

## Preaching – Nehemiah 8:1-12

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. *Isaiah 66:1-2*

Thus says the LORD: “Heaven *is* My throne, and earth *is* My footstool. Where *is* the house that you will build Me? And where *is* the place of My rest? For all those *things* My hand has made, and all those *things* exist,” says the LORD. “But on this *one* will I look: On *him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.*”

1. The prophet Isaiah spoke this to his generation;
2. Religious Jews who thought **God was impressed** by the Temple in Jerusalem.
3. He gives them a much needed word of correction –
  - a. Heaven is His throne & Earth is where He rests His feet!
  - b. So where’s the building that could contain Him?
5. Even today, religious people get worked up about buildings & facilities.
  - a. If you attend a Christian convention or Pastor’s conference,
  - b. Eventually you’ll hear conversations turn to “How big is your place?”
6. God says **He’s** not impressed with that kind of thing.
7. What He’s looking for are individuals who are humble, & who **tremble** at His Word.

#### B. *Dynamite*

1. In my early college years, I was studying to be a geologist.
2. We took several field trips that included lots of trips into old mines, mostly copper mines.
3. There are hundreds of them all over CA & AZ.
4. Several of them looked like the owner had just walked away one day.
  - a. The ore played out, but instead of dismantling & moving the equipment, they left it.
  - b. We found old shovels, picks, bottles, ore carts, empty crates & every so often something more exciting.
  - c. For instance, I found this old box in a mine not far from the Red Rover Mine just off HWY 5, going up the Grapevine.
  - d. When I opened it, I was shocked to see this → TNT.
  - e. Because it’s so old, it’s highly unstable. Have to be **very** careful with it because any sudden jolt could set it off.
5. I bring it today to illustrate what this word “tremble” means. [NOW!]
6. Tremble = to shake; distress so strong it causes a physical reaction.
7. Look at this ‘dynamite’ – now look at your Bible. That book in your lap is ‘spiritual’ dynamite.
8. If we’d **treat** it with the kind **care, handle** it with the same **seriousness** we would old dynamite – we’d be the kind of people God is looking for.
9. It’s not how we come **to this building** that impresses God, it’s how we come to **THIS** [Bible].

#### C. *The Word*

1. The hallmark of the CC movement is our devotion to the **teaching &**

*preaching* of the Bible.

2. We're dedicated to this because we believe in the power of the Word of God.
3. Expository teaching the basis of all we do.
4. Since we have a lot of people who've begun attending over the last year, I thought it would be good for us to share **WHY** the Bible is so important & why we study it the way we do.
5. Our study in Nehemiah affords us the perfect time to do that because ch. 8 is a great picture of *expository* teaching.

## II. TEXT

### A. Vs. 1-2

**<sup>1</sup> Now all the people gathered together 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. <sup>2</sup> So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding [literally – were old enough to understand] on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month.**

1. The book of Nehemiah can be divided into 2 parts:
  - a. Ch 1-6 tell the story of *rebuilding Jerusalem's walls*.
  - b. Chs 7-13 are the story of *rebuilding Jerusalem's people*.
2. Once the walls & gates were restored, the governor Nehemiah moved to insure they'd be guarded.
  - a. The rebellion & sin of the people against God years earlier that had led to the city's destruction by the Babylonians.
  - b. Nehemiah wanted to ensure it didn't happen again.
  - c. So he followed up the *physical* work of renewal with a *spiritual* renewal.
3. While limestone blocks repaired the walls; what was need to restore the people was God's Word.
4. So at Nehemiah's urging, the people called for a public reading of the Scriptures.
  - a. The priest & scribe Ezra was respected as a great teacher
  - b. So they invited him to share God's Word when they gathered to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles – one of their highest religious holidays.
5. With the people gathered in a large open square, Ezra brought out the Book of the Law.
  - a. More than likely *what* he read was the Book of Deut., the 5<sup>th</sup> & last of the Books of Moses.
  - b. Deut. recounts Israel's history & summarized the Law of God.

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6. There's an insight for us to glean here in v. 2 where it says that those who gathered were those *who could understand*. Little children weren't part of this group.
  - a. Now, best not to develop a doctrine from this, but it does suggest a *practical* insight.
7. We encourage parents to put their children in age appropriate classes instead of

bringing them in here where they'll be bored out of their minds.

- a. If parents want to keep with them their youngsters who are able to understand what we're doing – great.
  - b. But parents, for the sake of your children, don't make them sit with you if this is over their heads.
  - c. Growing up in Seattle, our church had Sunday School for different ages first, then *everyone* went to church except for the nursery.
  - d. I was bored out of my MIND! And fidgeted like a Chihuahua that just drank a Red Bull.
  - e. My mother & Aunt were ingenious at keeping me quiet.
  - f. But a few years later when I could have understood what that old geezer up there was saying – I hated church! Because for years it had been such a colossal BORE!
8. There's wisdom in what we see here – those who gathered to hear Ezra preach *were old enough to understand*.

### **B. Vs. 3-6**

**<sup>3</sup> Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate 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. <sup>4</sup> So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood -**

1. Then he lists 6 of the major leaders of the people,  
**Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah;**  
**and at his left hand**
  2. 7 more leaders are named.  
**Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.**
  3. They surrounded Ezra to let the people know they *endorsed* this whole thing.
  4. Though Nehemiah isn't named yet, the platform Ezra stood on was evidence he staged this whole thing.
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5. As it says in v. 3, it took *several hours* for Ezra to read through & explain Deuteronomy.

**<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> 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.**

6. They began with a time of worship, lifting up their hands, hearts, & voices to God.
7. They knew a miracle had taken place in the completion of Jerusalem's wall in an astounding 52 days.
8. They realized God was once again in their midst after their long exile.

9. The awareness that it was the Word of God that made them *different* was beginning to sink in.
10. That they were about to be renewed in it stoked an expectancy that poured forth in praise & worship.

### C. Vs. 7-8

**<sup>7</sup> Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. <sup>8</sup> So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading.**

1. This is why the reading thru Deuteronomy took several hours.
2. Ezra didn't *just* read. Every so often he'd stop to explain.
3. Then he'd take a break while the people turned to a nearby teacher to ask questions & gain further insight.
4. Men skilled in the Scriptures as well as a bunch of priests-assistants were scattered thru the crowd, ready to help them understand God's Word & how it applied to them.

### D. Expository Teaching & Preaching

1. What we see here is a perfect example of what's called *expository teaching*.
2. In Expository teaching, the text itself determines what's said.
  - a. The passage sets the teacher's agenda.
  - b. This is different from a lot of teaching & preaching today that is little more than a nice religious talk.
  - c. Sermonettes for Christianettes.
  - d. All too common in pulpits today one hears a discourse on the pastor's latest pet theory or social concern.
  - e. He's convinced Hollywood is the cause of most of the problems in the world, so no matter what passage he brings, it becomes little more than a launching pad to talk about Hollywood.
  - f. Alistair Begg tells the story of one minister who was Baptist with a big "B".
    - 1) He was preaching on the first chapters of Genesis & had 4 points in his sermon
    - 2) Adam's Creation – Adam's Commendation – Adam's Condemnation – And Finally, A Few Words on Baptism.
3. In Expository teaching & preaching, the text sets the agenda.
  - a. It's drawing out of the text with the aim of understanding what it says & how it speaks to us today.
  - b. It *exposes* the text to the hearer, by exposing the hearer to the text.
4. Let me expand on that –
  - a. Look at what they did here: The people gathered & began by focusing on God in worship.
  - b. Then Ezra read to them the very Word's of God through Moses.
  - c. He paused every so often to make sure the people were "getting it."

- d. Both he & the other teachers wanted to make sure they “gave the sense” of the text.
- e. A thousand years had passed since Moses first wrote Deuteronomy.
  - 1) Does a thousand years do something to a language?
  - 2) Try reading a 1611 *King James Bible* & get back to me; that’s just 400 years!
  - 3) Tried reading the original *Beowulf* recently?
  - 4) The English of a thousand years ago doesn’t look anything like the English to today.
- f. So Ezra paused often to comment on the text & give the other teachers an opportunity to make sure everyone was getting it.
5. Their goal was that the people would understand.
6. So they brought the text to them by *first reading, then explaining* it.
7. But that wasn’t their *ultimate* goal.
  - a. There was one final step the reading & explaining was aimed at →
  - b. Application!
8. But they knew that final step of application was something *only* the Holy Spirit could do.
9. They knew that as it says in Hebrews 4:12 –
 

**The word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**

  - a. They agreed with David who in Psalm 119:105 says –
 

**Your word *is* a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.**
  - b. Or Psalm 119:130 –
 

**The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple.**
  - c. They shared the conviction of the prophet Jeremiah who in 23:29 said –
 

**“*Is not My word like a fire?*” says the LORD, “*And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?*”**
10. Ezra & Nehemiah knew if they could just expose the Word of God to the people, the Holy Spirit would expose the people to the Word of God – and that’s when things would begin to happen.
11. Look now at what *did* happen . . .

#### **E. Vs. 9-12**

**<sup>9</sup> 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.**

1. They were weeping because as Ezra read, he got to that portion of the Deut. where God warned what would happen if they forsook Him; all the devastation & ruin that would follow.
2. Though the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt, everywhere they looked they could still see the ruin that followed their ancestors’ failure.
3. The poverty & hardships they now faced on a daily basis were seen in the

- proper light.
- a. Their distress wasn't a mistake or the result of political & economic factors beyond their control.
  - b. It was the judgment of God for generations of sin & rebellion.
4. Their eyes are now open to it & they weep huge tears of repentance.
  5. The Spirit of God used the Word of God in the people of God to effect the heart they need so blessing could once again be poured on them.
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6. That's why Ezra & Nehemiah tell the people to **stop** weeping.
  7. If they **hadn't** wept, Ezra & Nehemiah would have told them that's what they **ought** to have done.
  8. But their tears are evidence of genuine repentance.
  9. What they need to know **now** is that God's heart is to restore & bestow His blessing & renewal **immediately** upon the turning of their hearts back to Him.
  10. 1 John 1:9 says that When we confess our sins, God is faithful & just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
    - a. There's no **time** clause in that.
    - b. We don't need to confess & repent for 2 hours, days, weeks or months before we've proven we're sincere.
    - c. God sees the heart & at the **instant** of our brokenness, He's there to forgive & restore.
  11. This is one of the great truths in the story of the Prodigal son.
    - a. While he's still a great way off – but **intent on returning home** with a contrite & humble heart,
    - b. The father who's been searching the distance sees his son & runs down the road to embrace him.
  12. When Ezra & Nehemiah see that the Spirit has done His work of **conviction** & the people are broken, they share God's heart by calling the people to rejoice now in their renewal to God.
- 10 Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.*"**
13. That's something I'd love to launch on but we don't have time this morning. We'll do it Wednesday.

**11 So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, [cease your weeping] for the day is holy; do not be grieved." 12 And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.**

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. *Renewal*

1. Without exception, **every** revival & renewal among the people of God has been marked by the faithful preaching & teaching of the Scriptures.
2. Conversely, every period of spiritual declension, when either Israel or the church has lost ground has been marked by a lack of expository teaching &

- preaching.
3. Today, many churches are so eager to draw a crowd that they're looking to the latest marketing techniques or innovative media technologies as the means of doing ministry.
  4. They take their cues more from the world than the Word.
  5. But faith does not come through slick presentations or therapeutic religious talks.
    - a. Faith comes by **hearing God's Word.**
    - b. At Mt. Sinai when God revealed Himself to all of Israel – what they encountered was a voice – not a vision!
    - c. Why? Because God wants us to realize it's **His Word** that holds what we need to become all He wants us to be.

**B. The Word**

1. How great is the name of God? → Great to the gozillionth power!
  2. Yet in Psalm 138:2 God says He magnifies His Word above **all** His name.
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4. This is why we spend so much time studying the Bible here at CC.
  5. This is why our motto is Learning & Living God's Word.
  6. I want you to be the best fed & best led people in this County.
  7. I have a charge to keep as a pastor – To Lead, Feed, & Protect God's Flock.
  8. The best way I can meet my charge is to faithfully teach & preach God's Word.