

# BRING THE BOOK!

Neh. 8:1-10

Nehemiah chapter 8 shows us four marks of spiritual renewal.

## **They People Hungered for God's Word**

*Now all the people gathered as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel (v1).*

There was a great gathering at the Watergate in Jerusalem. In the Bible, water is a symbol for cleansing, but it is also a symbol for the word. They stood by Watergate! How crazy is that! How fitting since they were about to experience spiritual cleansing and renewal!

We are told they were assembled as "one man." They were a united people, and with great expectation they called out to Ezra, "bring the book!" Wow! Which book? The book of the Law of Moses, God's book.

Today so few, in Christendom cry out, "Bring out the bible, bring out the bible!" Could you imagine, what a worldwide revival there would be if every Christian would have that kind of hunger for the holy scriptures?

Man does not live by bread alone. Nothing else but spiritual bread and spiritual water can satisfy the longings of our souls. A longing for God's word means a longing for God Himself. A longing to be near Him, close to Him, to hear His voice, and to experience His special presence.

The central focus of that sacred assembly was not the place, it was not the preacher, it was not popular opinions, or trendy programs, it was only the Word of the living God. The people's expectation was to hear God's voice and directives.

Can we say, like the Psalmist, "*My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times*" (Psalm 119:20) ?

## **The People Revered God's Word**

*So, Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose.... And 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. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God.*

*Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground (V 4-6).*

They had built a wooden platform for Ezra and the other teachers to stand on. They stood above the people, so that all the people could see them and hear them better. 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 to and for our God.

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

After the opening of the book and Ezra's prayer, all the people that were standing there responded with praise and gratitude to God. With lifted hands they said, "Amen! Amen!" Then, they fall on their faces and worship the LORD. There is an essential, inseparable link between the Word and worship.

The psalmist was always thanking God for the truth of the Word. *"May my lips overflow with praise, for you teach me your decrees"* (Psalm 119 v. 171).

The people recognized the Law for what it was, God's inerrant, infallible, and authoritative word. They held a high view of God's word. We should highly esteem and honor God's precious word. God Himself gives His Word a place of preeminence. Psalm 138:2 says, *"For You have magnified Your word above Your name."* Jesus also gave His Word preeminence when He said, *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words shall not pass away"* (Matt. 24:35).

The reason God's word is not making impact on some people's lives is due to the value they place on it. It is not of greater worth than silver or gold to them. If our Bible reading is diminishing or has stopped altogether, it is because we no longer embrace its preciousness or taste its sweetness, and that is sin for the child of

God. It necessitates confession on the part of the believer and returning to personal study of Scripture.

### **The People Listened to God's Word**

*Then he [Ezra] read from it in the open square .....from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law (v.2-3).*

The people stood up, in respectful silence when Ezra read the book. They stood for hours, there were no seats in the square. The people were very attentive. Having ears that work does not guarantee that we really hear. Jesus often said, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear" (Mark 4:9,23).*

Since the Bible contains the very words God Himself is saying to us, then it behooves us to listen attentively and reverently to what He wants us to know. And from daybreak to noon, they listened, with no breaks in between. No coffee, no snacks!

Can you envision this? A five-to-six-hour sermon. They were not bored, there were no complaints. In our day and age, fifty or more minutes of good, sound preaching, and God's people become edgy, restless and start looking to the clock for deliverance.

*Ezra and the Levites helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So, they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense and helped them to understand the reading (v 6-8).*

Ezra was a well-balanced man. He was an all-in -all persuasive prophet and a pious priest. Ezra serves as model for those who would preach God's Word and intercede for the people. He had the spiritual credentials and qualifications to preach and teach.

For fourteen years Ezra poured out his soul in the study of God's holy word. Ezra was a man of the book. He stuck to the book. He enforced the truth. The truth was taught and explained in a way so that all who listened could understand its meaning and be able to apply it to their personal lives. We do have to understand it to obey.

Chapter 7:10 of the book of Ezra, reveals his love for the word, *“Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.”* In this text we find the biblical grounds for straight forward, expository preaching and teaching. They “explained” the Law. He and the other teachers made it mean what it said. There was no room for “re-interpretation “of God’s revelation, to better fit the times.

Today, sadly, and disgracefully much Scripture is being re-interpreted. Especially passages that are related to women’s issues, passages related to marriage and divorce, passages related to the abominable sin of homosexuality, passages related to creation and hell, are all being re-interpreted for the fear of man and for avoidance of accountability to God.

2 Tim. 2:15 exhorts us, *“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”* Studying God’s Word is not a casual hobby to the true man of God. No, it is his life! He deliberately, diligently devours God’s words daily!

When people think of you, can they say , *“There goes a man of the book, or a woman of the book”?* What an honor that would be, right? *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16 -17).*

Do you want spiritual revival and renewal in your life? Get into the book! Like Israel, if you get away from loving, reading, and obeying God’s word, you will start sinning and miss God’s blessings. It is not social media— Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other similar platforms that will get us blessed. Nor will worldly books, psychology, sociology, philosophy get our lives cleaned up and revived.

These things can absorb our time and entangle us, so that we do not consistently progress in the knowledge of God. There are those who own a bible but have never or seldom opened it. It is so tragic because it does them no good. You can have all the food you like in the kitchen fridge or cupboards, but if you do not care to take the food and eat it, you will starve. Others have become accustomed to eating only junk food and are malnourished.

In the world, multitudes, by choice are altogether spiritually starved, because they do not want God's word . But many Christians are spiritually malnourished, they have not trained themselves to eat the meat of the word. They have been in the faith for years, and still have not learned key, important doctrines of God such as: the doctrines of grace, of election, of justification, of sanctification, of adoption, and the doctrine of end times, to name a few. They have transitioned from being babes in Christ to dwarfs in Christ. How tragic! They have become spiritual midgets instead of giants of the faith.

### **They People Responded to God's Word**

*And Nehemiah, who was the governor, 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 nor weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the Law (v.9).*

Ezra preached and hearts were stirred. Ezra preached to beat down sin and advance holiness. Ezra could not change one single heart, the word can, *for it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*

Ezra spoke straight out, clear, and incisive. There was no attempt at being monotone. Hearers did fall asleep under his preaching. It was not formal, heartless preaching, his soul was in it.

The people wept when they heard and understood God's word. The Word brought conviction to their hearts, tears to their eyes, and shame to their faces. They felt the power of the word, like a two-edged sword, piercing their soul and spirit, judging the thoughts and intents of their hearts.

The Word is designed to reveal sin in our lives, this why Romans 3:20 states, *'by the Law is the knowledge of sin.'* Suddenly the people realized how radically depraved they were. They were freshly awaked to the holiness of God and their sinfulness.

But, by God's amazing grace, they had been brought to the right place – the low place. In Isaiah 66:2, the LORD stated *"But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.*

Spiritual renewal always involves godly sorrow unto repentance. They responded positively to the Word. It is spiritually dangerous to listen or study God's Word without the goal of obedient response. Bible knowledge apart from obedience leads to spiritual pride. James tells us that God's Word should be received with meekness, and we are not to deceive ourselves by merely listening to the words and not be doers of the Word.

The people were then told not to weep and grieve any longer, but to be joyful. Rejoicing always follows grieving. Indeed, the joy of the Lord is our strength, after a fresh sense of forgiveness. The Word had done its marvelous work. It revived them. *The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes (Psalm 19:7-9).*

Like Israel, for renewal and revival, we should hunger for God's word, revere God's word, heed God's word and respond to it. Only the Book of Books can reorient us to the truth that we are exceedingly small, but God is immensely GREAT!

The bible is not the book of week; it is not the book of the month; nor is it the book of the year; it is the book of the ages!

*CH Spurgeon: Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the book widens and deepens with years.*

*George Mueller: The less we read the Word of God, the less we desire to read it, and the less we pray, the less we desire to pray.*

God our father, increase our appetite for your word and turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve our lives according to your word.