

STIRRED BY THE WORD

Nehemiah 8:1-11

WHAT HAPPENS IN Nehemiah 8 is an extraordinary spiritual renewal of God's people in Judea. The people were amazingly stirred by the word of God.

The People Hungered For The Word Of God

The people gathered and asked Ezra to bring the book (scroll) of the Law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel (8:1).

There's a great gathering, at the Watergate. Water in the bible is a symbol for cleansing, and it is also a symbol for the Word. They stood by the Watergate! How fitting since they were about to experience spiritual cleansing and renewal through the word.

Deep within they were yearning for the God of the Scriptures as a deer pants for water (Ps.42:1). It says that they were gathered as "one man". They came in one accord; they were knit in the soul. They stood listening from daybreak until noon to the Law of God.

And the center of attention was not Nehemiah, it was not Ezra, it was not the priests, it was not the Levites, it was not opinions, it was not programs, but it was the Word of the Lord only.

The People Revered The Word Of God

"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. Then Ezra blessed the Lord the great God. And all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" While lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground" (vv. 5-6).

Ezra prays preceding his reading of the Law. He blesses the Lord, the great God. Ezra was deeply aware of the greatness of the occasion, the greatness of God, the greatest of the message, the greatest of the need of the people, and his own great responsibility (David Guzik).

The people stood up, in respectful silence when Ezra opened the scroll. The people were both attentive and reverent when God's Word was read to them. They recognized the Law for what it was, God's inerrant, infallible, and authoritative Word. They respected the Book.

Then we are told they responded with praise and gratitude to God. With lifted hands they said, "*Amen! Amen!!*" Next they fell on their faces and worshipped Him.

The main purpose of reading and preaching Scripture is for our view of God to be expanded, in order that we might respond with worshipful blessings for the Lord.

The Word of God rightly examined and interpreted, centered on God and His greatness, will produce worship of God. Scriptures are to provoke in us singing, praising, thanksgiving and joy.

The People Were Taught The Word Of God

"The Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. They read from the book, from the law of God, translating (margin "explaining) to give the sense so that they understood the reading" (vv. 7-8).

They had built a wooden platform for Ezra and the other men to stand on. A high scaffold is suggested. They stood above the people, but they were equal to the people. What really towered above and always does is the word of God.

We can say this is the first mention of the pulpit in the bible. From this section of Scripture is where we get basic knowledge on how to conduct meetings and services for our God.

Ezra stuck to the book. Ezra enforced the truth. The truth was explained so all who listened would understand its meaning and be able to apply it to their personal lives. We do have to understand it to obey it.

Ezra we can say was one who perfectly fit the category of 2 Tim 2:16 , *be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

Ezra 7:10 reveals the total commitment of the man. *Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.*

Ezra was a well-balanced man of God. He was all-in-all a persuasive prophet. He was pious priest. He was a sharp student of the word. He was a talented teacher of the word. He was an intelligent interpreter of Word. He was a skilled scribe and cautious copyist of the Word. He was also a remarkable reformer and an able administrator.

Ezra serves as a model for those who would teach God's Word. Ezra has been credited as the one who launched the synagogues in Israel

Ezra preached and hearts were stirred. Ezra preached to beat down sin and advance holiness. Ezra wasn't able to change a single heart, but the word can, for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

Here is where the Biblical grounds for expository preaching are found. They "explained "the Law.

They People Responded To The Word Of God

"Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, 'This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.' For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law" (v. 9).

It is spiritually dangerous to study the Word without the goal of obedient response. Knowledge apart from obedience leads to pride (1 Cor. 8:1). We are wasting your time if you read and study the Scriptures but do not intend to obey it.

The apostle James tells that the word should be received with meekness and we are not to deceive ourselves by merely listening to the words, but to be doers of the Word.

Studying the Word of God is means of becoming like Christ in character. If you do not obey the Word of God, you will not grow into spiritual maturity.

The people wept when they heard and understood God's Word (8:9). The Word brought conviction to their hearts and tears to their eyes.

The depth of their conviction of sin brought weeping. They discovered how serious had been their failure in the light of God's Word.

The Word of God reveals sin in our lives. Rom. 3:20, *"by the law is the knowledge of sin"*; as we come to understand what a holy God requires; the law shows us what we should be and what we are not.

This kind of conviction is a good thing, not a bad thing. A spirit of conviction is a very wonderful thing when a heart is broken in recognition of its own complete failure. It is a gift from God.

Spiritual renewal always involves godly sorrow unto repentance (2 Cor. 7:9).

Do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. 'So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, 'Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved '" (vv. 9-11).

The Holy Spirit will never comfort you until you mourn. However, when you mourn over your sins, "the joy of the LORD is your strength."

With mourning comes rejoicing and a fresh sense of forgiveness. It causes us to give all glory to God.

Such joy is based upon forgiveness, and the only explanation for the forgiveness of God is found in the substitutionary atoning death of Jesus for our sins.

The true convictions of the Holy Spirit is intended to bring us to the end of our own strength that we might discover infinite resources in Christ and rejoice in Him (Wil Pounds).

It is the gift of God's grace.

Soli Deo Gloria