

commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel should live in booths during the feast of the seven months” (Nehemiah 8:14). What they stumbled upon was Moses’ command that the Israelites observe the Feast of Booths (Leviticus 23:33-44).

What is so impressive is that they didn’t read and forget it—“**the entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them**” (Nehemiah 8:17). These people immediately applied what they read in the Law of God.

Are we willing to apply God’s Word to our lives, or are we content to sit and listen without ever changing

a thing? Change is hard, but it is necessary. Paul wrote, “**Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall**” (1 Corinthians 10:12). The possibility of veering off the narrow way is a real threat. It is imperative that we constantly apply God’s Word to our lives! At times it may seem that sermons or Bible classes don’t bear much application for our lives. Does that exempt us from making application? Let the remnant of Israel be your example: explore the book, find what is lacking, and make the application!

Conclusion

It is clear that the remnant that returned to Jerusalem had a different mindset than the stubborn Jews who were taken into captivity. The remnant was invigorated with a love for God’s Law. They set for us an example of excellence in this regard. (1) *They asked for the book.* It did not need to be forced upon them, but they were eager to hear what it had to say. (2) *They understood the book.* They’re excitement caused them to listen attentively so that they would come away with a firm understanding of the Law. (3) *They applied the book.* It wasn’t a mental exercise for these Jews, rather it was an effort to make their lives what God wanted it to be. May the Lord’s church forever be filled with people who ask for the book, understand the book, and apply the book!



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Faithful Sayings Issue 16.45 November 9, 2014

ISSUE

16.45

BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

November 9,
2014

Services

Sunday: 9:30 AM
10:20 AM
6:00 PM
Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn
Kyle Pope

Deacons:

Steve Dixon
Jack Langley
Neil Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott

Evangelists:

Kyle Pope
Andrew Dow



The People of the Book

By Andrew Dow

The Psalmist declared, “**O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day**” (Psalm 119:97, NASB). The 119th Psalm devotes 176 verses to the Word of God. Because the Psalmist recognizes its unparalleled value, he is moved to express his great love for what God has revealed. This Psalm should characterize the way every Christian views Scripture. It is evident, however, that many Christians view reading, studying, and meditating on God’s Word as a chore rather than a joy.

I would ask that you consider with me an event that took place in the book of Nehemiah. Following Israel’s division, the Northern Kingdom was taken captive by the Assyrian Empire and the Southern Kingdom was taken captive by the Babylonian Empire. The people who once flourished under the care of the Lord became slaves in a foreign land. As such, they no longer had the luxury of worshipping God or reading His words. This captivity continued until the Lord allowed the Medo-Persian Empire to overthrow Babylon. Under the reign of Cyrus a remnant of Israel was allowed to return to the Promised Land. Once back in the land, Ezra oversaw the rebuilding of

the Temple. Shortly thereafter, Nehemiah returned and oversaw the rebuilding of Jerusalem's city wall. After these projects were completed, the people did something they were not able to do for a very long time: they listened to the book of the Law of Moses.

The People Asked for the Book

The book of Nehemiah records that **“all the people gathered as one man at the square... and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel”** (Nehemiah 8:1). This describes a people who had been deprived from hearing the Word of God. Ezra didn't force them to listen, instead they wanted the law read to them! Ezra read the law **“from early morning until midday... and all the**

people were attentive to the book of the law.... and when he opened it, all the people stood up” (Nehemiah 8:3, 5). I can only imagine such a sight. These people desired so greatly to hear God's Word that when it was finally read to them they treated the occasion with care and respect.

Allow me to ask a fairly pointed question: do you excitedly anticipate opportunities to listen to a sermon or participate in a Bible class, or does it seem more like a burdensome requirement? If you think listening to sermons or attending Bible class is a burden, I would beg you to consider what the Bible is. In First Corinthians, Paul described the message he taught as **“God's wisdom”** (2:7), **“the depths of God”** (2:10), **“the thoughts of God”** (2:11) and **“the mind of Christ”** (2:16). Consider the fact that sermons and Bible classes are one more opportunity for you to explore the mind of the eternal creator! Is it still a burden?

One of the things that made the remnant of Israel so excited to hear the Law was that they had been deprived of it for so long. It got to the point that they were spiritually hungry and thirsty! Jesus said, **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”** (Matthew 5:6). Have you ever seen a hungry man turn down food or a thirsty man refuse a drink? Until we have an appetite for the milk and meat of the mind of God, we will never desire that the book be read.

The People Understood the Book

Back in Nehemiah the story continues, **“So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading”** (Nehemiah 8:8, NKJV). Earlier we noted that **“the people were attentive to the book”** (Nehemiah 8:3).

Again, this was not something they were forced to sit through. To the contrary, it was something that they deeply desired to know and understand. It is clear that, after the law was read, the people understood the serious implications therein. **“All the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law”** (Nehemiah 8:9, NASB). The text describes how Ezra and the priests **“calmed all the people”** (Nehemiah 8:11). Finally, the people rejoiced and celebrated (Nehemiah 8:12a). The text explains that these extreme emotions took place **“because they understood the words which had been made known to them”** (Nehemiah 8:12b).

Do we experience these emotions when we read from the Creator's mind? I understand that different people display different emotions in different ways. For this reason we all must ask ourselves, *“Does the word of God ‘pierce’ my heart?”* (cf. Acts 2:37). These **“living and active”** words which are **“sharper than any two-edged sword”** (Hebrews 4:12) often travel in one ear and out the other, or are ignored altogether. If we casually skim the Bible from time to time, half-heartedly listen to sermons, or refuse to engage in Bible classes how can we ever expect to understand the Word? The Remnant of Israel **“understood the words”** and **“were weeping”** because they were attentive listeners!

Along these same lines, have you ever known anyone to say something like: *“I know enough to get me to heaven,”* or *“that doesn't effect my salvation, so it doesn't matter”*? This is a dangerous attitude to have. Christians should never be ones to settle for

mediocrity when it comes to understanding the mind of God. If the Creator's words are not important enough for us to explore, how can we convince a lost world that they are important for them to explore?

The People Applied the Book

It is interesting to me that the beginning of Nehemiah eight was not the only time the Jewish remnant asked to hear the law: **“Then on the second day the heads of the fathers' households of all the people, the priests and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law”** (Nehemiah 8:13). The people had already heard the entire law read aloud, but they still sought to further understand what God had revealed to them. The next verse describes that **“they found written in the law how the Lord had**