

Respect For The Bible

TEXT: NEHEMIAH 8:1-12

INTRODUCTION:

1. There are very few things as precious to me as the Word of God.
2. There was a time in this country when many felt that way.
 - 1) In the excellent work, Rebirth of America, published by the Arthur Demoss Foundation, it is noted: Shortly after the birth of this great nation it was there was a shortage of Bibles.
 - 2) It was so important to them that a special committee was assigned to undertake the task of importing Bibles.
 - 3) 20,000 Bibles were brought into the United States from Holland, Scotland, and other countries.
 - 4) But 3 years later there was a request for more Bibles. One man petitioned congress to help and he began printing Bibles in the city of Philadelphia.
3. Today the Bible remains one of the best sellers.
4. Many homes in fact have more than one copy of the Bible.
5. My expression of concern is that many, even though they own a copy, do not respect the Bible like they should.
6. The Psalmist had the right attitude:
 - 1) Psa. 119:11-16 "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.
12 Blessed art thou, O Lord: teach me thy statutes.
13 With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth.
14 I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches.
15 I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.
16 I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word."
 - 2) Psa. 119:33 "Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end."
 - 3) Psa. 119:105
7. Our text from Neh. 8 should remind us of the preciousness of God's Word.

DISCUSSION:

I. THE DESIRE.

- Neh. 8:1-2 "And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel 2 And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month."
- A. Our story opens with God's people in the city of Jerusalem.
1. Our time frame is in the seventh month; a new year and time for a fresh start.
 2. The people assembled in one place and they were of one purpose and one mind.
- B. And a wonderful desire among the people is voiced to Ezra: "to bring the book of

the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel."

1. We take note of their attitude; that they wanted to hear the Word of God. Jesus said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6).
 2. Psa. 119:131 "I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments."
 3. Psa. 119:174 "I have longed for thy salvation, O Lord; and thy law is my delight."
- C. Such longing reminds me of those who have preached the gospel of Christ in foreign lands.
1. I have a number of friends who have told me about preaching in Russia; and they continue to tell me of how that the souls there long to hear the Word of God.
 2. I have another friend who has been an elder in the church; who frequents Trinidad. He informs me that if you preach less than 3 hours that the people will be upset. (And they sit on the ground; some even on narrow benches)
 3. And yet in contrast, in this country the push is on to limit the amount of time in the proclamation of the gospel.
 4. I know of one extreme case where a man preaches for a denomination who only preaches for eight minutes.
 5. What a delight it is when people hunger and thirst for the words of the living God.

II. THE ATTENTION.

- 8:3 "And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law."
- A. From morning until the middle of the day, perhaps as long as 6 hours, Ezra read the Word of God; and according to verse 7, the Levites helped to explain it.
1. It is amazing to me that throughout all of this, the people continued to pay attention.
 2. That's a wonder to me since it's hard to keep the attention of my brethren for 30 minutes.
 3. In reality, a lot of this has to do with one's attitude in the assembly.
 4. We should always be attentive to what God has to say; the salvation of our souls depends upon it.
- B. We can read from the Bible; we can teach and preach from the Bible; we can have classes in order to study the Bible more in depth; but if we don't pay attention to what is said in the Word, then how is it going to benefit us?
1. Acts 17:11-12 "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. 12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few."
 2. Investigation and study made the difference.

III. THE RESPECT.

8:4-6 "And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood" (& various names are mentioned) 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: 6 And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground."

- A. Here we are shown an example of people who had a deep and abiding reverence for the Word of God.
 - 1. As Ezra opened the Word of God, notice, "all the people stood up."
 - 2. How many churches have you been in where "all the people stood up" when the Word of God was read?
- B. Just think of the souls that could be saved if men would reverence the Word of God as these people did.
 - 1. We would have a lot more people making statements like the apostle Paul did: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6).
 - 2. Those kinds of questions come about when we are confronted by God; and that occurs today through the written Word; even today as people are "pricked in their hearts" (Acts 2:37).
- C. We have good reason to respect and reverence the Word of God.
 - 1. Heb. 4:12 "For the word of God is quick (living), and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."
 - 2. Peter says we are, "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23).
 - 3. God's Word continues to endure and is just as applicable to men today as it was when it was written.
 - 4. God's Word is also worthy of our reverence and respect because it is inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).
 - 5. God's Word is worthy of our reverence and respect because it tells us of sin and the love of God in sending Jesus to die for our sins (Rom. 5:8).
 - 6. God's Word is worthy of our reverence and respect because it is the means by which we are saved (Rom. 1:16-17; James 1:21).
 - 1) The answer to the question: "What must I do to be saved?", is found only in the Bible.
 - 2) It is the Bible that tells us of the necessity of faith (Heb. 11:6); repentance (Luke 13:3,5); the need to confess the Christ (Rom. 10:9-10); and the importance of being baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38).
 - 7. God's Word is worthy of our reverence because it will serve as the standard in the Judgment (John 12:48).
- D. When we think of the importance and blessing of having God's Word in our possessions we should be grateful and thankful, and reverence it!
 - 1. How ironic it is that in ancient times the Bible was on scrolls; some of them as much as 27 feet in length when unrolled; so it was not practical for people to possess a copy of God's Word.

2. They learned of God's Word in the synagogue.
 3. Through the centuries men longed for the time that they could have a printed Bible as we know it. Far too many had to rely upon the word of "a religious teacher," and they may have been taught error and not known it.
 - 1) This is why we encourage people to check out what we are saying that is comes from scripture.
 - 2) This is why we give book, chapter, and verse for verification.
 4. Now the Bible is available in mass quantities. Almost every home has at least one copy, but many do not respect those copies likely because it is so readily available.
 5. When the copies of scripture were few in number, people longed for it; but when it came into abundance, it lost its appeal.
 6. As a result, scripture occupies on a night stand or on a bookshelf; perhaps even in a box in the basement; and all the time the owner does not realize the power that is contained in those words!
- E. We should thank God for the treasure that we have been blessed with (2 Cor. 4:7).
- F. As we think of those who struggled over the centuries to hear and obtain a copy of God's Word, I pray that you may never take for granted what has been entrusted to you.

IV. THE RESPONSE.

- 8:7b-9 "...and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. 8 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. 9 And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law."
- A. Not only was the law read, but if you notice, verse 7 indicates that the Levites explained what had been read so that the people could better understand the law.
1. cf. Rom. 10:17
 2. When Philip talked to the Ethiopian in Acts 8: 8:30-31,35 "Understandest thou what thou readest? 31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."
 3. The Levites were serving as preachers or heralds of God's Word, just as many of us who preach the Word do so every Sunday.
- B. Having heard Ezra read the words of the law, and the Levites explain it, that the people might better understand it, note, "For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law."
1. Again, by means of God's Word the people were being convicted of their sins.
 2. And we do know something of the sins of the people in Nehemiah's day:
 - 1) They had not obeyed the marriage restrictions set forth in Deut. 7:1-6, and they intermarried with the nations around them (Ezra 9-10; Neh. 13).
 - 2) They had failed to keep the sabbath (Neh. 13).

- 3) They had forsaken God's House (Neh. 10); -- a strong indictment of the priests.
3. With God's Word having been preached, they were now aware of their sins -- which led to a change.
 - 1) Today: a change cannot take place until we realize our sins.
 - 2) Isa. 53:6 "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." (cf. Isa. 59:1-2; Rom. 3:10,23; 6:23).
- C. As you read on in the story from Nehemiah, you find that the people rejoiced; and the reason is given in vs 12: "they had understood the words that were declared unto them."
- D. And even better, on the 2nd day the people again heard the Word of God & they responded in obedience.
 1. Even today this is the kind of response that one prays and hopes for.
 2. Even the angels of heaven rejoice: Luke 15:10 "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."
- E. One of the key things that needs to be pointed out is what led to this obedience: the fact that they prepared their hearts to receive God's Word.
 1. They wanted to hear the Word. They were hungry and thirsting for it.
 2. They wanted to know the will of God and were prepared to comply with it.
 3. They were not like Solomon's son Rehoboam, of whom the Bible gives a sad commentary: 2 Chron. 12:14 "And he did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord."

CONCLUSION:

1. God wants souls who are willing to prepare their hearts to receive His Word.
2. He wants souls who will reverence and respect what His Word says, and obey it!
3. If you are not a Christian, I pray that you would open and prepare your heart to receive God's Word so that you may know what is necessary to be saved.

Mark Aites