

Nehemiah 8 | 5/20/18

- The reading of the Law | Nehemiah 8
 - **Read Nehemiah 8:1-6**
 - Ezra recites the Word of God and they have “church”.
 - God required the reading of the Law so that the people could learn to fear Him and so they would be obedient to His commands.
 - Deuteronomy 31:10-13
 - **This is the same reason that we read God’s Word today.**
 - **Christians must fear God, we must respect God, and we must obey God.**
 - When we read God’s Holy Word He speaks to us and we are drawn near to Him.
 - This is how we have a deeper and more personal relationship with Him, this is how we grow as Christians.
 - We must NOT neglect the reading of His Word and we must not neglect “church” where we come together as did the Israelites to hear God’s Word.
 - **The description that we have of Ezra reading God’s Word should sound familiar. It is what we would consider “church” today.**
 - They people gathered together to see Ezra on an elevated platform who then read from the Word of God.
 - However, they read the entire Bible (much smaller than what we have), which would have lasted at least 6 hours.
 - The congregation stood for the reading of Scripture – Verse 5
 - They stood for the reading of prayer, which of course showed respect to the Word, and the author whom is God.
 - They likely stood for the entire reading, which would have lasted for at least 6 hours.
 - Ezra and the congregation prayed to God before the reading of Scripture. – Verses 5-6
 - We see where they had prayer, in verse 6 Ezra praised God and all the people with uplifted hands said “Amen, Amen!”
 - Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD.
 - **All the people listened attentively** – Verse 3
 - We also see that the people listened attentively to the reading of the Word of God.
 - They didn’t simply attend church as a check box. Where they were physically there but did not really pay attention.
 - They knew that listening to God’s Word was extremely important and critical to their lives and they listened attentively.
 - We can see the difference between being attentive and having distractions with the story of Mary and Martha
 - **Luke 10:38-42**
 - Martha was distracted by here many tasks and didn’t give her attention to Jesus. But her sister Mary made the right choice sat at the Lord’s feet to listen.
 - Mary put aside the distraction to fully focus on Jesus.

- The Israelites here were not distracted with what they were going to have for lunch or the rest of their busy week. They gave this time and respected God's Word.
- **What similarities do you see between how Ezra shared the Scriptures compared to our modern-day church? Is there anything that stands out?**
- **Do you think that we could learn from the Israelites? Do we always listen attentively and respect God's Word? Or do we take it for granted?**
- The Scripture was not only read but it was explained and studied. | Nehemiah 8:7-8,13
 - ***Read Nehemiah 8:7-8,13***
 - So not only was the Word of God read to the people, but it was also explained to them so that they could understand it and they also went back and "studied" the Scripture.
 - This is of course exactly what we do in church today with the sermon, Sunday school and Wednesday night classes and small groups.
 - It is critical that we hear the Word of God.
 - Hearing in fact is enough to cultivate faith within the believer.
 - Romans 10:17
 - "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."
 - Just as we looked earlier it is critical that we hear and read the Word of God just as it is written in Scripture. But we are also called to do more than just listen.
 - It is critical that we understand the Word of God.
 - It is also critical to the Christian that we understand what we are reading.
 - We often just read or listen to a passage of Scripture without fully understanding it.
 - **What happens if we read something that we do not understand?**
 - It makes it difficult to learn from the Word and then to apply it to our lives.
 - This is why those that knew the Scripture well were there to help explain the meaning to others.
 - **We should seek to understand His Word when we do not instead of simply passing it over.**
 - It is critical that we study the Word of God.
 - There is a 3rd thing that is critical to the Christian when it comes to God's Word.
 - We are to hear the Word, we are to understand the Word, and we also must study God's Word.
 - Deep study of Scripture is where one can truly (and fully) understand God's Word on a deep and personal level.
 - **Regardless of how excellent and truthful someone else's interpretation may be, it takes on a new level when you see it come to light for yourself.**
 - It is not enough to only have the Scriptures read, preached or explained to you.
 - You must study it yourself, the Holy Spirit works within us when we do this.
 - We read and study His Scripture, so we can see how His Word applies in our life.
 - **Has the general approach to studying God's Word changed since the time of Nehemiah?**
 - **How important is it that we seek to hear, understand and study God's Word for ourselves? Does it really matter, or can we just simply sit and listen to a good sermon once a week and that be good enough?**
 - **How do you study the Scriptures?**
- The Scriptures will bring conviction, confession and great joy | Nehemiah 8:9-12, 9:1-2

- **Read Nehemiah 8:9-12**
- **When we hear, understand and study God’s Word it will bring conviction, confession and great joy.**
- God’s word will bring conviction
 - The Israelites were weeping initially at hearing the Law of God because they realized that they had not been obedient, that they had sinned against God and they were saddened.
 - Nehemiah 8:9b
 - “...For all the people wept as they heard the Words of the Law.”
 - **Why do you think they were weeping?**
 - **This is intentional and necessary as the Word of God will reveal where we have sinned and fallen short of what God expects from us.**
 - Hebrews 4:12
 - “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”
 - **When we realize this, it brings forth conviction which leads to repentance.**
 - This is the state that God wants us to get to. He wants us to realize our sins and to bring them to Him, so He can forgive (not condemn) us.
 - **Has the Scripture ever impacted you to such an extent, that it made you weep or feel extremely saddened because of being convicted?**
 - **What portions of Scripture have impacted you in this way?**
- God’s Word will bring confession | Nehemiah 9:1-3
 - **Read Nehemiah 9:1-3**
 - Confession is the result of conviction when we act upon it.
 - When God’s Word shows us what we have done wrong the first thing that we as Christians desire to do is to confess our sins to God.
 - **A Christian who truly embraces God’s Word cannot help but not desire to confess their sins.**
 - If a Christian does not have that desire, then they are suppressing the truth and are not truly letting God into their lives.
 - God will ALWAYS forgive us when we confess our sins
 - 1 John 1:9
 - “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
 - **Our confession that yields true repentance is one that breaks the chains of wickedness.**
 - The Israelites when they fasted and repented they did so to break the chains of wickedness, they turned away from their sins.
 - Isaiah 58:5-6
 - “Will the fast I choose be like this: A day for a person to deny himself, to bow his head like a reed, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast and a day acceptable to the LORD? Isn’t the fast I choose: **To break the chains of wickedness**, to untie the ropes of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and to tear off every yoke?”
 - **Once the conviction has set in, how hard do you have to try to bring yourself to confession?**
 - **What does true “repentance” mean to you?**

- God's word also brings great joy.
 - **While God's Word certainly will bring conviction and sorrow because of our sins, it will also bring us great joy.**
 - The Israelites were joyful when they understood God's Word.
 - Nehemiah 8:12
 - "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."
 - **This is because God doesn't just promise punishment, but he also promises forgiveness and mercy.**
 - This is why the Israelites were so joyful. Once they truly understood the Scriptures they knew that if they repented that God would forgive them.
 - We too are joyful when we understand the Word of God.
 - This joy is felt every time we read God's Word and we understand His truths.
 - We are joyful because we know that as Christians that God will fulfill His promises and that regardless of the adversity and problems of this life that we will spend an eternity with Him in Heaven.
 - We understand that God will forgive us even though we do not deserve it.
- **How might you explain to someone how the Scriptures make you feel, when at one moment you are saddened and feel conviction. Yet the next you feel an abundance of Joy and thankfulness?**
- **What portions of Scripture will always give you this joy?**