

“God’s Gift Of His Word”

John 1: 1 – 14; Hebrews 4: 1 – 13; Luke 4:14 -30;

Nehemiah 8:1 -10 (Sermon)

During the Christmas season we have been looking at the gifts God has given to us.

We have looked at God’s gift of hope, God’s gift of peace, God’s gift of joy, God’s gift of love, God’s gift of light, and God’s gift of Jesus.

Today we will be looking at God’s gift of His Word.

I want to begin by asking you to honestly think about why you came to church today.

I would guess some of you would say, *“To worship”*.

Some others would *“it is the Lord’s Day and church is where Christians are expected to be”*.

Some would answer, *“To offer my prayer requests”*.

Some would say their week goes better when they attend church.

Some would answer, *“To receive God’s blessings.”*

And most everyone came expecting to hear a sermon.

But did you come expecting to hear God’s Word to you today?

Did you come expecting to have an encounter with our Living Lord?

Did you come expecting to be spiritually fulfilled?

My primary job as your pastor is to bring God’s Word to you.

Bringing God’s Word to you is very serious business.

That is why I do my very best to make God’s Word clear, so you can understand it and so you can apply God’s Word to your daily life.

That is why you never hear me tell a joke or a silly story.

When I step up to the pulpit to preach I become God’s spokesman.

And that my friends is an awesome responsibility.

Your response to hearing God’s Word is also very serious business.

First of all, whether you spend eternity in heaven or hell depends upon your response to God's Word.

Remember the only people who will end up in hell are the ones who refuse or neglect to ask Jesus Christ to be their Savior.

Secondly, your response to God's word is very serious since you can never live a life pleasing to God unless you know God's Word to you.

2nd Timothy 3:16 and 17 tells us, ***"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."***

Thirdly, your response to God's Word is very serious business because you will never experience the love, the peace, the joy, or the hope of Jesus Christ to your daily life unless you apply God's Word.

With that brief introduction let's look at our text from Nehemiah.

Verse 1 also tells us ***"all the people assembled"***.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if all the members of the Mt. Paran family showed up on Sunday morning earnestly seeking God's Word to them?

As we examine this passage we see three ways the people prepared themselves to hear God's Word, three ways the people received God's Word, and three ways the people responded to God's Word.

I have listed them for you in your bulletin insert.

If each of us would apply these principles we would receive the same blessings that those Israelites did in Nehemiah's day.

First, the people wanted to hear God's Word to them.

We see this in verse 1.

"They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel."

The people initiated the reading of God's Word, not the pastor.

Also notice the people told Ezra to read the Book of the Law of Moses.

The people were not looking for some feel-good sermon or some nice little story.

The people truly wanted to know what God required of His people.

In 2nd Timothy 4:3 the Apostle Paul warns the young preacher Timothy.

“For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”

The people in Nehemiah’s day earnestly sought God’s Word to them.

We find the second way the people prepared themselves to hear God’s word to them in verse 3.

“He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.”

“All the people listened attentively”

The people’s attentive listening becomes even more significant when we realize that these people stood and listened to God’s Word for 6 hours.

Now I am not suggesting that our worship service should last for 6 hours.

The point is these people were hungry for God’s Word to them.

You see time never becomes the controlling factor as long as you are receiving what you came to church to receive.

We find that the third way the people prepared themselves for God’s Word in verse 5. ***“As Ezra opened the book all the people stood up.”*** This showed the peoples’ reverence of God’s Word. This practice is followed in some churches today when the gospel is read. However the standing is meaningless unless a person is standing out of reverence. These people stood from ***“daybreak until noon”*** out of reverence because they believed they were in the presence of Almighty God and God was speaking to them through Ezra.

Verse 6 gives us the first way the people received God’s Word.

“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.”

The word, ***“Amen”*** literally means *“so be it”*.

When we say ***“amen”*** at the end of our prayer or sing ***“amen”*** at the end of a hymn, we are saying, *“This is what I believe and this is really what I want to happen, Lord.”*

Unfortunately some people say **“amen”** during worship to draw attention to themselves and many of us say **“amen”** at the end of a prayer out of habit without really knowing the meaning of **“amen”** or not being serious about what they prayed for.

That is why I changed the ending of our Prayer of Confession today.

We also see that **“amen”** is repeated in verse 6.

When a word or phrase is repeated in the Bible it is repeated for emphasis.

Next verse 6 also tells us **“all the people lifted their hands”**.

As you know little children lift up their hands when they want to be picked up.

When the people in Nehemiah’s day lifted their hands up they were saying, *“Lord, lift me up. Lord I want you to hold me close.”*

Also in verse 6 we read, **“and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground.”**

Bowing down is another sign of submission.

Standing, saying **“amen”**, and bowing are all meaningless unless these actions truly come from a person’s heart.

In fact, standing, saying **“amen”**, and bowing are blasphemy if they are done to promote self-righteousness.

Everything that is done in public worship must be for God’s glory and nothing should ever be done to draw attention to one’s self or that is done that interferes with other people hearing God’s Word to them.

A worship service should never become like a circus with individuals interrupting the message by shouting out and / or jumping up and down.

However, neither should our worship remind people of a mortuary full of dead bodies.

Verse 8 tells us the people understood how God’s Word applied to them.

When the people understood what God required of them the people confessed their sins.

Their confession was much more than just reading the Prayer of Confession printed in the bulletin.

Verse 9 tells us all the people **“wept and mourned as they listened to the words of the Law.”**

These people were convicted of the sin in their life.

They knew they had violated God's Law.

They knew they had neglected being the people God had called them to be.

They knew God demanded His people to live holy lives and they knew God punished sin.

From verse 9 we know the peoples' confession was genuine.

The good news is in verse 10.

“Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our LORD: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

Nehemiah sent the people out to enjoy life and to share their joy with the people around them because they had truly confessed their sin and they had straightened out their relationship with Almighty God.

You see, we can never experience the love of God until we come seriously seeking God's Word to us.

We can never realize the hope that God offer to us until we know God's promises to us in His Word.

We can only experience the peace of Christ after we have experienced the forgiveness of Christ.

We can only experience the joy of the Lord when we are in a right relationship with Almighty God.

In our lesson from Luke Jesus proclaimed the year of The Lord's favor.

The year of Jubilee occurred every 50 years.

The year of Jubilee was when all debts were canceled, every slave was set free, and all land was returned to its original land owner.

The year of Jubilee was a symbol of God's forgiveness of our sins and the year of Jubilee gave the people a taste of God's Kingdom on earth.

Jesus said, ***“This scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”***

This morning we read about two different responses to the Word of God.

The people in Jesus' day that gathered in the synagogue in Nazareth heard The Word and they saw The Word in the flesh but they rejected The Word.

Those people came to the synagogue out of duty to hear some flowery words from a hometown boy named Jesus.

Those people had not come expecting to hear God's word to them.

These people did not come with the intent of allowing God's Word to change their lives.

Their hearts were full of evil and they went away angry.

Conversely, the people in Nehemiah's day were anxious to hear God's word; they applied God's word to their life; and those people left full of joy and peace!

You see, the problem is never with God's gift of His Word.

The problem, if there is one, will always be with our response to God's Word.

The question for you this morning is how are you going to respond to God's gift of His word to you?

Are you going to reject God's word to you today or are you going to gladly receive God's word to you today?

Each one of us must make a decision about responding to God's gift of His Word to us today.

God's word to you cannot be ignored.

You see when we sincerely receive God's Word things will change because Jesus is The Word (John 1:14).

God's Word disrupts our daily lives.

When God's Word is sincerely received we will be changed.

The Bible is full of examples of people whose lives were changed because they came face to face with Jesus.

However, those peoples' lives were not changed until they opened their hearts to receive Jesus' words to them.

If we are not uplifted, if we are not encouraged, and if we do not have love, joy, and peace when we leave here today, then we each need to examine ourselves, examine our motives for coming to Church along with our willingness for Jesus Christ to be in control of our lives.

If we leave here unfulfilled we each need to ask ourselves; "*is Jesus really my Lord?*"

God's Word must never be allowed to become a story of what occurred long ago.

God's Word is alive.

God's Word to us cannot be ignored.

A proper response to God's Word to us can not be put off until tomorrow.

We must be willing to allow the Spirit of the Living God to change us so we will become the people that God has called us to be.

We must be willing to allow the Spirit of the Living God to change us so we will be effective in carrying on the ministry that Jesus began when He was on earth and the ministry Jesus has entrusted to each one of us.

AMEN