

## "The Word we Hear"

## Nehemiah 8

NEW TO ICF – noticed our routine, what happens at this point in program  
Someone comes up here and talks, and talks, and talks, .....

If you are new, you are learning how to behave during this endless drone –

- If you have a Palm Pilot – get it out (wife thinks you are looking at Bible program), but you're checking e-mail and playing games
- Or you can count the light bulbs in the ceiling
- Make a mental note of all the grammatical mistakes made
- Replay that movie you watched last night on video screen of your brain
- Or do what experienced Church people do very well, "Sleep with your eyes open"

EXPLAIN – What am I doing? – Present to you Message of the Living God  
As I present His message – I am prayerfully presenting you to God

Apostle Paul described himself as "a minister of Christ Jesus...with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit"  
Romans 15.16

MARTIN LUTHER - "when I declare the Word of God I offer sacrifice, when you hear the word of God with all your heart, you are offering sacrifice"

J.I. PACKER "preaching, if not sacramental, is profane...a true sermon is an act of God, and not a mere performance by a man. In real preaching the speaker is the servant of the word & God speaks and works by the word through his servant's lips"

MANY CRITICS OF PREACHING – even friends of preaching have concerns  
DO A BETTER JOB USE MODERN TOOLS, videos, rap music, computer graphics

ALL OF THESE CAN BE KINGDOM TOOLS FOR GOD'S WORD AND WORK  
2 PROBLEMS –

- 1) Age – Old Dinosaur – too low tech to edit a video, or even make Power Point
- 2) Theology – Biblical Religion is primarily one of the EAR – not the eye

"Faith comes by hearing" / "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God"

UNSEEN GOD communicates to us most fully and finally in A WORD  
 Psalm 29 “The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic”

Israel was surrounded by PAGAN, GENTILE neighbors  
 Whose religions appealed to their various senses – sight, touch, and taste

Moses asked the Israelites in Deuteronomy 4 (7-13)  
 “What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?... You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens... Then the Lord spoke out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. He declared to you his covenant”

The Distinctive of Israel / Law of God – God’s Word / Religion of the Ear

Some of final words of Moses – Deuteronomy 31 (9-13) “So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests... At the end of every seven years... you shall read this law before them in their hearing... men, women, and children... so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God”

RARELY IN ISRAEL’S HISTORY WAS THIS DONE – one example Nehem 8

IRONIC – our passage – Event after Israel was returned from Babylonian Exile  
 HAD ISRAEL READ AND OBEY – LAW OF GOD – Never been an Exile

Exile was result of FAMINE – prophet Amos told the nation of Israel  
 “The days are coming” declares the Sovereign Lord, “when I will send a famine throughout the land – not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it” (8.11,12)

DARKEST DAYS OF OLD AND NEW COVENANT – God sent preachers

Preachers to Shine the Light of God’s Word / Lift High the Banner of the Lord  
 Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Ezra, and John the Baptist  
 When God sent His Son into the World – He made Him a Preacher

Jesus defined Himself words of Isaiah “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He anointed me to preach the good news to the poor”... Said to His disciples “Let us go to the nearby villages... so I can preach there also. That is why I have come”

Christian Church was launched by a Sermon – Peter on Pentecost – 3000 came in  
 “And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” Rom 10.14

Preaching has been tool of God thru history of the Church – Peter and Paul,  
 Wycliffe and Hus, Luther and Calvin, Whitefield and Wesley, Carter and Blair

NOT NEUTRAL – REASON IN KAZAKHSTAN – TRAIN PREACHERS

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BOOK WRITTEN BY THE SHORTEST MAN IN BIBLE - Knee high Miah  
 NOT THE SMALLEST MAN IN BIBLE - Philippiian jailer, slept on watch

500 years of monarchy in Israel and Judah - ended in 587 B.C.

PEOPLE OF GOD -DISOBEDIENT TO WORD OF GOD - RESULT: EXILE  
 NOT END OF STORY - GOD OF 2nd CHANCE HAD MERCY ON HIS PEOPLE

GOD CUT VINE of Israel DOWN to BARE ROOTS – REMNANT 50,000 people

PEOPLE OF GOD - SMALLER IN NUMBER BUT MORE DEVOTED, REVIVAL  
 FAVORITE PHRASE "the hand of our God" - SOVEREIGN OF PROVIDENCE

Nehemiah - WALLS WERE COMPLETED – 52 days- JOB WAS NOT DONE  
 PHYSICAL RESTORATION must be followed by SPIRITUAL REFORMATION

Nathan – born Kuluva Hospital 1984 – near Arua, Uganda / Church Hospital  
 Devoted believers on Staff – Daily Preaching – Every year Evangelistic Campaign  
 Lousy facilities – No Electricity – Buildings unfired adobe brick – 40+ years old  
 DESPITE POOR FACILITES – GREAT STAFF TREATED & HELPED MANY  
 Today – 24 hr. Electric – All new buildings – improved technology – No Christianity

PHYSICAL RESTORATION must be followed by SPIRITUAL REFORMATION

Chs 1-6 / are about WORK – led by Nehemiah the Governor

Chs 7-13 / are about WORSHIP – led by Ezra the Priest and Scribe

1. God’s Preacher / 2. God’s Proclamation / 3. God’s People

1. God’s Preacher

a. Called 8.1 “all the people assembled as one man (UNITY)...they told Ezra the  
 scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses”

**EZRA CALLED BY GOD – GOD’S CALL ON EZRA RECOGNIZED BY MAN**  
 Ezra 7.11 “Ezra the priest and teacher, a man learned in matters concerning the commands and decrees of the Lord”

**EVEN RECOGNIZED BY KING ARTAXERXES – KING OF PERSIA**  
 7.25 “And you Ezra, in accordance with the wisdom of your God, which you possess

In a Similar Way – NEW COVENANT preachers are to be Called of God  
 Paul to Timothy “Command and teach these things...devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift”

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word”

**PREACHED TO PRESIDENT OF UGANDA – only time before Head of State**  
**SOMEONE MORE IMPORTANT PRESENT “in the presence of God and Jesus”**  
**CALLED BY GOD TO PREACH BEFORE GOD – no greater Audience**

**CALL ON EVERY BELIEVER’S LIFE – to Salvation and to Service**  
**ALL MEMBERS OF THE BODY ARE IMPORTANT AND ESSENTIAL**  
 Every gift is essential to advance the cause of Christ, need Unity in Him

b. Faithful 8.1 “the Book of the Law of Moses, the Lord had commanded for Israel”

**DIFFICULTY IN PREACHING – how can I be fresh, exciting, interesting**  
**AREN’T PEOPLE TIRED OF OLD MESSAGE? Jesus and the Cross?**

EZRA followed advice of Jeremiah “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths where the good way is, and walk in it” 6.16

**NOT Babylonian Astrology, Persian Society News, or Critique King Artaxerxes**  
**ANCIENT PATH OF MOSES WORDS – LAW OF GOD – COVENANT**

Ezra 7.10 “Ezra devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel”

Difficult 3 Point Sermon – 1. Study Law 2. Observe Law 3. Teach Law  
**NO POWER IN NUMBER THREE WITHOUT GOOD JOB AT NUMBERS 1 & 2**

Paul to Corinthians “Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God”  
 2 Cor 2.17

c. Respected - to God and His Word – and those who faithfully serve them

vs. 4,5 “Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion... Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up”

CHURCHES OF VARIOUS TRADITIONS TODAY – stand for Gospel of Christ

“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is in preaching and teaching” 1 Timothy 5.17

EZRA the Scribe – Compiled our OT, wrote Ezra, perhaps Chron, Ps 119

DOUBLE EDGED SWORD – “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because we know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” James 3.1

Paul gives special instruction about how to critique preachers / NEED IT  
2 or 3 Witnesses Needed / If they sin, they should be rebuked publicly

Messenger of the Word / Mirrors the Word / their Sin also Stains the Word  
DISCREDIT THE MESSENGER / DAMAGE THE MESSAGE

## 2. God's Proclamation

a. Anticipated – they looked forward to meeting with God through Word

8.5 “Ezra opened the book...the people all stood up”

8.6 “Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground” / WORSHIPPED GOD, NOT THE BIBLE

MOST of these PEOPLE HAD NEVER HEARD THIS WORD – Exile 70 Years  
Seen God open door of Babylon and set them free / Walls were rebuilt

Could identify with Sons of Korah “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?  
Psalm 42.1,2

Perhaps Ezra wrote these words – Psalm 119 “My soul faints with longing for your salvation, but I have put my hope in your word”

One of them wrote – Psalm 126 “When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy...The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy”

OBVIOUS QUESTION – Do YOU Come HERE w/ Such Eager ANTICIPATION?  
Have you been poured out in service to Him and long for Him to again fill you up?

PRACTICAL Applic.– Your Saturday night has much to do with your Sunday morn  
Hard to Anticipate God when you’re not ready – up too late, ate too much, argument,

b. Apprehended – not only did they want it – THEY GOT IT!

Law of Moses was almost 1000 years old AS EZRA READ IT  
Changes in Hebrew Language / MOST DID NOT UNDERSTAND HEBREW

PEOPLE in vs. 4,7 – Translators and Teachers – 13 Priests

8.8 “They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could not understand what was read”

Not like MODERN PREACHER – 6 Days Invisible / on 7<sup>th</sup> INCOMPREHENSIBLE  
RECEPTOR ORIENTED COMMUNICATION – Cookies on the Lowest Shelf  
PREACHER must Do His Best to Make it CLEAR – Only God can Open Eyes

Paul spoke of VEIL over the Eyes of the Jews “their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away...whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away”  
2 Corinth 3

PEOPLE IN CHURCHES TODAY – intelligent, well-meaning, sincere BLIND  
ONLY JESUS CAN LIFT THE VEIL – ONLY HE CAN REALLY TEACH US

JESUS TO DEVOTED BIBLE STUDENTS “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life”  
John 5.39

MAN HAS PICTURE OF GIRL FRIEND WHO IS AWAY ON A TRIP  
Girl comes back again – Man does not want to see her – Embraces the Picture

Bible is intended to Point us to Jesus / that He might APPREHEND US

EXISTENTIAL EVENT – something happens in the preaching moment

SERMON TAPES, NOTES, BOOKS are all good / but they're like an ECHO  
CANNOT FULLY RECREATE THAT MOMENT OF ENCOUNTER w/ God

Have Enough Sermon Notes to Wall Paper my Apt – Rarely look at them  
CANNOT RECREATE THOSE ENCOUNTERS I HAD AT THAT TIME

Revelation 2.7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”

c. Applied – it stuck to their lives and they changed

8.13 “the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered  
around Ezra the scribe to give attention to the words of the Law”

“give attention to” INTENSIVE STUDY – not merely passive listening  
“heads of families” PATTERN of Deut 6 – “teach your children well”

Followed MOSES WORDS – celebrated the Feast of Booths / Harvest Festival

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and  
training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every  
good work”  
2 Timothy 3.16,17

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” Ja 1.22

BEST IMAGE OF PREACHING – Marathon race / Support teams to Help Runners  
Thirst Aid Stations – give cups of Water – Cups to Drink, Cups to Drench Heads  
SO THE RUNNERS CAN CONTINUE TO RUN THEIR RACE  
AFTER THEY DRINK AND DRENCH – CUP THROWN TO GROUND  
VESSEL DID ITS JOB – CARRIED THE REFRESHMENT – RUNNER GOES  
SERMONS – LIKE those CHEAP CUPS – PRECIOUS CONTENT – GOOD WORK

### 3. God's People

a. Concentration – you're a little tired by now, I am on my third and final point

8.3 “He read aloud from daybreak till noon...in the presence of the men, women, and  
others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the  
Law”

HERBERT CARSON “To hear a sermon is not to engage in a leisure activity but to discipline our minds so that, with all our mental powers at full stretch, we might aim to grasp all that God has to say to us on each occasion”

No matter who is the preacher – If Scripture is Opened – there is something for us!

8.18 “Day after day, from the first to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the feast for seven days”

“YOU MEAN THEY WERE THERE FOR 5 or 6 hrs. FOR SEVEN DAYS?!”  
And you think my sermons are too long!!

Jesus’ Parable of the Soils – 4 Soils – 4 Responses to the Word of God

Luke 8.18 “Consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him”

BISHOP J.C. RYLE comments on the Parable “The degree of benefit people receive from God’s means of grace depends entirely on the way people use them...It is not enough that we go to church and hear sermons. We may do so for 50 years, and be ‘nothing bettered, but rather worse’”

“For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of death”  
2 Corinthians 2.15,16

VERY WORD THAT SAVES SOME / WORD WHICH JUDGES OTHERS

b. Conviction – Mystery of Grace / Spirit of God applies the Word of God

8.9 “For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law”

WORD OF GOD does Not Always make us Happy – and this is GOOD  
Sometimes we feel EXPOSED, CONVICTED, GUILTY, & ASHAMED!

“Is not my word like fire,” declares the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”  
Jeremiah 23.29

“The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the Lord shakes the desert...The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, ‘Glory!’”  
Psalm 29.7-9



Martyn Lloyd-Jones pastored Westminster Chapel in London  
 Preached through Book of Romans – took 12 years to finish – preached over an hour  
 Woman in Congregation complained “When you finish your sermon, I feel exhausted”  
 Lloyd-Jones “Good! So did Jacob after wrestling with God to receive the blessing”

Nehemiah – Governor & Layman – better Preacher than Priests and Scribes  
 8.9 “This day is sacred to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep”

Jeremiah said “Though he brings grief, he will show compassion” Lam 3.32

CONVICTION is NECESSARY / GOSPEL is GOOD NEWS / HOPE of SALVATION  
 SOME PREACHERS USE THE LAW TO BEAT– feel like a whipped dog, wimper off

“So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith”

8.10 Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength”

c. Celebration - work of God thru Word – Concentration, to Conviction, to Celebration

8.12 “Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.”

MAYBE BIBLICAL PRECEDENT giving out discount coupons to Hotel Buffet

DEREK KIDNER “Three times in this short paragraph it is pointed out that holiness and gloom go ill together...the words that went most naturally with ‘holiness’ were not only ‘justice and righteousness’ but ‘glory,’ ‘beauty,’ ‘strength,’ and ‘joy’”.

“The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart” Psalm 19.8

“Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart” Psalm 119.111

“When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight” Jer 15.16

Not sure – how many light bulbs in ceiling – or games on your Palm?  
 Time for God’s People to Hear His Word – to Love Him, and Live for Him

8.10 “This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength”

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