

Proclamation of the Word # 20

Nehemiah 8: 1-8

Tonight we have come to the first of three parenthetical chapters within the book of Nehemiah. In chapters one through seven we have considered the building of the walls, the struggles to overcome adversity, and the commitment of Nehemiah and the people. In large part we have considered the physical needs and trials of the people. Nehemiah was the central figure in the previous chapters.

As we come to chapter eight there is a definite shift in the focus. These chapters will deal primarily with the spiritual needs of the people. Nehemiah is still present, but Ezra the priest will have the prominent role in chapters eight through ten. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are intertwined and complement each other.

As the people began to contemplate their lives in Jerusalem, they became aware of their responsibilities to serve the Lord and live according to His Word. Chapter eight will set the stage for the spiritual renewal of the people. A key verse in these parenthetical chapters is [Neh. 8:13 – And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, **even to understand the words of the law**](#). The people had a hunger for the Word and desired to comprehend it in order to apply it to their lives. We too need to develop the hunger and passion they had for the Word of God. Tonight I want to consider the [activities](#) involved with their desire as we think on: [Proclamation of the Word](#).

I. The Desire for the Word (1-5) – These verses reveal the genuine desire the people had for the Word. They ought to speak to us regarding our desire for the Word. Notice first of all:

A. Their Resolution (1a) – [And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate](#); I don't know about you, but that is simply amazing to me. The people came together as one man with a common desire and that was to hear the Word of God. They were united in their passion for God's Word.

- I don't think I have ever been in a service anywhere that I honestly felt that everyone there had a genuine, heartfelt desire to hear the Word of God. All may have had good intentions, but they were preoccupied or simply came out of habit. That ought to be our desire and commitment each time we have an opportunity to gather at the house of God. We ought to come together as one to hear His Word.

B. Their Request (1b) – [and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel.](#) It gets more amazing as we continue to read; they requested for Ezra to bring the Word of God and read it before them. It is hard enough to get Baptist to agree on virtually anything, much less getting them all together with a common request to hear the Word read from the man of God.

- It saddens me, but it is true nonetheless, in many churches the emphasis is on anything but the Word. There are many who can agree that they like to hear singing, or they like to get together for fellowship (to eat), but few congregations have a majority that hunger for the reading, teaching, and preaching of the Word. Many preachers today may select a random verse for their text, but most of their time is spent dealing with current events or life experiences. I am not opposed to illustrations in a message, but I have not been called to preach from the newspaper or the Readers Digest. We need to hear the Word!

C. Their Representation (2) – [And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.](#) This is something that the church needs to understand in our day. All the people came together. This gathering wasn't reserved for the men of Jerusalem, or even the adults, all that could hear with understanding were present. Six times in the verses we've read, we find the phrase "[all the people.](#)" That includes young and old alike.

- I appreciate the fact that children need instruction that is on their level. I am not opposed to Sunday school and small group discussions. However, I firmly believe that children need exposure to the preaching of the Word and the corporate worship of God's people. We are doing a great disservice to the young people if we send them out of every service and never allow them to hear the Word of God read and preached in the worship service.

D. Their Resolve (3a) – [And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand;](#) Allow me to read that again to make sure we understand what that has said. The people stood before Ezra as he read from the Word [from morning until midday!](#) They were in no hurry to leave. They had not come hoping it would soon end; they had come to hear from the Lord.

- My how we need that resolve and desire to hear a word from the Lord in our day. I have heard of folks actually telling the pastor that they expect him to finish by 12:00 every Sunday. To that I would say as a friend of mine did, "If you get finished before the Holy Spirit and I do, you know where the door is."

E. Their Reception (3b) – and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

Isn't that amazing? The people were paying attention to what the Word and the man of God had to say. They actually desired to hear it and receive something from it. Our churches and communities would be far better today if God's people would hear and heed His Word. If you are sitting under a God called man, I can assure you that he does not desire to hurt or hinder you. He is simply delivering what the Lord has given him for the benefit of the church.

F. Their Reverence (5b) – And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: They stood in attention to the Word. They knew that the Word of God had something for their lives. There was a respect and eagerness for the Word.

- Oh how we need that reverence for the Word of God in our day. In the Bible we have the heart of God. He has given us His Word to live by. It is the Word that brought conviction to me, resulting in my salvation. It is in His Word that I find encouragement and direction for my life. The Word is not to be ignored or dreaded, but cherished and respected! A copy of the Bible ought to be the most precious possession we own.

I. The Desire for the Word (1-5)

II. The Declaration of the Word – In these verses we also discover Ezra declaring the Word of God to the people. Let's take a moment to consider the declaration. Notice:

A. The Priest (1-2, 9) – These verses reveal that Ezra was a priest and scribe. He was called of God to lead the people in worship, but he was also well versed in the Scriptures. He had spent much time reading and studying the Word of God. The Lord had prepared him for such a time as this. Notice what [Ezra 7:10](#) reveals. [For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.](#)

- Handling the Word of God and preaching from it is a serious endeavor. Far too many today choose ministry as a vocation. After all, in the minds of many, all that preachers do is ride around and eat fried chicken. I for one still believe in the call of God for ministry. I certainly would not want to do what I do if I wasn't certain of His call upon my life. We need God called men who will spend time in His Word, studying and preparing their hearts long before they attempt to deliver a message!

B. The Place (1a) – [And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate](#); The people had gathered in a predetermined, prominent place for the reading of the Word. This location was likely selected due to the room it provided and the ease of hearing for the people.

- I still believe in coming together with God's people for worship. We have a beautiful facility that God has blessed us with for the purpose of worship and biblical instruction. We must not forsake the assembling of ourselves together at the house of God. I have heard those who claim they can live for God just as well by worshipping at home. I don't believe a word of it. I have never met one person who grew in their faith apart from being part of a local assembly. There is something about coming together with God's people that you can't get anywhere else. You won't find it while watching a TV evangelist either. I know some are physically hindered from attending, but if you are able, you ought to be in God's house!

C. The Pulpit (4) – [And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose](#); Does that sound familiar? Ezra the priest stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose, and expounded the Word of God. They had made preparations for preaching. Worship must include the man of God preaching the Word.

- I know modern society has gotten away from Bible preaching, but there is nothing like the man of God getting alone with the Lord, getting a word from Him from the Bible, and bringing that word to the people of God. Preaching is essential to worship! God has chosen that method of delivery to share His message and deal with people's lives. [1 Cor.1:21 – For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.](#) Ezra had a desire to share the Word of God. [Ezra 7:10 – For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.](#)

D. The Praise (6) – [And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.](#) As the Word was read and preached, it brought rejoicing to the hearts of the people. They lifted their hands and rejoiced in the Lord. The Bible had brought comfort to them and they rejoiced in the Lord. They had reason to rejoice.

- We too have reason to rejoice. There is nothing wrong in rejoicing in the Lord. I have been in services where folk looked at you like you had the plague if you lifted your hand or said amen. God deserves and desires the praise of His people. If God's people can't rejoice, who can? If they can't rejoice in the worship service, where can they?

E. The Priority (7-8) – Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. [8] So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. It is clear that the people were committed to hearing and understanding the Word of God. They read from the Word *distinctly*, seeking to receive what the Lord had given. Their worship was centered on the Word.

- We need to share that priority. It ought to be our desire to hear from the Lord each time we gather, and to ensure that all are able to hear and understand. We need to open the Book and allow it to speak for itself whether it consoles or confronts.

F. The Passion (2, 13) – In [V.2](#) we found that Ezra opened the book of the law on the first day of the seventh month. In [V.13](#) we find them gathered again on the second day. They had stood from morning until midday the day before and they were back again, hungry for more.

- Wouldn't you agree that we need more passion for the Word and its instruction for our lives? Most of us are pretty good at coming two or three times per week, but what about hungering for the Word daily. I know we can't be in church every day of the week, but we can ensure that we take time daily to read and meditate upon the Word.

I have enjoyed considering the account of the spiritual renewal that took place in Jerusalem after the walls were complete. God had allowed His people to return to the homeland and they were seeking to worship and serve Him. We must keep in mind that this renewal was centered on the Word of God. As Ezra opened and proclaimed the Word, the people responded and were changed.

That is clearly what we need to see in our day. We need to return to the foundation of our faith. We need a renewed desire for the Lord and His Word. We need to make the Word the priority in our lives and our services. I pray that each of us has been enlightened and challenged regarding God's Word and our responsibility to it.