

Hearing and Responding to God's Word Through Repentance

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[0 : 00] the city walls, the early mornings, the late nights, all of the praying, the fasting, the strategic planning, the giving of time and money and energy and resources, persevering through threats and opposition, confronting conflict.

What is all this for? Where is it all leading to? That's what we see beginning in chapter eight. In many ways, chapter eight, eight through 10 are the climax to this whole story.

We see at the beginning of chapter eight that God works powerfully among his people, that a revival breaks out. God works in a powerful way to bring about a great movement of spiritual renewal among the people.

And how this spiritual renewal happens and what follows is the subject of chapters eight through 10. And this morning, we're gonna see part one of this movement of renewal as we focus on chapter eight.

We're gonna ask two questions. Our two questions are what happens in this story and what can we learn? What happens in this story and what can we learn?

[1 : 14] So first of all, let's look at what happens in this story. Beginning of verse one tells us that very early one morning, at the beginning of the seventh month of the year, all of the people gather together in the city near the water gates.

The water gate. Remember that for later on in the sermon. This assembly of people is just shy of about 50,000 people. So imagine Nat's Park downtown.

Imagine National's Park filled to the brim. That's about the size of this assembly. And the people have gathered, they've assembled for one purpose, to hear the word of God read.

To hear the word of God read. Now you have to appreciate the drama and expectation of this moment. This is something that had not happened in the life of God's people for several generations.

The people gathered together in this moment had not heard God's word read or taught publicly in such an assembly for over 100 years. You know, many of us have probably been to church many times.

[2 : 24] Some of us may have grown up in the church. And so you just have to appreciate what would it have been like to grow up in Babylon during the exile and to never have heard the word of God read or taught publicly.

Not a single sermon, not a single Bible study. But now for the first time, you're gathered with 50,000 of your friends and family to hear the word of the Lord.

And so Ezra the priest and the scribe climbs up on top of a large wooden platform that they had built so that people could see him and hear him as he read God's word.

And he gets to the top and he puts the big book of the law on top of the podium and he opens it and he starts reading.

Verse three says that the people were eager. They were attentive to read the book, to read God's word. Verse three, and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

[3 : 24] The people are waiting. They're on the edge of their seat. They're eager. They're receptive. They're open. They're attentive to the word. If you're here this morning and you're unfamiliar with the Bible, maybe particularly the Old Testament, what Ezra was reading, the book of the law, would have been the first five books of the Old Testament.

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These are also known as the five books of Moses or the Pentateuch. The Pentateuch.

One way to think about it if you're unfamiliar with the Bible is that these books were Israel's Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and Gettysburg Address all wrapped into one. These five books told the story of who God was, of who they were as a people, what their story was, and how they were to live in light of that. Verses seven through eight tell us that not only was God's word clearly read, but it was clearly explained.

It was clearly explained. As Ezra read, the Levites helped the people to understand what was being read. How exactly did this happen? What was the format of this? What was the structure of this? [4 : 38] Well, we actually aren't told specifically in this text. Some scholars suggest that perhaps Ezra read a section and then paused and perhaps across the whole assembly as people are gathered in small groups, the Levites would go around and sort of share and summarize and explain what was just read.

And then Ezra would move on to reading the next section. We don't know if this is exactly the order of what happened, but we know that some version of this is what happened. Ezra read and the Levites explained clearly the meaning of God's word.

And this went on for four hours. We're told it goes on from sunrise to midday around noon. Next time you think that a Sunday morning sermon might be going a little long, just remember Nehemiah chapter 8.

Four hours. People are standing. And that at the end of it all, at the end of the four hours, how did the people respond? Well, we see in verse 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. And then in verse 9, for all the people wept as they heard the words of the law.

[6 : 01] This is a powerful moment. The Spirit of God is moving. The people worshiped and they wept in response to God's word. Why is that?

Why did they respond in that way? Well, well, of course, God's Spirit was moving among them powerfully. But again, imagine for a moment that you've grown up in exile in Babylon and you've never heard the word of God read or taught publicly in a way that you can understand.

And then you hear Ezra get up and start reading the book of Genesis and how God made heaven and earth and all of his, every man and woman made and created in his image and how God had made a promise to Abraham that his people, your people, would be a light to the nations, a blessing to all the peoples on earth.

And then Ezra moves on to Exodus. You hear the miraculous story of God's great power and salvation to lead your ancestors out of bondage when they were in slavery in Egypt and how Moses led them to Mount Sinai where the Lord appeared in great power and glory and smoke and fire and entered into a covenant relationship with his people and gave them the law.

And then you keep, Ezra keeps reading in Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy and you read how God made it possible for a sinful people, for a sinful people to continue to live in a covenant relationship with the Holy God through atonement and sacrifice to follow his commands and to walk in his way so that they might live out their vocation of being a light and a blessing to all the nations of the earth.

[7 : 44] And over the course of four hours you hear the story of your people being read of your people to giveHope