

The Centrality of God's Word to God's People

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Nehemiah 8-9
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Sermon Theme: God is at work restoring His people to Himself. And what is the central focus of God bringing people to Himself? It's His Word. God's Word is the way He speaks to us and makes His ways known to us. God's Word reveals His character, informs us of truth and corrects us and trains us. It is all that we need for life and godliness. When Israel gathers, the focus is on the Word. I'd like to draw your attention therefore to the way they responded to the Word and draw some applications for us today.

I. They listened attentively

And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. -- Nehemiah 8:3

- They listened attentively because they had expectation to hear from God! They believed that God speaks through His Word, which He does! And because He speaks through His Word, they listened with attention. They didn't want to miss what God had for them!
- Teaching and preaching have its very clear role in the gathered assembly of God's people. In fact, it's the primary role. We come together on Sunday mornings for many things, as God declares in the Word.
- We come to fellowship with one another, encourage one another and sing praises to the Lord. Those and many other reasons are why we come, as God intended. But the primary reason we come is to hear God's Word.

II. They responded reverently

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. -- Nehemiah 8:5-6

- They stood because what was being read was worthy of honor. Ezra was reading the very words of God.
- And they rose in honor of the eternal words of God being read.
- When Ezra blessed the Lord, they all said "Amen, Amen (verse 6)." What does it mean to say Amen, but "I agree!" That is good to do!
- They lifted their hands in worship to the Lord (verse 6). They were seeking to exalt the Lord by lifting their hands, drawing attention not to themselves, but drawing attention to the fact that God is in our midst. He is worthy of our praise. We lift our hands in worship to Him!
- Encouragement towards expressiveness in worship.
- They also responded to the reading of the Word with tears (verse 9).

III. They went away rejoicing

Then he said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.” And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them. -- Nehemiah 8:10–12

Conclusion

- God’s Word is the way He speaks to and grows His people. It is central to the life of the Christian. That’s why the bulk of our time each Sunday is focused on hearing His Word proclaimed. That’s why the focus of our care groups is applying the Word that we’ve heard -- because His Word brings life and joy.
- In the presence of God is the fullness of joy! God changes people through His Word!
- Let us come to the Word with *expectation* knowing that God wants to meet with us.
- Let us come to the Word with *anticipation* believing that God will speak to us
- Let us come to the Word with *hunger* knowing that nothing satisfies like the Word.

Questions for Discussion/Application:

- Take time as a group to summarize the basic narrative events of Nehemiah 7-8. What happens here?
- Read Nehemiah 8:3. What does it look like practically for us to hear the Word of God preached, and proclaimed *attentively*? How can we grow in our attentiveness to God's Word? How can we prepare ourselves prior to the Sunday service to effectively to receive maximum benefit from the preaching event on Sunday?
- Read Nehemiah 8:6. Jeremy pointed out that the people were very expressive in their response to God's Word (lifting hands, bowing down etc...). What can we learn and glean from their example? How do you feel and what do you think about the whole idea of expressiveness in worship? What hindrances/obstacles might keep us from being more expressive in worship? How do you want to grow in this area?
- Read Nehemiah 8:10-12. Why was it appropriate for the people to go on their way rejoicing? How can we cultivate in our own hearts and in our families and mindset of gratitude and rejoicing as a result of hearing the word of God proclaimed?
- When God's people respond to the preaching of His Word rightly, how does that foster effective corporate evangelistic witness to the world around us?
- Consider taking time to pray, thanking God for the privilege we have to gather around God's Word preached every week. Ask God as well to help us to grow in our attentiveness to, reverence for, and joy in the Word of God preached and proclaimed.