

Sermon Notes

WORSHIP SERVICE - 1.15.2023

FEASTING ON GOD'S WORD - PART 3

I. INTRODUCTION

Nehemiah 8:1-12

And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. 2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 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. 4 And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. 5 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. 6 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. 7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. 8 They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

9 And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. 10 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." 11 So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." 12 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.

II. REFORMATION AND REVIVAL

- What happens in this part of Nehemiah's story is a magnificent work of reformation and revival.
- Ezra, a scribe skilled in the law of Moses (Ezra 7:6), came with the second wave of exiles.
- Ezra 7:10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.
- His task was restoring worship in the rebuilt temple under Zerubbabel.
- Ezra, the priest of the Lord, was summoned to present himself before the people with the Book of the Law of Moses.
- They were reinstating the Feasts prescribed by the Lord. (Lev. 23)
- And Ezra read the Scriptures for several hours. Now this was no easy task.
- The Scriptures were written in Hebrew, but most of the Jews who had returned had adopted the language of their captors—Aramaic.
- The Scriptures had to be translated into Aramaic from the original Hebrew.

The people's respect and reverence of God's Word.

- V3 And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.
- Do you approach the reading of God's Word with reverence?
- They stood at the reading of the Law/Torah (v5), and they remained in their place the whole time while the Word was being expounded and made clear so that they could understand the reading (v7-8).
- Set your mind and heart on being attentive to the Word as it is taught and preached.

The doxological aim of reading Scripture

- They are reading and expounding on Scripture and the people worship (v6).

- Your reading and study of Scriptures should evoke praise, worship, and adoration of God.
- Psalm 119:171-172 My lips will pour forth praise, for you teach me your statutes. 172 My tongue will sing of your word, for all your commandments are right.

The penetrating work of the Spirit and the Word

- As you read, God's Word works in you through the power of His Spirit.
- They wept as they heard the words of the Law (v9).
- They recognized just how far they had fallen away from God's righteous requirements, how utterly sinful they had become, but more than that, they realized that they were the covenant people of God.
- They were cut to the heart, they were pierced by the Word.
- Hebrews 4:12-13 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.
- God's Word through the Spirit does surgical work in our heart.
- When you approach God's Word to read and study, come as one who is to be transformed and shaped by His Word, a doer of His Word, not just a hearer.
- James 1:23-25 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.
- The word convicts but it also drives us to the gospel and our need of Christ and his grace and mercy.

The need for careful study of God's Word to understand it.

- The Law was not just read, it was read "clearly" (v8), that is to say, it was expounded upon, so the people were left without a doubt about what the Law said.
- And they "gave the sense," they gave insight into the passage, what God intended. They understood what it meant.
- We need to dig deeper beyond just a casual reading of God's Word, to really understand what it says and what it means.

III. INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

THREE PRINCIPLES FOR UNDERSTANDING GOD'S WORD

1. OBSERVATION - WHAT DOES IT SAY?

2. INTERPRETATION - WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

3. APPLICATION - WHAT DO I DO?

- The goal of observation is to give a careful reading of Scripture to know what the text says.
- Observation involves reading prayerfully, thoughtfully, imaginatively, meditatively, and purposefully.
- As we're reading we want to identify key terms, phrases, people, places, the literary genre.
- Look for repeated words, phrases, and themes.
- Pay attention to grammar, verbs, descriptive words, connective words.
- All of this to get a handle on what the text is saying.
- Next, we want to unpack what a particular passage means, that's interpretation.
- In Observation we try to determine what the author said, in interpretation we are trying to determine what the author meant by what he said.
- An important element of interpretation is understanding who controls the meaning of a text.
- Is it the reader or the author?
- Two views: Authorial Intention or Reader Response
- Traditional view is Authorial Intention—meaning is determined by the intention of the author.
- Modern view is Reader Response—meaning is determined by the reader.
- If the Bible is merely read as great literature, or for helpful tips, or moral guidance, then you can interpret the text any way you want.
- But, if you believe the Bible to be God's revelatory Word, inspired by the One True, Divine Author, then you are not free to determine the meaning of the text any way you want.
- Your main interpretative question is, "What is the meaning God intended in this text?"
- Meaning is what the author intended to communicate when he wrote this text.

EXEGESIS VS EISEGESIS

- Exegesis - Gk. "to lead out of"

- The process of discovering the original meaning of the biblical text by studying the text according to the authorial intent in its historical context.
- You read out of the text what the author intended.
- Eisegesis - Gk. "to lead into"
- The process of reading your own presupposed ideas or beliefs into a text to support a conclusion you already have.
- You read into the text what you want it to mean.
- Anytime you go straight to application after reading a passage without spending time in observation and interpretation to extract the timeless principle of the passage, you are engaging in eisegesis.
- Our goal is to exegete a passage to determine its meaning.

GAPS IN BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING

- With some passages of Scripture it's not always easy to determine what the author meant.
- We speak a different language
- We're from a different culture
- We're from a different era
- We communicate differently
- We're facing different situations
- We may be part of a different covenant (Old/New)
- Depending on the passage we are reading and studying, the gaps can be small or huge.
- To discover what the passage means we need to bridge those gaps in order to rightly interpret Scripture.

BRIDGING THE LITERARY GAP

- What is the genre of the book I am studying?
- History / Narrative
- Wisdom / Poetry
- Prophecy
- Epistle/Letter
- Apocalyptic
- Each genre has a certain characteristic and rules of interpretation.
- A good Study Bible gives you details of literary features of the book you are studying that will help you interpret the meaning.

BRIDGING THE LANGUAGE GAP

- We have highly accurate translations of the Bible in English and they all involve a certain amount of interpretation on the part of the translation team.
- You can trust many of those translations (ESV, CSB, NASB 1995, NIV).
- You don't need to know Biblical Hebrew or Greek but there are tools that can provide a deeper understanding of critical passages.

BRIDGING THE HISTORICAL GAP

- The writings of Scripture were composed in a specific culture at a particular point in history.
- We need to know how the original hearers would have understood the message in their own time.
- While there can be a variety of points of application to a text, the text can only have ONE meaning.
- We need to consider:
 - Author: who wrote the book?
 - Date: when was it written?
 - Audience: who was it written to?
 - Circumstance/Purpose: What was going on at the time? Why was it written?
- Some of that will come from within the text itself, we'll also need external sources, like the book intro from our Study Bible, commentaries, OT / NT surveys, etc.
- Scripture contains unfamiliar scenes, practices, and culture. There are different economic, agricultural, social, religious, and dietary practices.
- We need to bridge the gap in order to grasp what the text means.

BRIDGING THE CONTEXTUAL GAP

- In biblical interpretation everything is about "context, context, context!"
- You can make a text say anything out of context.
- When we are examining a passage, we need to look at what comes before and what comes after.
- A few keys:
 - Argument: what goes before and comes after which forms the argument of the passage.
 - Authorial disposition: describes the attitude of the author when the work was composed which contributes to the tone.
 - Authorial style: refers to the writing style and capabilities of the author. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers using their own voice, writing style, skills and personality.
 - Theological history: refers to the time in history when the work was composed with the understanding that there was a progressive unfolding of revelation throughout history.
 - Literary / Rhetorical devices: how the author intended one to interpret his own words considering the literary or rhetoric employed (hyperbole, sarcasm, idioms, metaphors, symbolism, etc.)

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

- [ESV Study Bible](#)
- Online Resources: [BibleGateway.com](#) / [BiblyStudyTools.com](#)
- [Logos Bible Software](#)
- [Bible Timeline Chart](#)

Introduction to Biblical Theology Books

- [What is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism and Patterns](#) - James A. Hamilton Jr.
- [God's Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible](#) - Vaughan Roberts

Books that teach How to Study the Bible

- [How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth](#) - Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart

APPLICATION AND REFLECTION

In light of today's message....

- What did I learn about the gospel?
- How can I apply what I learned about the gospel to my life?
- With whom can I share the gospel this week?