

Nehemiah 8:1-8 – The Centrality of the Word of God

TSK, HebrewLexicon, Geneva, Handfuls, Clarke, Trapp, Gray, Poole, Gaebelein, Armstrong, Henry, Maclaren, Expositor, Delitzsch, Barnes Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: **If you want to get a great job**, you know the importance of getting good training and good education. **If you want to get a good wife**, you know you have to look hard, and look your best to get someone to be interested in you. You prepare yourself! (You are foolish if you don't!) No one questions the need to prepare!

But what if someone wants to live a successful Christian life? How does that happen? **To live as a successful Christian there are 2 essential things**: The **need for constant prayer (you heard about that already)** and the **centrality of the preaching of the Word of God**. Hear about this today.

Our headings are:

The Request

The Reading

The Response

Our goals are: **That you will remember to refocus on the reading and application of the Word of God so you can grow and be most helpful to the kingdom of the Savior.**

The Request

1 Now all the people **gathered together as one man** in the **open square** that was in front of the Water Gate; and **they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law** of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel.

1. God's people were not only commanded to come together for communion and worship, they wanted to come together for worship and communion for mutual encouragement.

Ezra had been in Jerusalem at this time and was promoting a return to the Gospel about 13 years before Nehemiah came...

They knew they needed worship. They knew they needed friendship and encouragement (especially considering the enemies nearby). They knew no man was an island.

Yes, they needed the trowel to build, they needed the sword to defend! But their greatest enemy was within - sin, and for that they needed more than a trowel and a sword. They needed the Gospel.

2. That coming together was a picture of unity, so not surprisingly, they were described as being "one man."

They were united in spirit, they were united in doctrine, and they were united in purpose.

They didn't have a great building, but the church never needed a building.

Their women were not put to the back, but were gathered as a family.

3. They came together publicly.

4. The people then told Ezra the scribe to get the Bible and read it to them.

Ezra was not mentioned with the rebuilding of the walls, but when it was time for the rebuilding of their faith, he was prominent. The people knew the importance of the law as a rule for what they must believe and how they should live.

Proverbs 6:23 For the commandment is a lamp, And the law a light; Reproofs of instruction are the way of life,

They did not ask for a comparison study of what all religions taught and then opt for the best; they knew the only and best teachings were found in the Word of God.

5. Lessons:

a. Can you imagine demanding that the preacher preach more, that your father reads more of the Bible, that you want more sermons to listen to during the week? That's what you must take away from this. You know you don't know what to believe and how to live. You know you need the encouragement to live godly.

And the focus was not on the preacher but in the book that was in his hand.

b. You set the tone for your family by teaching them the Word of God, making sure they learn to listen. This is what prepares them for when they gather with the saints on Sunday. Get a good commentary to understand the full meaning of the text. Ask your elder or pastor to explain something you don't understand. Prepare what you teach them.

c. The Gospel always ends in worship.

d. Don't be a teacher in God's church if you aren't called for that duty or if you aren't knowledgeable for that role. If you misrepresent God's Word you are in severe danger. Let not many be teachers in the church.

e. Only the Word of God is a guide for what you must believe and how you must live. There are many in our society who

think they know what is best for you and your family. If they teach consistently what the church teaches, you don't really need them. If they teach what is contrary to what the church teaches, you need to avoid them.

f. Worship is not singing, as is commonly held. (Let us do worship!) Worship is the congregation of God's people giving prayer and praises to God AND God giving his people sustenance by the Word and Sacraments.

The Reading

2 So **Ezra the priest brought the Law** before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. 3 Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, **before the men and women and those who could understand**; and the **ears of all the people were attentive** to the Book of the Law. 4 So **Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood** which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

1. Hearing the call to hear God's Word, Ezra the scribe and priest brought out the law and read it – all of it.

Ezra did not just read the text but **explained the meaning to the people of God.**

God's Word was the focus, not Ezra's ideas of what people needed to hear. Ezra's thoughts were not always God's thoughts.

Luke 4:16 So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.

2. Everyone gathered to hear the law – in his own language; none was excluded.

Some argue the phrase "and all who could hear with understanding" means they are justified in putting children out of worship. Answer: This was not a worship service. (This was the 1st day of the civil year, so it was not *the Sabbath*.)

This was a restoring of the law to the lives of God's people. This was a reading that would last for between 5-6 hours. (What zeal they had for the Word of God!) Further, Ezra was reading to those who could understand, **but this was not an exclusion of young children.** This **was a demand that children who were old enough to understand be there as well!** It was positive.

Some argue that since the people were standing, it was a command to stand for the reading of the Word of God!

Answer: There was no place to sit. They weren't indoors. Ezra stood to project his voice.

3. The people listened carefully as the sun rose over them.

That was not an unnecessary statement. It was intended to show the effort the people made to listen attentively over many hours, in the heat of the day! **This was to show how much they loved God and so loved his Word.**

Notice how Ezra had others standing next to him. This had a purpose too: To confirm the truthfulness of his words.

Malachi 2:7 "For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And people should seek the law from his mouth..."

4. Ezra stood on a high place so his voice could travel and make sure all those who were gathered could hear him.

Jesus went out on a boat and spoke to the people on the law so his voice could travel even farther. A practical thing.

5. Lessons:

a. Call your fathers, husbands, elders, and pastors to read the whole Bible so you could understand, believe, and live! Tell them you want God's will for your life! Tell them you want the sunlight of God's Word to overwhelm you.

b. Train yourself to shut out distraction from your life when you are under the ministry of the Word and Sacraments. Don't watch other people's clothing. Don't think about what's for supper. Forget about work. Ignore the kids when they are fussing. Focus on the Word. This takes training.

c. Ask your children if they understand what you teach them. Answer them like Philip answered the Ethiopian eunuch who did not understand what he read.

d. Simply reading the Word of God without explanations, especially of difficult texts, is a superstitious view of Scripture. Repent of that.

The Response

6 And **Ezra blessed the LORD**, the great God. Then all the people answered, **"Amen, Amen!"** while 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, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. 8 **So they read distinctly from the book**, in the Law of God; and they **gave the sense**, and helped them to understand the reading.

1. Ezra pronounced a benediction on the people who listened to and lived by the Word of God.

2. And the people responded with a desire that God would indeed bless them.

This is why it is common for ministers to say, “And God’s people say...”

Here the people responded with a double “Amen,” showing the intensity of their feelings. (Amen! Let it be true.)”

3. Then they prostrated themselves worshipped the Lord, Yahweh, showing total submission.

What a New Year’s Day it was! What a Day of Trumpets!

4. But some people did not understand the full meaning of the law, not having heard it before or were speaking a different language, so others, especially the Levites, explained the meanings to them.

Not everyone was a priest of a prophet, but those who knew more helped others.

One notable thing about how they did this work: **They distinguished between truth and not truth**. This is significant as it showed what God taught and it was contrasted with false teaching.

5. Lessons:

a. The Word of God and preaching always demands a response. So start with “Amen,” but then proceed to obedience. Be doers of the Word, not hearers only. **When you hear the Word of God, like after you’ve eaten, exercise your soul.** Exercising is always good for the body, the mind, and the soul. The Gospel always ends in worship! That’s your exercise.

b. Watch out for preachers who use language you don’t understand or those who have little application of the Word! They are demanding little of you. Run from them. God demands a lot.

c. If you don’t know the meaning of a text, don’t be afraid or ashamed to ask for help. God expects nothing less from you.

Conclusion:

The people as a whole, after the walls of Jerusalem were repaired, demanded to hear the law of God read and explained so they could more faithfully worship and work for God. Upon hearing the reading and explanation of the Word of God, the people responded with thankfulness and obedience.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Demand leaders in church faithfully read, exposit, and apply the text of Scripture so you can know and grow in Christ. Don’t settle for a superficial understanding of the text or reading of a long text without explanation. Demand they preach from every book of the Bible. Demand they teach of the sinfulness of man, the holiness of God, and the work of Jesus Christ.

2. Denounce those who spend their sermons telling long and interesting stories, making jokes, but ignoring the truth of Sacred Scriptures, failing to apply the Scriptures to life. Dare to tell those who go to those churches they ought to challenge those preachers.

3. Disperse this knowledge to those who are lost so they may find the only hope that could be theirs. Let them learn of God’s plan for saving man that is found in the Bible only!

Finally, if you don’t know the Word of God, you are in spiritual darkness, and you will walk right into the fires of hell. If you want to see the truth, then go the light of God’s Word. There you will see you are sinful

beyond belief, God is holy beyond your understanding, but Christ died in the wretched sinners' place on the cross to make peace between God and you. Believe it and you'll be saved forever.