

Rejoicing In God's Word

Text : **Nehemiah 8: 1-12 ; Ezra 7: 10**

INTRODUCTION :

A. We have a wonderful text this morning.

1. The story of the restoration of Israel is one which gives great hope to us all.
2. Chapters 1 thru 6 tell of the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.
 - a. It chronicles the struggles of Nehemiah.
 - b. In them we see God forming him into a great leader.
3. Chapter 7 reveals the character traits God wants in those who follow Him.
4. Chapter 8 chronicles the rebuilding of God's people.

B. As we study Ezra's public bible study with Israel , we will observe that it teaches us how to study privately.

1. First we will observe four essentials to personal bible study.
2. Then we will look at four ways we receive spiritual renewal via these four essentials.

I. Four essentials for successful, fruitful bible study.

A. First essential : One must set aside a regular time for reading the bible.

1. **Vs. 3-** He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.
 - a. Literally : *"From first light until midday"*
 - b. They attentively stood for hours in the sun to hear the will of God.
2. It takes time and attentive study to learn the will of God.
 - a. **ILL-** A young student preacher heard the great expositor, G. Campbell Morgan speak. He was so impressed he could not help but ask, *"How is it that you are able to achieve such a powerful grasp of the scripture texts you are discussing."* Morgan responded, *"If I told you, you wouldn't do it."* In response the student chided, *"Try me!"* Morgan then told him, *"Before I begin to study a book, I read it 50 times."*
 - b. If we really want to know what God's will is for us, we must invest time in study.
3. Successful bible study requires discipline. (*A characteristic of all success*)
 - a. Make an appointment with God to seek His will at a certain time every day.
 - b. Don't let God down. *Be there for Him at the appointed time.*

4. Some object that they don't need a set time for study. (*Objectors often need it most.*)
 - a. I'm too busy to do it the same time every day; I do it when it is convenient.
 - b. DO YOU REALLY ? Are there not days you miss ?
 - c. Are there not times when you miss more than one day ? (*Discipline focuses Priority*)
 5. Relationship experts stress the importance of couples having specific time set aside.
 - a. They teach couples to have a "Date Night" each week. (e.g. *Pres. spend 100K for*)
 - b. More important to have a **set time** for each other **every day**. (*even 5 minutes*)
- * **Could there possible be any relationship more important than that with God.**

B. Second essential : One must respect the bible as the very words of God.

1. **Vs. 5-** 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.
 2. As a body, the church appears to have lost some respect for the word of God.
 - a. We stand when we speak to God in prayer.
 - b. We just set when He speaks to us from His word.
 3. Inspiration means : "*God Breathed*"
 - a. When God breathed into dirt, **He** gave man life.
 - b. When God "inspired" the scriptures, He breathed His life into each word.
- * **We know God gave the very words because the Apostle Paul was able to make a theological argument based to a word being singular. (Gal. 3:16)**
4. We have so many bibles in our homes we take the scriptures for granted.
 - a. The bible has become just another book. (*We don't know how many copies we own.*)
 - b. Consequently, when we read it, we don't think in terms of God speaking to us.
 5. Just because we have bibles in abundance, doesn't mean we have God's word in abundance. **Unread bibles are of no benefit.**

C. Third essential : One must respond attentively to the word of God.

1. **Vs. 3-** He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.
2. Any time we hear the word of God we should pay close attention.
 - a. Our attitude should be : "*What word does God have for me ?*"
 - b. Any encounter with the word is an opportunity. (**Bible class, sermon, reading**)
 - c. We listen attentively so as to discover God's will for our lives.

3. Even freshman communication classes teach us listening is an active skill.
 - a. Listening is requires a conscious effort, **not** just being in the room.
 - b. Active listening involves a seeking to understand.
4. Reading is a form of listening.
 - a. One must read attentively, **not** just run his eyes over the words.
 - b. We must stop and ask ourselves, “*Do I understand the paragraph I just read ?*”
 - c. If you think you understand it, repeat it back to yourself in your own words.
5. **Vs. 8- They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.**

- a. Their language had changed from the time the book was written.
- b. Our language changes from generation to generation **SO** we need translations.

Definition : *Understanding involves the ability to relate it to your personal circumstances.*

- c. Sometimes we need help coming to full understanding. (**Acts 8: 30 -cf- II Pet. 3:16**)

D. Fourth essential : One must surrender his will to the word of God.

1. **Vs. 6- 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.**
2. Their bowing was an act of surrendering to God.
 - a. When we learn that God wants us to do something, we have a decision : **surrender or rebel.**
 - b. Bible study is a waste of time if we are not willing to obey what God tells us.
3. Bible study is not a theoretical exercise.
 - a. We don't gather knowledge and store it.
 - b. We don't study so we will have good arguments in a religious discussion.
4. Bible study is a search for God's will in your life.
 - a. **Eph. 7-8, 10 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.**
 - b. Bible study is how one finds God's will for his live.
 - c. Thus, it is a waste of time if we are not willing to surrender to God and apply it.

God gave us the bible as a guide to assist us in surrendering our hearts And our wills totally to Him.

II. Bible study will produce spiritual renewal in our hearts in four ways.

A. Spiritual Renewal comes from studying the word of God. (*Not just casual reading*)

1. We commend those who kept their commitment to read the whole bible this year.
 - a. We pray it was not done just for an accomplishment. (**Look God I ...**)
 - b. It guided you in the paths of righteousness and enlightened your understanding.
 - c. Reading is the first step on the path the study.

(**ILL- Luther equated bible study to picking apples. Start with lowest branches.**)
2. As in Israel, there's a place for the reading of scripture in the assembly of the saints.
 - a. **I Tim. 4:13- Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.**
 - b. We do this every week in connection with the lesson, but some congregations read through the bible publicly.
3. Those in Jerusalem stood for hours to listen because they were hungry for God.
 - a. The word of God is a gift from God. (**The key to unlock unimaginable treasure.**)
 - b. One reads in direct proportion to his desire for the will of God.
4. Before the printing press, the word of God was scarce. (**NOW it is accessible to all.**)
5. Nine (9) times in the 19th Psalm we are told of the ability of the word to revive us.
 - a. The word is necessary food to keep your soul healthy.
 - b. **I urge each of you to have a daily reading schedule.**

B. Spiritual Renewal comes from hearing God's word.

1. We have observed in verses **3, 5, & 6** that they listened attentively.
 - a. God wants no less attention than your spouse or children want.
When my daughter was young, she crawled up in my lap while I was busy studying for a lesson and began describing something she wanted me to get for her. When she saw my eye drift toward my notes, she grabbed my chin and said, Papa, I want your eyes.
 - b. When God is speaking to us through His word He wants our eyes.
2. Jesus admonished us to be careful how we hear His teachings.
Luke 8:18- So take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him.
3. When listening to the word proclaimed, seek the voice of God, not of the proclaimer.
ILL- If a rich uncle dies and you go to the reading of the will, to what do you give your attention, to the skill of the reader or do you listen for what you might possibly receive.

C. Spiritual Renewal comes from teaching the word of God.

1. Not every Christians is a preacher, but every Christian has a congregation.
 - a. You teach every day of your life.
 - b. What do your words communicate ? (**That which you value shines through.**)
2. There are times when we all need someone to explain things to us.
 - a. **Vs. 7-8** Also *thirteen* Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. **8** They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.
 - b. No one understands all of the scriptures, but we teach what we **do** understand.
Mark Twain is quoted as having said, “It’s not the parts of the bible that I don’t understand that scare me; but the parts that I do understand.”
 - c. **We read to learn, then to understand, then to apply and ultimately to share.**
3. The Christian puts the standard of God above that of man. (**reject Political correctness**)
 - a. A famous bible expositor and teacher of old once said,
“God’s word is written so that it may reform our lives.” This is still true.
 - b. We must allow the word of God to teach us then we will teach others.
“We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” Acts 4:20
4. Martin Luther once wrote, *“The job of the bible teacher is to communicate the truth clearly and simply.”*

Such communication flows naturally when one has incorporated the word into his life. Thus :

D. Spiritual Renewal comes from responding to the word of God.

1. Once one has read the word, heard the word explained, and shared the word, his life will respond to the word.
2. It is spiritually dangerous to read the word of God without the goal of being personally obedient to it.
 - a. Knowledge apart from obedience leads to pride.
 - b. **I Cor. 8: 1- Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.**
 - c. Love is taking what God has taught us and putting it into practice.
3. Once we have filled ourselves with the word, if we don’t give it to others, we become prideful people. (**often judgmental**)
4. Our spiritual renewal is a fruit of our response to the word.

CONCLUSION :

A. I leave you with a short article written in 1962 by a man named Naismith :

***Are You A Butterfly, A Botanist Or A Bee ?
... When It Comes To God's Word.***

*As I looked out into the garden one day, I saw three things. First, I saw a **butterfly**. The butterfly was beautiful, and it would alight on a flower and then it would flutter to another flower and then to another, and only for a second or two it would sit and it would move on. It would touch as many lovely blossoms as it could, but derived absolutely no benefit from it. Then I watched a little longer out my window and there came a **botanist**. And the botanist had a big notebook under his arm and a great big magnifying glass. The botanist would lean over a certain flower and he would look for a long time and then he would write notes in his notebook. He was there for hours writing notes, closed them, stuck them under his arm, tucked his magnifying glass in his pocket and walked away. The third thing I noticed was a **bee**, just a little bee. But the bee would light on a flower and it would sink down deep into the flower and it would extract all the nectar and pollen that it could carry. It went in empty every time and came out full. (A. Naismith, 1200 Notes, Quotes and Anecdotes [Chicago: Moody, 1962], p. 15.)*

B. And that is the very question I leave with you this day.

1. What is your relationship to the word of God ?
2. What will your relationship with the word be during this coming year ?

Let us all be like Ezra

Ezra 7:10 - For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord
and to practice it, and
to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

INVITATION :

Much of this sermon was taken from notes on sermons I have heard other preach in the past.
Such is most common for me.

Scripture Texts For Reading : (NASV)

Ezra 7:10 - For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord
and to practice it, and
to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Nehemiah 8: 1-12

1 And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. **2** Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who *could* listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. **3** He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law. **4** Ezra the scribe stood at a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood *¹ *six men* on his right hand; and *² *seven men* on his left hand. **5** 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. **6** 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. **7** Also *³ *thirteen* Levites, explained the law to the people while the people *remained* in their place. **8** They read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.

9 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. **10** Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." **11** So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." **12** All the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions and to celebrate a great festival, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.

Ezra 7:10 - For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the Lord
and to practice it, and
to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

*¹ Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah

*² Pedaiiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah *and* Meshullam

*³ Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah,