A Preaching Service

May 15, 2005 · PM · https://letgodbetrue.com/sermons/2005/a-preaching-service/

"And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel....

"So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading....

"And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them."

"Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner."

Nehemiah 8:1,8,12,18

Introduction:

1. 1. Since we are thinking about a new church building, we should remember the priority of God's word over facilities, for the people in this place stood in the street gladly to hear the word of the Lord explained to them.
2. 2. The preparation and response of the people to the preaching of God's word here is every true pastor's dream.
3. 3. We live in the perilous times of the last days, when men prefer entertainment and fables to the preaching of God's word, and God has sent a famine into the land for it (II Tim 4:3-4; Isaiah 30:8-11; Amos 8:11-12).
4. 4. Since there are a thousand inventions today to replace preaching, we must learn this event well (II Tim 4:2).
5. 5. Let us learn this lesson from Scripture, so we will not need 70 years of chastening in Babylon to learn it!

The Preparation (8:1-4)

A. The people gathered themselves together in a public assembly for congregational worship (8:1); which precludes the idea of some to forsake church assemblies for their private worship (Heb 10:25).

B. The people came together in total unity and peace without self-defeating division and strife (8:1); which was why Paul could not preach the fullness of the gospel to the Corinthians (I Cor 3:1-3).

C. Their own personal desire to hear and learn Scripture is clearly indicated by their request for it (8:1).

D. They chose Bible preaching rather than a gospel songfest, a Christmas cantata, a basketball game, the personal testimony of a "saved" movie star, or any fables or entertainment for itching ears (8:1).

E. They chose Ezra the scribe to read and teach rather than a famous or eloquent preacher (8:1); it was a

scribe's duty to copy and learn Scripture, and Ezra was a ready scribe in the law of God (Ezra 7:6).

F. They chose the book of the law of Moses for the preaching rather than the history of Genesis (8:1), for they were more eager for what they could do better to serve God than Joseph's history in Egypt.

G. They wanted God's commandments, which is the mark of spiritually minded men (8:1; Acts 2:37).

H. Ezra was a ready scribe in the law of God and did not need time to respond to such a request (8:2).

I. The women and all those who could hear with understanding were included, indicating God's endorsement of family worship rather than Sunday Schools and other manmade inventions (8:2).

J. They stood and heard the reading for at least three hours – from morning until midday (8:3); which is all the more remarkable in our generation when people cannot even sit that long and stay awake.

K. The people were attentive and focused on the reading rather than sleeping, daydreaming, reading the hymnal, reading some other place in the Bible, or looking around on the other people present (8:3).

L. Observe that it was their ears that were attentive – your eyes prove nothing (8:3); it is by disciplined and focused ears that you take in instruction (Luke 8:18; Prov 2:2; 4:20; 5:1,13; 18:15; 22:17; 28:9).

M. Ezra read the Scriptures to them – he did not tell stories about his childhood, slay anyone in the Spirit, use canned illustrations, crack jokes, use anecdotes, or even make a chalk drawing (8:3).

N. Ezra read the Scriptures to them – he did not sing, dance, laugh, fall, pantomime, or otherwise (8:3).

O. He used a pulpit – a scaffold, stage, or platform for public preaching – to elevate himself above the crowd for this public and solemn reading and teaching of God's precious word (8:4 cp 8:5).

P. Ezra's colleagues – priestly scribes and Levites – read and taught as well as Ezra (8:4 cp 8:7-8); which the Holy Spirit included in Holy Scripture to honor the lesser preachers of God's word.

The Preaching (8:5-8)

A. Since he was visibly above the people, they could easily see him open the book of God to read (8:5).

B. He opened the book in the sight of all the people; he did not open the books; they did not use projection screens with 18 different versions to pick and choose words for cool sound bites (8:5).

C. All the people stood up in solemn and fervent reverence when Ezra opened the book to read (8:5), which is a holy prompt for us to see how important it should be to hear God's word taught publicly.

D. The people had been sitting prior to the service; but they stood up when the preaching began (8:5).

E. Observe the reverential worship of God that accompanies proper reading of Scripture (8:6); which has not changed, for God must still be worshipped with reverence and godly fear (Heb 12:28-29).

F. Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God; he did not bless the god-buddy of carnal Christians (8:6).

G. The people participated reverently in the glorious worship of God with Ezra (8:6); for participation by the congregation of men, women, and children with "amen" is right (I Cor 14:16). Glory!

H. Lifting up hands to worship God, especially in prayer, is proper (8:6; Ps 134:2; Is 1:15; I Tim 2:8).

I. Humble and reverent worship of God includes bowing the head and looking down (8:6; Isaiah 6:2); "every

head bowed and every eye closed" might be acceptable, but not for a manmade invitation.

J. Ezra's assistants helped him instruct the people rather than provide them entertainment (8:7); there was no youth minister, music minister, sports minister, travel minister, or children's magician there!

K. The purpose and result of preaching should be understanding – an increase in knowledge and wisdom (8:7; Jer 3:15; Matt 7:28-29; Acts 17:1-3; Eph 4:13-15; Heb 5:12-14); it is not a warm and fuzzy feeling by a charismatic entertainer with funny illustrations to make you feel good about life.

L. The people continued to stand in place; they did not leave early or complain about hard seats (8:7)!

M. They read in the book in the law of God rather than many books claiming to be the law of God (8:8).

N. They read in the book in the law of God rather than religious poetry or diary of Mother Teresa (8:8).

O. They read in the book in the law of God rather than some commentary of the church fathers (8:8).

P. They read distinctly, proving individual words are very important (8:8; Pr 30:5; Luke 4:4; Gal 3:16), which is totally corrupted by reading two or three versions with different and conflicting words.

Q. They read distinctly so all the people could easily distinguish the words of the reading (8:8), which objective is not accomplished with voice fluctuations, foolish emphases, or frequent interruptions.

R. They gave the sense – the meaning or interpretation – of the words they read to the people (8:8).

S. It is the duty of preachers to give the spiritual sense of God's words for correct understanding (8:8).

T. They rightly divided the word of truth as faithful ministers in applying secondary senses where needed (8:8), which is the duty of New Testament preachers in order to please God (II Tim 2:15).

U. They did not give primary definitions of words, as all the people already knew them (8:8); they gave the sense beyond the literal words, which can only be understood by much study (I Tim 4:13-15).

V. Distinct reading and sound interpretation are the means by which the people understood (8:8); and this detailed description is given to us to help define the duty of preaching. See Matthew 5:21-48!

The Party (8:9-12)

A. These people mourned and wept when they prepared and focused on the reading of Scripture (8:9); it is a prepared heart that hears God's words and mourns for violations of it (Luke 8:18; II Kgs 22:11).

B. Though there was definite reason to mourn, understanding Scripture calls rather for holy joy (8:9); this was especially true on this holy day of trumpet blowing and worship (Lev 23:34; Num 29:1).

C. Their leaders called for a time of celebration and feasting for understanding the Scriptures (8:10).

D. Mourning is not always appropriate, especially when there is reason for holy rejoicing in God (8:11).

E. The celebration and attendant mirth of the people was in appreciation for understanding (8:12), which is mirth the wicked do not understand and will never partake of (Prov 14:13; Hab 3:17-19).

F. Celebration and mirth describes those who appreciate truth (8:11; Luke 24:32; Acts 13:44,48).

G. They responded as God's people should respond when understanding Scripture (I Thess 2:13).

H. They had more than definitions of individual sound bites declared, for they understood the message (8:12); the idea of Ezra pronouncing a word and reading a dictionary definition is profanely absurd.

I. Godly saints will be extremely thankful and want to celebrate for God sending them the truth (8:12).

The Performance (8:13-18)

A. One day of hearing preaching was not enough, so they came together for more (8:13), which was the second day of the seventh month (8:2), which was 13 days before the feast (Lev 23:34).

B. We can see the leaders of the people also coming to learn more so as to understand and teach (8:13).

C. Great men will learn Scripture to be leaders at home (8:13; Gen 18:19; Ps 78:1-8; I Cor 14:34-35).

D. They learned by hearing and understanding that they had forsaken the Lord's feast of booths, which is also called the feast of ingathering and feast of tabernacles (8:14; Lev 23:33-44; Num 29:12-38).

E. When a people come eager to hear, the Lord will reveal truth to them (8:15; Acts 10:1-6; 16:13-15).

F. These willing hearers did not resist the new commandment, but obeyed it quickly (8:16); they were not just hearers of the word, but doers of it (James 1:21-25); they changed their practice right then!

G. This feast was not light matter: it cost them good money for the sacrifices and a lot of convenience and comfort to construct and stay in booths of branches for a week; but they did it anyway (8:16)!

H. This feast had been neglected in some ways for over 1000 years, but they did not excuse themselves (8:17); they submitted themselves to God's words regardless of others or tradition.

I. Their spirit about it was not a begrudging reluctance to obey but rather a very great gladness (8:17).

J. They did not waste a single day without hearing the book of the law of God read to them (8:18); which eight days are the days of the feast of booths after harvest (Lev 23:33-36; Num 29:12-38).

K. They kept the feast for the full duration and solemnly according to the specified manner (8:18), for those who seek the word of God and hear it with understanding want to keep it exactly as written.

Conclusion:

A. Last Sunday evening I preached to you about being Bible Christians. Here is a picture of Bible Christians!

B. If you go through this week without reading the Bible, you cannot claim any relationship to these saints!

For Further Study:

A. Sermon Outline: "Noble Hearers," which identifies those traits that characterize godly hearers and their response.

B. Study outline, "Knowing the Scriptures," is a very detailed and lengthy study of how to understand the Bible.

C. Sermon Outline: "Do We Need Teachers?" corrects the misconception that God teaches all men by His Spirit.

D. Sermon Outline: "Every Word of God," shows the great importance of every word and its role in true doctrine.

E. Sermon Outline: “Contemporary Christianity,” reviews the inventions added to the word of God in recent years.