working in the rafters of that large auditorium, neither one a Christian. One of them was convicted at that moment in his conscience by the verse Spurgeon quoted and became a believer later that day!

God’s Word is ***living and active***, and works in our hearts in amazing ways  
 Last week, we saw looked at the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month, the day of the Feast of Trumpets, where  
***“all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate.” 8:1***  
 Verse 2, ***“both men and women and all who could understand what they heard” 8:2***  
 Those who were old enough to understand what was being read and explained  
 Those too young, did not gather, for it was a time to listen to God’s Word  
 If I were to write sermons that could be understood at a 3 or even 8 year old level, it would lack  
 the depth and relevancy needed to anchor our lives in Christ  
 We are so thankful for those who serve our children, who take care of them and teach the Word  
 of God so clearly to them  
 Parents, we encourage you, let us take care of your babies in our nursery, and your little ones in  
 our children’s ministry, allowing you to listen and learn, and apply what you hear  
 So all who were able to understand, gathered in the massive square ***‘before the Water Gate’***

We saw the ***Water Gate*** in our tour of the gates of chapter 3, and it has great significance for us  
 The temple servants used this gate to bring water for the purification ceremonies in the temple  
*Water for drinking* symbolized the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, *water for washing*  
 symbolized the cleaning power of the Word of God

**PP** ***“How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.”***  
**Psalm 119:9**

At the ***Water Gate***, the Holy Spirit fills us with God’s Word to sanctify and purify our hearts by  
 renewing our minds with truth, scrubbing away old desires and giving us new ones  
 And nowhere did Nehemiah infer this gate needed rebuilding, and even there we are reminded of  
 the indestructibility of God’s Word, which Jesus said ***‘will never pass away’***

Nehemiah assembles this great crowd into the square before this particular gate, because while  
 the walls were rebuilt, the people of God were in need of renewal in their love for God  
 In our passage we will see how to approach the Scriptures and the resulting transformation

**PP** **1-Eagerness**

***“And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel.” 8:1b***

***‘Ezra’ (Ezra 7:5)*** was a descendant of Aaron the High Priest of Israel  
 He was a priest and a scribe (8:9), which were Jewish experts in the Law of God

The Scribes were trained to read the various languages at the time, and they grew to have great authority as guardians and interpreters of the Word of God

Ezra had led the second group of Jews back from exile about 14 years before Nehemiah returned. God had moved in the life of King Artaxerxes of Persia, to allow Ezra back to Jerusalem

**PP** I want us to read the mission that God had for Ezra: ***“For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.” Ezra 7:10***

The first 7 chapters of Nehemiah are Nehemiah’s personal entries, but most believe that chapter 8 through 13 are Ezra’s reports of the revival of the people of God

In fact, originally Ezra and Nehemiah were one book, until the Latin Vulgate separated them out

In Nehemiah 8, Ezra opened up the ***‘Law of Moses’***, the first five books of the Bible, and read from ***‘early morning until midday’***, about 6 hours

It is easy to miss the fact that ***‘they’***, the people told Ezra the scribe to read the Scriptures

They wanted to hear the Word of God, which had nearly been extinguished in their exile

They would have come to church today ready to sing, but eager for the reading and explaining of the Word of God

Does that describe your attitude toward God’s Word?

If so, then even right now as I am preaching, the second point will be true for you

### **PP 2-Expectation**

There is a deadly rumor regarding a married couple that has been circulating our church the past 2 months and I’d like to deal with it this morning...

Did your ears perk up just now?

If I was sitting where you are and heard that, likely mine would have

What makes our ears open up?

Something within us grabs hold of what is being said...hungrily, eagerly, expectantly

The problem with many when it comes to reading the Word of God is that there is no expectation that God, the Creator of all there is, will speak to us when we look into His Word

If the Bible is to become life changing in our lives, then we must expect to hear from God

***“And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.” 8:3***

*We don’t read to critique the bible; we read the bible to let it critique us*

Amazon has a feature that allows readers to rate and review the books they buy

But the Bible must be able to rate and review our hearts, and the reviewer is the Holy Spirit

Do you read the Bible as if God Himself has sat down to speak with you?

When we open the Bible to read and study, there must be in our thinking an expectation that God will speak into us the truth we need to know and live by

**PP “Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.” Psalm 119:18**

What enables us to expect wonderful things in God’s law is regarding it more highly than any other book, which leads us to the third point

### **PP 3-Esteem**

Esteem is the value or regard you give to someone or something

When people find the bible boring and unhelpful, it is nearly always true that they do not value it highly or esteem it greatly  
 I have found that the more I mark up my Bible with highlights, underlines, and short notes, the more highly I value it

***“And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood [13 men] on his left hand. 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.” 8:4-5***

Solomon, dedicating the Temple of God, made a bronze platform on which to lead the worship  
 Here, Ezra and 13 men surrounding him was elevated above the people to be seen and heard  
 As well as to elevate the Word of God to the place of authority it deserved  
 God’s Word is above us, over us, for us

Ezra stood on this wooden platform with our modern day elders, who likely are taking turns  
 reading the Law of God to the people

Notice what the people did as he opened God’s Word: ***“all the people stood”***

In the Old Testament, people stood as a sign of respect for God’s Word

**PP** When God spoke to Ezekiel, He commanded, ***“Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you.” Ezekiel 2:1***

I’ll never forget as a young teen once again waiting for my father, one of the elders of our church, who was mired in endless after church conversations, and walking out to the car to join my sister, when I frustratingly took my bible and threw it onto the hood of our car  
 My sister, shocked, told me to never treat the bible like that, and to my knowledge, I never did again, even to the point where I would not place a book over it  
 While that can slip into legalism quickly, my personal intent is to never reduce the bible to the level of another book, rather to elevate it to the highest status in my life

#### **PP 4-Exaltation**

When we are eager for God’s Word, expecting God to speak, esteeming it as life-giving knowledge, our hearts will respond in worship and exaltation

***“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.” Nehemiah 8:6***

Ezra opened the Law of Moses, and prayed a blessing upon God and the people answered, ***‘Amen, Amen’***

Illus Years ago I was building a referral list for Christian counselors in the Lehigh Valley, so I called one particular family counselor to make a lunch appointment, but I reached his voicemail. It was early in the morning, it had been a tiring morning, and I left the obligatory message, already thinking of the next counselor on my list. I got to the end and for some reason, instead of saying goodbye, my distracted and addled mind churned out the words, ‘In Jesus’ name, Amen!’ As I said that, it was like my mind woke up to full attention, realizing what I had done, and no way to retrieve it from his machine. I just kept saying ‘Uhhhhhhhhhhhh’, and finally, ‘Goodbye’

The worst part of that whole incident was that I had to have lunch with him later that week!  
 We say the word **'Amen'** not at the end of a voicemail message, but at the end of our prayers,  
 and occasionally in conversation or when the preacher makes a point we agree with  
 In the Bible, and here in Nehemiah 8:6, it means ***I agree, may it be so...doubly so!!***

How comfortable are you with raising your hands in worship, or in prayer?  
 I hope that more and more people in our church feel comfortable to do so, for it is thoroughly  
 biblical

**PP** It demonstrates dependence on God: ***"Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to  
 you for help, when I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary."*** Psalm 28:2

**PP** Raising hands is a form of adoring God: ***"Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the  
 LORD!"*** Psalm 134:2

Bowing down before the Lord ***'with their faces to the ground'*** is not bizarre, it was a way of  
 humbling yourself before God

The people of God were eager to hear God's Word, expecting Him to speak to them, esteeming it  
 greatly, exalting God in adoration, and finally, open to the explanation of it

### **PP 5-Explanation**

***"Also [13 men], the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people  
 remained in their places. They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they  
 gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading."*** 8:7-8

There were 13 men who helped the people understand what Ezra was reading  
 Picture these men, Levites all of the men, priests, walking through that great crowd, reading from  
 God's Word, explaining it to men, women and older children

***'They read from the book...clearly'*** meaning they translated it to a language they understood  
 Most of these people were exiles who had returned from a life-long captivity in Persia  
 Raised in Persia, having learned the Chaldee or Syriac language, they were not fluent in Hebrew  
 The Law, written in Hebrew, had to be translated into the language they now understood  
 But not only did these men translate the Scriptures, ***'they gave the sense, so that the people  
 understood the reading.'*** 8b

They explained it, expounded it, ***'gave the sense'***

Friends, has God given you the gifts of teaching, to be able to give the sense of God's Word?  
 If so, you will love to learn, you will love to study, and you will find that when you explain the  
 bible to someone, there will be a measure of understanding they will receive  
 If you find that people often are more confused when you explain the scriptures, then be a  
 student of God's word, and let it live through your life, but you may not be a teacher  
 Your teaching, in that case, may be by example, rather than verbal!

Let me draw out a point, that there were 13 elders, 13 Levites to explain the Scriptures, yet  
 there were over 50,000 thousand of people

This is not because those who could and should teach weren't stepping up, but because God has  
 never given His church an overabundance of teachers in any given time period

**PP** James hints at the reason for this: *“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” James 3:1*

Men, ladies, young people, if you are called to teach, it will be evident to others

Come to the Elders and pastors and let us confirm that giftedness, and if necessary, let us discern if instead, you are gifted in other ways

You may not have a place on the platform, but you will be influential among the people as perhaps Life Group facilitators, or mentors and disciple makers

Study and show yourself approved for God’s Spirit takes His Word and reveals His truths to us

**PP** *“For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God...that we might understand the things freely given us by God.” 1 Corinthians 2:10, 12*

Do we come to the Word of God eagerly, expecting God to personally speak into our hearts?

Esteeming and valuing it more highly than any other knowledge or any human philosophy?

Letting it moves us to exaltation and worship?

And allowing God’s gifted people to explain it to us, revealing its eternal truths to our minds?

There is more we can learn and we must if the Word of God is to transform us into worshiping, faithful wall-builders

Lord willing, we’ll see more next week

What will you do with God’s Word this week?

Pray