

Responding to the Word # 21

Nehemiah 8: 9-18

In our last study we found the people of Jerusalem gathered in the street before the water gate. They had come together with a common desire to hear the Word of God read by Ezra the priest. This must have been a great turning point in the lives of the people. They had been busy rebuilding the devastated city, but during the process of reconstruction, they realized the need for spiritual renewal. There was a unanimous consensus to seek the Lord and His Word.

Tonight as we finish our study of chapter eight, we discover the results of seeking the Word of God and His guidance with a pure heart. The people had come before the Lord with a genuine desire to hear from Him and rededicate their lives to Him. Just as we would expect, God honored the desire of the people. As His Word was read among the people, they experienced a great renewal.

The same is true in our day as well. We may live in an age that has abandoned the ways of God, but He is faithful to those who seek Him. I want to consider the [realities of seeking the Lord](#) as we think on: [Responding to the Word](#).

I. The Discernment of the Word (9-11)

A. The Grief of the People (9b) – [For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law](#). When confronted by the Word of God, the people wept. God's Word had brought conviction to their hearts and they became aware of their sin. Keep in mind that they had spent several hours listening to the Word. As Ezra read, the Lord brought conviction. This brought about a sense of sorrow for sin and repentance.

- The Word has the ability to bring conviction to our lives. It is inspired of the Spirit and He takes the truths of God's Word and brings conviction to our hearts. [Heb.4:12 – For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart](#). We need some godly sorrow and repentance in our day as well.

B. The Guidance of the Priests (9-11) – In these verses we discover the guidance the priests offered the people regarding the Word and their repentance. They didn't want the people to dwell on their grief. They wanted them to understand the beauty of the day. It was:

1. A Day of Holiness (9,11) – Twice in these verses the priests conveyed to the people that this day was [holy unto the Lord](#). It was a day for worship and rejoicing. A miraculous thing had happened in their lives. The God of heaven had visited His people again. They had heard His Word and He had spoken to them through the Word.

- Many have grown apathetic and complacent regarding worship and entering the presence of the Lord. We need to understand the enormity of what we are privileged to have part in. We have been blessed as of late with a glorious manifestation of God's presence. That is not to be mourned or grieved over, but celebrated in recognition of God's holiness!

2. A Day of Hope (10a) – [Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared:](#) Things had been hard for the people of God. Unrepentant sin had resulted in captivity for them. Those who now dwelt in Jerusalem would likely have been born in bondage. They had now received the promise of abundant blessing from the Lord. The hope for their future was so great, they were encouraged to enjoy the goodness of the Lord and send unto those who had nothing prepared. Their days of bondage and suffering were over.

- We too face great adversity, but hope is not lost. We may be in the midst of tough economic and spiritual times, but a brighter day is coming for the redeemed. We have received much from the Lord and we need to do all we can to share that abundance with those who have not met Christ, those who stand in need of His grace in their lives as well.

3. A Day of Healing (10b) – [for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.](#) As we have already discussed, the days of bondage were over. They had returned to the land of promise. As long as they sought the Lord and continued to serve Him, they would enjoy His blessing. God desired to bring healing to the people and to the land and it appears that the healing process had begun.

- Surely we would all agree that America stands in need of healing. We have strayed from the ways of God and lost our fear of Him. God desires to send that healing and we could have it once again, but we must meet the conditions that He has described. As with the people of Jerusalem, healing will not come until we return to God, seeking His Word and living according to His commands.

C. The Gratitude of the People (12) – This reveals that the people experienced great joy and gladness because they had received and understood God’s Word. That is the basis for real joy. We cannot expect to experience joy if we are living contrary to God’s Word.

I. The Discernment of the Word (9-11)

II. The Discovery in the Word (13-15)

A. The Commitment (13) – We discussed this as the basis for their spiritual renewal. The people were genuinely committed to the Word of God. Simply hearing the Word wasn’t enough. They had developed a hunger and desire to hear from the Lord and live their lives pleasing to Him.

- We need to regain our hunger for the Word of God. We need to once again embrace it as the sole authority for our lives. Churches and men of God need to come to the place that they accept all of the Word, with absolute confidence in it. We do not have a book that contains God’s Word; we have His infallible Word. It is not a mixture of God’s Word and the writings of men. We have the preserved Word and we must base our lives upon it!

B. The Command (14-15) – As the people studied the Word they found a particular command the Lord had given His people. Let’s take a moment to consider this command. We find that:

1. It was Specific – These verses are dealing with the command of God in relation to the Feast of Tabernacles. God had commanded that each year during this feast, the people were to construct booths made of tree branches to commemorate the faithfulness of God during the wilderness wanderings. It served as a reminder and contrast to the temporary dwellings of the wilderness and the permanence of Canaan. God was not vague in His desire for the Feast and its observance. He gave specific instruction as to what was expected.

- The specifics of God’s Word are often hard to be received, but I rejoice for them. God is not vague in His plan and desire for our lives either. We can find exactly what we need to know regarding our Christian journey within the pages of His Word. In fact, I believe we understand far more than we would like to admit. Most don’t have a problem with the things they don’t understand; they have a problem obeying what they do comprehend.

2. It was Significant (15) – On the surface this may seem a rather insignificant detail, but it is actually the opposite. We must keep in mind that the people had been in bondage for 70 years before the first group was allowed to return. The people had been separated and scattered for many years. The command was given to proclaim the observance of the feast in all the cities of Judah. God's favor and providence was returning to Judah as a whole, no longer just among small groups. The nation had received an offer for celebration and worship.

- Anytime that God deals with people, it is significant, but when He begins to deal with a people corporately, that is wonderful. God is working among those groups that seek Him, but I would like to see a nationwide return to the Lord. I would like to see our nation turn to God so that we could experience His presence throughout the land. If we could see nationwide revival, that would be the most significant occurrence in modern history!

I. The Discernment of the Word (9-11)

II. The Discovery in the Word (13-15)

III. The Devotion to the Word (16-18)

A. The Response (16) – This is very simple and yet it is very profound. The people did according to the Word of God. They knew and understood what God expected and they responded to His commands.

- We just need to do what we already know to do. If we are to ever experience real revival that motivates us and moves outside the church, we are going to have to respond to the Word. We must get to the place that we embrace God's Word and live accordingly. Can you imagine what would happen if those who were really born again simply started living whole-heartily according to the Word. I can assure you, we would experience revival and it would radically change the spiritual landscape of our nation and the world.

B. The Reward (17) – The people responded to the commands of God and they were rewarded for their faithfulness. It had been hundreds of years since the people participated in the Feast and now they were the first generation in years to experience this joyous occasion. Their obedience resulted in **very great gladness**. God allowed them to experience something that other generations had missed.

- I for one am convinced that we don't have to settle for what we currently have. Many today may have no desire for the Lord, but that doesn't mean we have to live without His presence in our lives. God is aware of those who seek Him and He will reward them for their desire. [2 Chron.7:14 – If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.](#)

C. Their Renewal (18) – This was not something they celebrated one day and soon went back to their old way of living. The Word of God was read before them for seven days and on the eighth day they held a solemn assembly. God's Word reveals that this spiritual renewal did not last forever, but I believe there were those whose lives were changed. They had embraced the Word of God and they were committed to continuing their service to the Lord.

- We desperately need a spiritual renewal in our day. Many who attend church are not challenged in their walk, and see little, if any, spiritual growth. A spiritual renewal will last beyond 12:30 on Sunday morning. We need a spiritual renewal that will totally transform our lives. I pray that God will stir us and continue to move among us. We can have as much of His presence as we desire. How much do we really want?

We have been challenged by this account of the people's response to the Word of God. Their reception of the Word brought real, profitable change to their lives. I would love to receive what they did. How about you? Do you desire more than you currently have? Are you satisfied with your Christian life as it is? Surely we all need to draw nigh to God and allow His Word to mold us into His image. I pray that we will sense our need and genuinely seek the Lord.