



“Spiritual Renewal”

Part 2

Nehemiah 8

Idea: Spiritual renewal and vitality come through God’s Word, which forms the believer.

Intro: God has spoken. From the opening page of creation to the concluding promise of Christ’s return, the Bible and as such the Christian faith conclude that God has indeed spoken and continues to speak. The Bible in our hands is an inspired book. Many writers contributed to its composition over a span of some 1,500 years, but it only has one author...God.

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. – 2 Timothy 3:16-17

...no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. – 2 Peter 1:20b-21

Through this inspired Word, God has revealed the truth. We could not have come up with this on our own. The nature of man leads him to suppress the truth (Rom 1:18) that “*in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*” (Gen 1:1). We could not have fitted together the prophecies or designed something so wondrous as grace. It takes revelation. The Bible is God’s revelation to us.

Christianity and Judaism are based on revelation: God meets Moses and bestows the law. God comes down in the Person of Christ and reveals salvation and hope.

Revelation is the unveiling of that which is hidden. It is God pulling aside the curtain, sweeping away the clutter, opening the door of understanding and truth. His clearest revelations are in creation, Scripture, and Christ.

The result of inspiration and revelation is that the Bible has authority for all of life. It is the only rule of faith and practice. It is God’s inspired, revealed, and authoritative word for us. Unfortunately, many people, while finding it an interesting book, will not accept its authority. Jesus was thoroughly committed to the authority of Scripture. He obeyed it in His every move, and He is our example. Therefore, as followers of Christ we believe, the veracity of God’s Word is the center around which life arranges itself.

Inquiry: As we have seen so far in the first seven chapters of Nehemiah, his ambition was not simply to reconstruct the city’s defenses but to revitalize a spiritual community. He wasn’t seeking to resurrect a religious community. He desired to see his countrymen experience a spiritual renewal in their lives. Nehemiah quickly discovered that reforming a community is a more exacting task than restoring its walls. He understood that the only way for them to experience a spiritual renewal was for them to return to God’s Word. Spiritual renewal and vitality come through God’s Word, which forms the believer.

As soon as the building work came to an end, an unusual event took place, which was to prove dramatically influential in the spiritual life of God's people. The work was finished during the late summer month of Elul (6:15), and the next month, Tishri, marked the beginning of the year. The first day of the seventh month was a public holiday known as the Feast of Trumpets. So, only a few days after the completion of the wall, hundreds of men, women, and children gathered in Jerusalem for a new year celebration in which God's written Word played a central part. An outdoor public meeting was devoted entirely to hearing the reading and interpretation of Scripture.

Ezra and Nehemiah's work to reestablish faithfulness and holiness among the Jews cultivated a genuine desire for the Word of God that opened the door for spiritual renewal. Let's examine this desire, which led to renewal. Last Sunday we learned that experiencing spiritual renewal first involves valuing God's Word. Secondly, their desire for renewal led to:

II. Applying God's Word (8:9-12)

Read Nehemiah 8:9-12.

The people's response to the interpretation and application of Scripture at this huge outdoor meeting was evident and immediate. Whenever God's Word is relevantly applied, the implications are far reaching. We find three implications of applying God's Word in this passage.

A. Sin is exposed in you. (vs. 9)

The first sign that God's Word was reaching the hearts and informing the minds of these people was that they began to grieve about their failures. This unique book had touched their consciences, heightening their awareness of ways in which they had disobeyed, dishonored, and ignored God.

The seventeenth-century preacher, William Bridge, used a biblical illustration popular among the Reformers and Puritans when he described the Bible as a “looking glass.” Using a mirror, we see three things: the material glass, the reflection of our own image, and also that of the things around us in the room. As we see the glass itself, we are reminded that Scripture is God’s testimony to His own nature. “There is God seen especially, and Christ seen,” says Bridge, but “there also you see yourself and your own dirty face; there also you see the creatures that are in the room with you, and their emptiness.”

Without the mirror we would have no vision of ourselves. The people wept because what they heard in the reading of Scripture condemned their lifestyle. The Word of God brought them face to face with the majesty and justice of Holy God. The bright light of His holiness revealed their impurity, His faithfulness challenged their disloyalty, and His compassion condemned their selfishness. Like Isaiah, they saw themselves as lost and undone before the Lord of Hosts (Is 6:5).

The exposing of sin may seem harsh and unkind. No one wants his or her failures and shame brought to the surface. Instead, we want to keep them hidden and tucked away in our closets. God’s Word, however, exposes them. His purpose is not to be mean or vindictive toward our sin and us. Instead, it is to reveal our rebellion and the danger sin brings upon our lives. He reveals our sin so that we will consciously see the heinousness of it and choose to walk away. He reveals our sin so that we can receive mercy and forgiveness.

Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. – Proverbs 28:13

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. – 1 John 1:9

The Jews felt the weight of their sin. It caused them to mourn and weep. Scripture condemns our sin, but it also proclaims the remedy. The Levites instructed the people to not mourn or weep. Within ten days this new year holiday would be followed by the Day of Atonement. On that day all of their sins would be fully, immediately, and irrevocably pardoned.

Today, as you value the Word of God and seek to apply it to your life, it will expose your sin. God's purpose in this is to make you holy. Allow it to search your heart and expose everything that is not of God (Heb 4:12); because only here can you experience forgiveness and cleansing.

There is a second implication of applying God's Word found in this passage.

B. Needs are revealed in others. (vs. 10)

Scripture not only makes us aware of our own failures; it also opens our eyes to the needs of others. The people were not to indulge in groveling introspection when there was a world out there needing the assurance of forgiveness and love. It was a day of rejoicing, a time to celebrate God's mercy to them and His compassion for all. The holiday was to be marked by festival meals to which families and communities should invite their neighbors, and the best of food must be sent to

those people who lacked the basic necessities of life. Their understanding of the Law motivated their concern for the poor, the widow, the fatherless, the orphan, the alien, and even the one who had nothing prepared (Deut 14; 15; 24; 26).

Their salvation was not to be a *cul de sac* of personal experience. The grace and benevolence of God was not something they were to keep to themselves. No, it was meant to be an open road to loving service in a world where God wanted them to be His hands and feet.

Christian, the Lord never intended for your salvation to be a *cul de sac* of personal experience either. He has redeemed you and placed you where you are so that your life might be a conduit whereby His life can flow to those who are still lost in sin, hurting, and struggling. If your eyes are never opened to the needs of others when you read the Bible, there is something seriously wrong in your heart. God's Word moves us to service.

There is a third implication of applying God's Word found in this passage.

C. Resources are given by God. (vs. 10-11)

The Word of God assured the Jews of God's help through three immense resources: peace, joy, and strength.

The people were urged to calm their distressed minds (vs. 11). *So the Levites calmed all the people, saying "Be quiet..."* Other translations say, "Be still." However great their sins, the people could be completely forgiven and be at peace in their hearts.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. – Romans 5:1

While in our sin, we were at war with God, but now in Christ our sins have been forgiven. We have peace with God. Therefore, we have peace in our hearts about all matters of life, knowing that God is on our side and working on our behalf.

The peace of God brings joy to our lives. Joy is not found in ideal circumstances, material prosperity, or social popularity. Joy is found exclusively in the Lord. Just like these Jews, Paul understood this truth. His letter to the Philippians reveals how he rejoiced in the Lord and what the Lord was doing through his life and the church despite his circumstances. Christian, our joy is derived from the knowledge of who God is, does, says, and gives. Our knowledge comes as we value and apply God's Word to our lives.

The joy of the Lord is your strength (vs. 10). It is the source of constantly renewed strength. The guarantee of such comprehensive resources fortified the lives of the Jews and provided the dynamic for daily living. *Strength* speaks of a fortress or well-protected stronghold.

The Lord is our strength in salvation. He alone calls us to Himself and supplies us with His power and presence to live for Him. The Lord is the one who strengthens us to see the needs in others and meet them. And it is the Lord who defends us against the attacks from the enemy. As we rejoice in the Lord, we are encouraged to stand firm in our Fortress.

Conclusion: God has spoken. Where would we be if God had not spoken? Where would you be if God had kept silent? We would not be here if God had not first said, "*Let there be.*" We would have no reason to gather in this building, no reason to sing songs of joy, and no hope for the future if Jesus on the cross had not said, "*It is finished.*"

God has spoken, and He has spoken most clearly through the God the Son, Jesus Christ. And He alone has *the words of eternal life* (John 6:68). His presence and voice are what we seek. They are what bring spiritual renewal to our lives. Therefore, we would be wise to value God's Word that reveals Him to us, and we would be wise to apply it to our lives. Allow it to expose any and all sin in you. Open your eyes as it reveals needs in those around you. And rejoice in the resources God gives you to love and serve Him and to love and serve others.