

Attentive to the Book; Nehemiah 8:1-3.

- I. Importance
 - A. What do we think is essential?
 - 1. Society will tell you that college is essential; you must have a degree to be successful.
 - 2. Society will tell you that you must have money.
 - 3. Every commercial you have ever watched will try to tell you that their product or service is so crucial that you must have it!
 - B. There is something that I think is way more important than these things, your story.
- II. Your story
 - A. “Those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it,” George Santayana.
 - B. Your story is your identity.
 - 1. When you forget it, you forget who you are.
 - 2. We often regale each other with stories from our past.
 - 3. Memories of things that have happened to us mold our thoughts and reasons for our current decisions.
 - 4. Without our story, we lose our identity.
 - C. The way the Bible communicates to us is through the story.
 - 1. From the beginning of Genesis one, we have the story of creation.
 - 2. In Genesis 2, we have the story of man and woman.
 - 3. In Genesis 3, God tells us the story of sin.
 - 4. All these stories (along with the rest of the stories in the Bible) are essential to our identity as Christians.
 - 5. The Bible is our story.
 - D. We have left our story on the shelf!
 - 1. We must rediscover the Word of God.
 - 2. The Bible is meant to be read.
 - a. We treat it like a classic collectible or an icon.
 - b. We “treat bible study as an onerous chore or a bitter medicine given to resistant patients.”¹
 - c. Ezra read the Law to the people.
 - d. Nehemiah 8:1–3 (ESV)¹ 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

¹ Kenneth L. Cukrowski, Mark W. Hamilton, James W. Thompson, *God's Holy Fire: The Nature and Function of Scripture*, (Abilene, Texas, ACU Press, 2002), 8

those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

- e. The people asked Ezra to read the Book of the Law to them.
- f. Nehemiah 8:5 (ESV) 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.
- g. If you read through verse 12, you will see Nehemiah stress the idea of understanding (in verses 2, 3, 7, 8, and 12).
- h. Nehemiah ensured that people were there to help the Israelites understand the Law (verse 7).
- i. The nation had wandered so far away from God that they had not properly observed the Feast of Booths since the days of Joshua.
- j. Nehemiah 8:17 (ESV) ¹⁷ And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing.
- k. This public reading of the Torah (or parts) brought Israel to tears.

E. The great thing about our story is that it is from God.

III. The Word

A. The Bible is the word of God.

- 1. 2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV) ¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,
- 2. 2 Peter 1:20–21 (ESV) ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.
- 3. These two texts remind us of the divine origin of the Scriptures.

B. Are we attentive to the Scriptures like Israel under Ezra and Nehemiah?

- 1. Psalm 1:2 (ESV) ² but his delight is in the Law of the LORD, and on his Law he meditates day and night.
- 2. The written word of God was critical to Israel.
- 3. Psalm 119 is a literary masterpiece written about the love of God's Law.
- 4. When we read "Scripture says" or "it is written," we must recognize God's authority in the Scriptures. ²
- 5. Do we 'remove our sandals' like Moses?
- 6. Do we recognize that we are standing on holy ground?
- 7. Psalm 119:103 (ESV) ¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!
- 8. Psalm 19:10 (ESV) ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
- 9. Is this how we view the Bible, as something to be desired or to make us wise?

IV. Rejoice

² Ibid, 29

- A. Reaction to Scripture can be an amazing thing, both positive and negative.
- B. We claim to look at the whole of Scripture, yet we leave so many things out.
 - 1. We may be uncomfortable with the text; it is a difficult teaching.
 - 2. We may have been taught something different and don't want to change our understanding.
 - 3. We are looking to prove our own interpretation instead of understanding God's.
- C. The Israelites had neglected the Law for many years.
 - 1. They were weeping over their neglect.
 - 2. Nehemiah 8:11–12 (ESV) 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.
 - 3. When they were presented with the Scriptures and faced their neglect, they committed themselves to God's Law and went away rejoicing!
 - 4. How often do we see people react this way?
 - 5. Someone recently said to me, "Baptism doesn't save you."
 - 6. 1 Peter 3:21 (NASB95) ²¹ Corresponding to that, **baptism now saves you**—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
 - 7. Their statement was the exact opposite of Scripture.
 - 8. Yet, when faced with this text in 1 Peter, they refused to understand.
 - 9. They were not attentive to the book!
- V. Attentive to the Book
 - A. As Christians, we find our story and identity in Scripture.
 - 1. We have changed who we were to Christians.
 - 2. We compare our old lives with our new lives, and the Bible becomes our story.
 - B. We recognize the Bible and God's Word breathed out to us so that we can live this new life that God has granted us.
 - C. We rejoice in the changes God has made in our lives.
 - D. We share these changes (and the One who changed us) with our community.