

Revival Under the Word of God

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References: **Nehemiah 8**, Numbers 29:1; Nehemiah 7:73; Ezra 7:10; 2 Timothy 3:14-15

Good morning. Good morning. We do see so many familiar faces this morning, and we had a wonderful day yesterday for those that were here at our parenting conference—parenting, child training conference. We look forward to a good week together and the other end, Daybreak Bible Camp, and we look forward to that.

Background to Nehemiah 8: The Feast of Trumpets

Let's take our Bibles and turn to the book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah chapter 8. In Nehemiah chapter 8, God is doing something very special. Now, keep your finger in Nehemiah chapter 8 when you get to that chapter, and I want to read one verse to you from Numbers 29 verse 1. Numbers 29 verse 1 tells us something about the background to what we're going to be looking at in Nehemiah 8. It says this: and on the seventh month—this is the Hebrew month of Tishri, which today, in the present day, it's the Jewish New Year; the first of Tishri is the seventh month, it's the Jewish New Year. In the days of the Bible, days of Nehemiah, look at verse—I'll read it to you, Numbers 29 verse 1:

[Numbers 29:1 NKJV] - "And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work. For you it is a day of blowing the trumpets.

It's the Feast of Trumpets. But it's interesting in that verse and every other verse you read about the Feast of Trumpets: what would happen during that holy convocation was nothing like what happened here in Nehemiah chapter 8. It was a feast. It was an agricultural feast. They brought food, they ate food together, they rejoiced in the Lord's goodness. But when you come to this chapter, in most of your Bibles there's a heading, and in that heading it may say something like this: Revival Under Ezra.

A Longing for Revival

And there are a number of revivals in the Old Testament. There's revival under Josiah, there was a revival under Hezekiah, and there was this revival in this chapter. And we want to spend a little bit of time looking at it this morning because we desire—I think each one of us, I desire revival in North America.

You know, revival does take place today in many places in the world. It has taken place in North America; it's taken place in Canada; it's taken place in the early colonial days in the United States. It is said that in the colonial days, in the colonies, that there was revival for a consecutive one hundred years. I don't know if that's one hundred percent correct. Northern Ireland—we have some friends from Northern Ireland—in Northern Ireland, there was a tremendous revival of 1859. I know Derek was not around for that, but he may have read and known it was a tremendous revival, and it said up to one hundred thousand Irish believers came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There's a particular man named James G. McVickers; he was very influential. He was influential. Many came to salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. There was a lot of lay preaching, and God was working in a tremendous way.

We need that same kind of thing. In my days when I was a young person, when I was about fourteen years old, I would say a type of revival swept through the area that I lived in. That was New Jersey. In fact, a number of times revival swept through New Jersey. In the 1700s under David Brainerd, they saw some revival in the Princeton area. But I remember as a young person, we had a little house church. Normally only about twenty people would come to it. But during this time, the gospel went forth, and we could have on our usual Thursday night Bible study—there'd be seventy-five people in our living room, up the stairs, in the kitchen, sitting on the floor, on the front porch. For ten years, eleven years straight, we've had many, many young people and other people come. Baptisms of twenty-five and thirty people in the Atlantic Ocean. We thought it was normal. I thought it was normal. I thought it would go on forever.

And so God does bring revival, and we long for revival in North America. We're in ordinary times, and we want to see God move by His Spirit in a tremendous way.

The People Gather as One Man

Now, in our chapter, I'd like to read a little bit of what is happening from verses 1 to 10. Now, the wall is completed. People are living in safety. People are living in their cities. The last verse of chapter 7, verse 73:

[Nehemiah 7:73 NKJV] - So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the Nethinim, and all Israel dwelt in their cities. When the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities.

But now there's a movement of God. God's moving among the people of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. The Spirit of God is moving in their hearts, and they come from out of those cities, and they come into Jerusalem. It is a feast day. It is a holy convocation day. It's a time to gather together. No ordinary work is done.

But notice what happens when they come together. The Spirit of God is working so much in their lives that they come together and they do something that is never mentioned in any occasion of the Feast of Trumpets:

[Nehemiah 8:1-3 NKJV] - ¹ Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel. ² So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. ³ Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

The word here for morning is from the first light, possibly six o'clock in the morning 'til midday, 'til noon—six hours of reading the scriptures. And I think there was more than just a reading of the scriptures. We go on in this chapter, we'll see there was the preaching of the scriptures and the explanation of the scriptures, the unfolding of the scriptures to all the people. But he read the scriptures in verse 3:

[Nehemiah 8:4-6 NKJV] - ⁴ So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkihah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ And Ezra blessed the

LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Now, I forgot to read a little, a little very important phrase in verse 3. At the end of verse 3: "and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law." Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people. He was above the people. When he opened the book, they stood up, 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.

Drop down with me to verse 7:

[Nehemiah 8:7-8 NKJV] - ⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. ⁸ So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.

Verse 8 is the Levites and all these other Bible teachers and men who were laboring along with Ezra. So they, plural, they read the book of the law distinctly, and they gave the sense, and they caused them to understand. Notice that phrase: "they helped them to understand." Verse 7: "and the Levites helped the people to understand the Law."

[Nehemiah 8:9-10 NKJV] - ⁹ And Nehemiah, who was the governor, 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 nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Let's look to the Lord for a moment in prayer.

Our God and Father, we thank You. Thank You for this time together. We pray, Father, You will lead us and guide us as we look into Your Word, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Hunger for God's Word

So God was doing a work, doing a work of revival. He's causing the people to come together, and He's causing a hunger in their hearts, causing a convicting work in their hearts. They want to know more about God. They want their families to know about God. They want the mothers and the fathers and the grandmothers and the grandfathers to know more about God. There's a hunger for it. They want to get right with God, I believe. They want to know the Word of God. They want it taught to them.

And this is the kind of thing that happens, I think, during revival. People gather for long periods of time, and they want the Word of God presented to them. They want it preached to them with power, and they seek to find men who can do this kind of thing. Sometimes it's women; they say that the revival in Ulster began with a woman going door to door, explaining the Bible to all those that would hear, and others came after her. And there were others that prayed—the Word of God being explained powerfully.

The Character of Ezra

God often uses an individual to be involved in this kind of revival, and I'd like to ask you to keep your finger in this passage and go with me to the book of Ezra chapter 7 and verse 10. Notice they called Ezra. They called Ezra—they call him in this chapter the scribe, and they call him the priest. But when we go to Ezra chapter 7, verse 10, we find out why they called him. Why did they ask him to bring the book of the law? Why did they ask him to bring it and to read it and to preach it? And why did they want all these other men lined up on the right hand and lined up on the left side? And when we read these names, they're not called Levites; I think they're Bible teachers. They're people who minister in the Word. Maybe they were scribes. They are those who are able to teach the Word of God and preach the Word of God. Now, there were Levites; we see them involved a little bit later. But they asked Ezra to come.

Why Ezra? And I think we need Ezras today, don't we? Now look at chapter 7. We read a little biographical sketch of Ezra, and I wish that was said of me. I wish it was said of more and more Bible teachers. There's a great biographical description of Ezra. Look what it says about him, chapter 7, verse 10:

[Ezra 7:10 NKJV] - For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Now, some translations translate this first part of the verse like this: He devoted his heart, committed his heart, prepared, devoted his heart to study the law of the Lord. We need more and more of those kinds of people—those who study the law of the Lord, have a hunger, have a desire, have a joy in knowing as much as possible about the Word of God and are able—we find out a little bit—are able to preach it, are able to teach it, are able to explain it. This is what we need more and more.

But notice something else that is said about Ezra that made him the kind of person he was, and the reason why they had called him: prepared his heart to know the Word of God and know the person of the Word of God, know the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, know the God of the scriptures—not just to know it academically, not just to know it in what the Hebrew may say, but to know it and know the Person, the God of the scriptures.

But look what it says also: when he would find an ordinance, when he would find a command, when he would find a statute, and he would find an instruction, look what it says: he would **do** it. It says, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it." I think that makes a man or a woman of God. It gives them power in their lives, and they're obedient to the Lord. When they see the Word of God and are obedient to the Word of God, that's a life-changing, empowering Spirit of God that can use that kind of individual.

And then notice the third thing that is said in this verse: he studied it, and he loved the God of the scriptures that he found, and he obeyed the ordinances and the scriptures and the instructions, and then it says God put in his heart to teach it—to teach Israel the statutes and the ordinances, everything he would find in it. He studied it. He did it. He taught it. I think he was a remarkable man, and God began this revival by using Ezra to do this kind of thing.

Reaching the Next Generation

Now go back with me to chapter 8. In the first part of chapter 8, we find something very wonderful. We find the kind of people who desire to be at this revival, to be there, the thousands upon thousands. Bible scholars tell us—I don't know how they know exactly—but there are about forty thousand people gathered in this particular place where they're under the hearing of Ezra and the scribes and the Levites. And this place where they have the pulpit, this place where it was before this area, before the Water Gate, this big opening and gathering center.

But we're told who were there. Who came early in the morning? Who came at six o'clock in the morning, the break of day? We're told. Look at verse 2:

[Nehemiah 8:2 NKJV] - So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month.

Mothers were there, and fathers were there, and grandmothers were there, and older men were there, and younger men were there—all with a hunger to know the Word of God, all with a hunger to hear Ezra and the scribes and the Levites explain it to them.

But notice something else. Notice something else of those who were there. And those with children know it's kind of hard to do this; it's hard to get them to Sunday school at eleven o'clock in the morning! But it says there's another group that are there: "all who could hear with understanding." It's another group. There's men, there's women, and then those who could hear with understanding. You go to almost every commentary—older ones, you know Matthew Henry, written in the 1700s, modern day—they will say it's referring to children. Children! Those who could hear: young children, five years old, six years old, seven years old. Their children were there. Mothers were bringing their children, fathers were bringing their children, grandmothers were bringing their grandchildren to hear the Word of God because they knew it could be life-changing. They knew it could save them. It could bring them into a living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's something very, very important. It's very important, and that's one of the reasons 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel is having a week next week, and they have Kids Club, and Sunday school, and youth group, and camp—encouragement to go to camp—and all of these kinds of things to reach a generation of young people in this nation of Canada, and North America, and the United States: to see young people come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing better than to see a chapel building, or a vacation Bible school, or Sunday school with so many children you don't know what to do with them, to have them hear the Word of God. And that's what changes lives: those who can hear the Word of God, hear it taught to them.

Standing on Deep Convictions

Now I'm going to turn to a passage, and then we'll have a break for our break, and we'll come back and we'll finish this section after the break. But turn with me over to 2 Timothy, 2 Timothy chapter 3:

[2 Timothy 3:14-15 NKJV] - ¹⁴ But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Your scriptures, the knowing the scriptures, the being taught the scriptures, the memorizing the scriptures, the knowing the meaning of the scriptures are able to make you wise unto salvation.

Now, he was taught primarily from a young child by his mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois. Mothers can have a tremendous impact upon their children, an untold impact upon their children. If you ask Billy Graham the greatest impact, he had a godly mother; he would say his mother. C.H. Spurgeon would say that his mother had the greatest impact upon his life. C.H. Spurgeon's mother would give him half a shilling for every Isaac Watts hymn that he could memorize, and he had a very good mind to memorize. He memorized over a hundred Isaac Watts hymns, and his mother said, "Too much! Too much! I can't give you any more money for all the hymns you're memorizing." Mothers have a tremendous impact.

Here, learning the scriptures from their mother—but the mothers must have been believers in Christ, not just Jewish women, but true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because notice what Paul says when he mentions that the scriptures were able to make you wise unto salvation. Notice the last phrase—that's not where it ends, that's where I ended my quotation—but it says this: "unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." He's referring to what the ministry of his mother and grandmother had. They must have been true believers, and they would teach him the true gospel. They made sure to teach him about salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. I think that's one of the reasons these men and women, these mothers and fathers, were bringing their children at the break of day, at 6:30 o'clock in the morning, to hear the Word of God and hear it explained to them.

But it says something else in verse 14, a verse just prior to the one we've just been looking at. He says to Timothy—the Apostle Paul does—he says, "Continue." Continue in the things which you've learned. Continue in them, Timothy. What your mother taught you, what your

grandmother taught you, continue in these very basic, fundamental things that you've learned. Then he says this: "and have been assured of." I love some other translations; they say, "have convictions about." You've learned them and you have convictions about them. You know, we need that more and more. We need people who have convictions about the scriptures, that they stand on them. They don't move this way or that way; they stand on the great truths when they see them in the Word of God.

The Necessity of Biblical Conviction

I'll tell you a quick story, and then we'll break for our break. We started a gathering of believers in our town, Land O' Lakes, Florida. If you're visiting Tampa, Florida, you just go down the highway and you'll come to us first; we're the first town just north of Land O' Lakes of any size. And twenty-five years ago, we started a Bible study and we started to meet together.

In the very beginning, we met a family. He was—you would call him a First Nations people; we would say a North American Indian, a Sioux Indian. He was born on a reservation in North Dakota, Rosebud Reservation. His parents moved him off of that to California. He was a tremendous athlete, became a professional football player. He's a very big man. Started a construction company afterwards, and we got to know him. He got saved, and he and his wife—they were one of the people that we started this work together.

And time went on—ten years, twelve years, thirteen years or so went on—and one day I get a phone call. The phone call said, could we have an Indian chief, a Sioux Indian chief, come to your chapel, come to our chapel and preach on a Sunday morning? He would like to preach on the reunification of the eagle and the condor.

Now, I love these people. I worked with them for a long time. We started with them at a twenty-acre farm. We did our Vacation Bible School on their farm, we had Bible studies together, we worked together and poured our lives in together. But they'd been going back into the Native American Indian—in fact, they eventually put a teepee up on their property and had all kinds of meetings with Indian leaders.

So I said—when they asked, could he come and speak—I said, "You know what we do on a Sunday morning? We preach the Bible. Will he preach from the Bible?"

"Well, he might use a verse or two."

"No," I said, "will he preach from the Bible?" So I said, "No. No."

And these were very good friends, very good friends. But we have to have convictions. And you know what happened, right? You know what happened: they left. They left our local church. Well, you have to have convictions on the fundamentals of what you believe. I could have said yes... No, I could never really have said yes. I could never have said yes. We have to have convictions.

People like Eunice and Lois, your mother, your father, have convictions. The Word of God gives us convictions, and we need that so, so much in our world today, in our churches today, with our leaders today.

Well, let's close in a word of prayer. We'll have a break and we'll come back.

Our God and Father, we thank You for our time together. We thank You for Your goodness to us. We thank You for the people You bring into our lives. We thank You for those like Ezra who can preach and teach the Word of God. We thank You for the way You work in our lives, Father, and we pray that You'll continue.

We pray for revival in our land. We pray for it in Canada, we pray for it in Vancouver, we pray for it in British Columbia, we pray for it in Florida, Father. We pray for it in North America. We pray for men like George Whitefield, we pray for men like D.L. Moody, we pray for men who can preach the gospel fearlessly and that You can use them. And we pray for men like Ezra—men like that You would raise up, Father, in our land and throughout this world. And so we pray these things, and we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.