

Session 2

October 23, 2022

HEAR GOD'S WORD

Nehemiah 8:1-3, 7-12

Most of us are familiar with the Babylonian Captivity that sent the idolatrous Jews into exile from 586-516 BC. You may recall that Ezra the scribe led one of the three return trips of exiles back to Jerusalem. His main concern was rebuilding the temple. The book of Nehemiah picks up where Ezra leaves off, and traces the effort to rebuild Jerusalem's dilapidated walls, a feat completed in an astounding 52 days (Neh. 6:15).

But the repairs to neither the city of God nor the temple of God were enough to restore the people of God. Their faith—like ours—was not founded on structures or buildings, but on the Scriptures. In this week's lesson, we see four responses to God's word drawn from the text.

Hear the word (vv. 1-3). Indeed, James said that we are to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22). But *doing* the word is predicated on the act of *hearing* the word! Paul chimed in: “Faith comes by *hearing*, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). John wrote in Revelation 1, “Blessed is he who reads and those who *hear* the words” of the prophetic book he penned. Once the walls of Jerusalem were completed, the word of God was read to the people. Several interesting observations can be made from Nehemiah's account. First, *all the people* gathered in a group (v. 1). This was not personal devotion time; this was corporate worship time. Second, the *people* asked that the word of God be read (v. 1). Third, according to verse 2, *men, women, and children* were included in this Bible time (there was no dismissing the kids for Children's Church!) Fourth, the reading lasted for *at least six hours*, with various speakers and expositions mixed in (v. 3). Finally, this reading of God's word was received with *rapt attention* (v. 3). For reflection: *How much of this worship service sounds like what your church does? Suppose your pastor tried such a thing. What do you think would happen?*

Honor the word (vv. 4-6). The ascent of Ezra to the platform (literally *tower*) presented quite a spectacle. Seven men lined up on each side of him. Notice Ezra's handling of God's book. He took it to the pulpit with him, and he opened it in full view of the people. Such careful honor of God's word was rewarded with like honor by God's people. As Ezra praised the Lord, so the people praised Him, too, by standing high, lifting up their hands, bowing to their knees, and putting their faces to the ground. For reflection: *How do we honor God's word in our churches? Do we sometimes do things that might dishonor the Bible? How do you think we should we treat our copies of the Scriptures?*

Understand the word (vv. 7-8). Good teachers are a blessing from God! The Hebrew of the original laws was likely translated into the Chaldean language of the people. But just as importantly, the Scriptures were *expounded* upon, thus giving them a clear meaning, “so that the people could understand what was read” (v. 8). For reflection: *Notice how important proper understanding is when learning God's word. Remember...error can (and will) replicate just as fast as truth!*

Respond to the word (vv. 9-12). Upon hearing the Law, the people were no doubt pricked in their hearts because of their failures (see Acts 2:37). The temptation at this point might be to

crush the crowd with conviction! But rather, the leaders present declared a great feast and celebration. While it was true that God's word brought conviction of their sin, it is also true that God's word brought hope in the midst of their sin. Verse 12 is telling: "Then all the people began to eat and drink, send portions, and have a great celebration." Why? "*Because they had understood the words that were explained to them.*" For reflection: *Note how God's word covers both mankind's sin and God's solution to it. Take a moment and thank Him for His precious, inerrant, infallible, fully inspired revelation to us!*