

Nehemiah 8:1-18

Understanding the Word of God

In Chamber of Secrets- Harry Potter. There is a fairly depressing start where His aunty and uncle and his cousin treat him like rubbish, like he is a burden and a complete loser. And for Harry it felt like no-one cared for him.

Have you ever felt like that? Like you are invisible and it *genuinely* feels like no-one could care about you at all?

Maybe when you're starting a new job or sitting at home by yourself again. Feeling like no one gives two hoots about you. Or for our sponsor children- living in a shack, father has left mum and 5 kids alone to fend for themselves. The poorest of the poor- feeling like the lowest of the low.

But what if someone loved you greatly and had been writing to you and trying to contact you? Someone was sharing how you were greatly loved and cared for- but you never got the sms/the email/the letter. *Like in Harry Potter- No letters, no correspondence.*

All by himself.

But in reality his friends had been writing to him constantly.

we discover that Dobby the house elf kept the letters from Harry.

The reality was that his friends loved him lots, they wrote to him over and over again. But he never knew.

In Nehemia we see the Israelites were in a very similar situation.

IN 587BC Judah(the people of God) were defeated by the Babylonians, who were the world-empire of their time.

The Babylonians completely smashed God's people and ruled over them.

Many of the leaders and ruling class of Judah were taken from their home country and forced to live in Babylon.

The temple of the Lord which was the centre of the Jewish faith and at the heart of the unity of the people, was completely flattened.

And Judah itself became just a small outpost of the Babylonian empire.

Many if not most thought that Judah (and with it the Jewish faith) had become a footnote in history.

You can only **imagine** how they would have felt...

God has promised to Abraham that his descendents were to be **the chosen people of God**, through whom God was to reconcile the world to himself.

They were told they were *precious* and ***much loved*** by him- but everything happening to them and around them said the complete opposite.

BUT... during this 50 year exile from their home land they began to realize that God had *not* finished with them.

These people remained the people of God despite everything that had happened to them...despite all appearances- God's people remained the legitimate heirs to the promises of God.

And it is in this book that we witness Nehemiah and the people of God despite tough opposition, **taking hold of the promises** given to them as the people of God.

From an economic point of view, and a quality of life perspective-we have it pretty good here in Australia.

As our missionary friends from Tanzania put it- everything in Australia is awesome, the water is awesome, the roads are awesome, the food is awesome, our doctors are awesome, our homes are awesome...so sometimes we imagine we can go it alone and without God.

But every now and then God reminds us that first and foremost **we need him!**

Have you ever felt like this? Felt that desperate need to hear from God? Its often not until something big, or distressing or uncertain happens. For those in the developing world it might be when your house colapses in a typhoon and you have no way of getting it fixed or your baby contracts malaria. In Australia in might be when relationships break down or when a family member is struggling with severe depression.

And once again like God's people in Nehemiah's time- you realise once again your need to come back to God, the creator who is in control of all things and loves his people.

1.Great news rediscovered

Occasionally God speaks audibly to one of his prophets (ike when Jesus spoke to Paul on the Damascus road.

But the way God promises to speak to all people is through his word, the Bible, the scriptures.

And so the Israleites in their desperation and captivity call Ezra to bring them the Scriptures- because that is how God promises to speak to his people.

They knew Ezra was committed to the word of God, to reading it, to obeying and teaching it to others.

And so they took the initiative to invite him out to read the law.

And who wouldn't love the chance to share it

This is word of the living God, their creator. The one who made them and called them as his people.

Ezra knows there is nothing better than people who **want** to hear from their God.

He knows there is nothing better than people who **know** they **need** to hear from their God.

You know- God's people then were like us, like people in every country -we find it so easy to forget our NEED for God and our NEED for his word.

It gets like that doesn't it. Looking everywhere for what's new and exciting and informative and the clue to life- The iPhone 5c, or a new government, or the latest self help book etc. But these things are no answer.

And in Nehemiah They rediscovers that.

¹ **all the people** assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. **They told Ezra the scribe** to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel.

^{2(b)} He read it aloud from **daybreak** till **noon** as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And **all the people listened attentively** to the Book of the Law.

What's so great about the word of God?

For the Jews- they knew they needed God.

They were solely trusting in **God alone** in a hostile situation being occupied by the Babylonians and at their mercy.

Trying desperately to restore the temple and the walls of Jerusalem so that they may return to worshipping God.

All the while facing extremely violent opposition, that their lives were at risk.

Just like many of the countries Compassion works in like India, Indonesia, Bangladesh.

What do you think would motivate thousands of Christians *today* to join together in the middle of Sydney or Melbourne for the Bible was to be read aloud for six hours straight, then come back for more; seven or eight days in a row?

If we lived in parts of Indonesia or Bangladesh where we would be arrested for doing what Bruce does here each week- preaching salvation through faith alone in Christ alone. If our ministers and bible study leaders were in jail facing the death penalty like pastors are in Iran. *That* might motivate us back to the word of God.

Or when we are feeling overwhelmed or out of place or lonely or lost. That might motivate us back to God and his word.

Sometimes your situation reminds you that we have no where else to go...no self help book, no motivational speaker can ultimately do anything for you--- only place to go is to God and his words of strength and comfort.

And the Israelites knew here the treasure they have in their hands.
They know the Bible is **Divine truth** shared with **mortals**.
God revealing himself, sharing himself.
This is God's communication to humans.
They rediscovered the good news!
God speaking clearly, comfortingly, authoritatively and lovingly to his people.
Scriptures are **the** only trustworthy source to understand God and his plan for his people.

What an incredible **treasure** they knew they had. That's why they called Ezra up to read it allowed for them.
What kind of **arrogant lunatics** would just ignore their Creator and go it alone- trying to work things out by themselves?

(Pause)

I can't change the time on my **car clock-radio**.
Daylight savings messes with things and now everywhere I go I worry I'm about to be there an hour late (or unsure why I have arrived an hour early)
There are 2 things a wise person wanting to fix this situation could do- 1 get out the instructions from the glovebox & 2 read the instructions and follow them.

Here the Israelites knew it. Why go it alone?- we have the words of eternal life!- the manual from the maker- the very words of God.
***and how incredible that is for a people who were struggling, suffering and lost without them...

And the incredible news is that We've got it too!
The word from our creator!
Why do we try and wing it?
Why live like we are alone?
Why do we live **like we know more** than the one who made all things, the director of all things?
Why search elsewhere for the very blueprint for life?
In the Scriptures- in the Bible is the good news from the one who loves you and wants you to trust in him, the one who is completely trustworthy.
So grab hold of it and don't let go.
Rediscover the good news for yourself.

Like the kids in the projects in Indonesia. God's word is at the heart of the projects, God's word is at the heart of what they do day in and day out- they read their Bibles because true hope is found only in God and his words to us.

Download it to your phone, your ipad, your PC, put a hardcopy in your backpack.
Join a Bible study group, GO to your bible study group, read it on the train, read it with a friend, attend your church, LISTEN in church.
These are the words of God.
So it should be it is **no surprise** the people of God all crowd into the city to hear Ezra read it outloud day after day after day.

DO you hang out to hear the words of your God?
Why not?

What a great gift God has given his people! Let's rediscover it and grab hold of it.

So- What happens next?

2. **God's Great news praised**

Have you ever had to sit through at a school awards night -talk that is like having your teeth pulled?

What was the response as Ezra took to the stage to read the word of God in the public square as the whole nation stood waiting-was it a clanger, cringeworthy or a borefest???

Did they snuggle in to their pews for a snooze?

No way....⁵ Ezra opened the book....

⁶ Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

Pause...

As Ezra read from the Law the people absolutely loved the words of their God. They loved what they heard!!!

And why wouldn't they.

A people seeking direction about how to live as God's people in a world where they are nobodies?

As individual people who are overjoyed to once again be reminded from God himself that they are loved by Him.

That he is working his promises out through his people.

Do **you** get this excited about the chance to hear God speak through his word?

We **should** be just as excited about having the chance to hear the Bible. Just as excited as the kids and their families and the Compassion staff in the projects throughout the world. Just as excited as the Israelite people.

What a privilege to soak up the very words of the creator. Amen Amen- and we bow down and worship the Lord!

Compassion In the 2011-12 financial year alone, Compassion's church partners distributed 249,795 Bibles to Compassion assisted children and families around the world.

Like finding out for the first time that God had written his word to you and for you- but the mail had been diverted, or lost or withheld....but has finally arrived.

What an awesome delivery for these 249,795 children and their families.

And did you know individuals like you now sponsor over 1.4million children worldwide. Caring for the desperate physical needs of these children- but hand in hand with that loving care is the Gospel- the good news of Jesus.

Discovering that **God loves them** and has a eternal plan for those who trust him and follow him.

Discovering **through the Bible** that he has Jesus for them, to die for them, to pay the price for their sins, to bring them into relationship with Him.

Hearing for the first time that even though your home is on a rubbish dump and you spend your life sorting through other peoples bags of rotting garbage- discovering God's words that he does **not** think you are a piece of junk, but you are loved by him. That he has a plan for his people, for those who trust in Him.

Praise the Lord he speaks to us and doesn't leave us without **hope** and **without** God.

God's word is for you too! Whoever we are we need to hear from the God who calls us into relationship with him and calls us to live for him.

What was the result of the word being read?

3. Great news reaction **Of course they reacted!**

⁷ The Levites—(list of names)—instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. ⁸ They read from the Book of the Law of God, **making it clear**^[a] and **giving the meaning** so that the people **understood** what was being read.

Then down to verse 12-

¹² Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

But through different circumstances God again reminds us of our need for Him and his word -in our sorrow, in our pride, in our ignorance, in our weakness. In all these things he reminds you of your need for him and his word.

And what a blessing that God gives fellow Christians to helping us learn and understand the Bible.

Who are the people in your life that, like the Levites, help you and others understand the Bible?

Like your pastor, maybe your Bible study leader (or youth group leader) and our Sunday School teachers. Good writers of Christian books.

They help us read and understand the amazing words for God. And the word of God isn't just for hard times- it is invaluable for all times:

1. to discover salvation

John 6:68

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the **words of eternal life**.

These are the words of eternal life- salvation and life in Christ. We ave the whole Bible & we have the Messiah Jesus that they were waiting for revealed to us.

2. to encourage one another

Colossians 3:16,

¹⁶ Let the **word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.** ¹⁷

3. And to grow in godliness

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2 Timothy 3

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for **teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,** ¹⁷ so that the man (and woman) of God may **be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

The Bible is not an optional extra-like mag wheels.
It is central to our life as God's children, God breathed and equipping us thoroughly for every good work.

In sad times, in confusing times, in uncertain times, in good times.

Why would you go anywhere else? We have nothing better to offer these children.

The incredible blessing of having God's word front and central.

That's why every child gets a Bible and the local church teaches them all about the good news of Jesus.

What a privilege we have to have the word of God. It **must** remain **central** to who we are as individuals, who we are as a church, in everything we do, every decision we make.

It is so easy for us to take it for granted...but in the end the Bible is the word of God to you. And it is the word of God to those in desperate need for good news.

What a joy- Amen? Amen!