



“So Be It” - July 26, 2020

## OPEN

Have you ever heard of William Cameron Townsend? He “was born into a humble farming family in California on 9 July 1896 and...attended Occidental College from 1914 to 1917. During that time, he became involved with the Student Volunteer Movement and became deeply interested in mission work...After graduating from the college, he and a friend visited Guatemala to sell Spanish Bibles to the locals. To their surprise, they found that most of the local people spoke other minority languages. One man even rebuked him when Cameron tried to sell him a Spanish Bible, ‘Why, if your God is so smart, hasn’t he learned our language?’...This so impressed Townsend that he soon began working to learn and translate the Bible into the Cakchiquel language.” In 1934 Townsend founded a linguistics institute to teach the skills needed for Bible translation. And then in 1943 a partner agency was started, called Wycliffe Bible Translators. “Today, out of over 7,000 living languages, WBT have translated portions of Scripture into over 3,300 languages.” <https://www.evangelical-times.org/43871/the-life-and-legacy-of-william-cameron-townsend/>

Can you imagine a world where you could not read the Bible in your language?

At Cornerstone we value the Bible. Our Statement of Faith affirms,

We believe the Bible to be the complete Word of God; that the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testament in the original manuscripts, were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and were entirely free from error. Further, we believe that the Bible is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice (see II Tim 3:16-17; II Peter 1:19-21).

Last week we noted the successful completion of Nehemiah’s mission (apart from the gates) in fifty-two days! How!? Even enemies of Israel saw that “*this work had been done with the help of our God*” (Nehemiah 6:16) But what a tragedy would it have been had the walls of the city been restored, but the voice of God not restored in the people!

How many congregations have built beautiful church buildings and exciting ministry programs, but the congregation is not hearing God’s Word!?

Nehemiah 7 helps us “make census of it all” by documenting the Jews who returned to Jerusalem from Persia. It is also a transition point in the story. Allan Redpath, in his book *Victorious Christian Service* (F. H. Revell, 1958, 16) suggests two parts to Nehemiah:

- ✓ Chapters 1-6 - *Reconstruction of the walls*
- ✓ Chapters 7-13 - *Re-instruction of the people*

Nehemiah was not just in “project management”! His work of rebuilding was to restore God’s glory; remember how he wept for Jerusalem (1:4ff)? Are we grieved by “broken walls”? *What walls need to be rebuilt in our lives? Where is the rubble in our congregation?* The Bible rebuilds and restores!

In Nehemiah 8 we meet Ezra, who was in Jerusalem thirteen years before Nehemiah – read the description of this man in **Ezra 7:6**.

- 536 BC** *Jews return with Zerubbabel during reign of Cyrus, but only Temple foundation and altar was rebuilt.*
- 518 BC** *Haggai and Zechariah inspired the completion of the Temple, now during the reign of Darius.*
- 445 BC** *Nehemiah hears God’s call to restore the walls of Jerusalem while Artaxerxes ruled Persian Empire.*

## DIG

This chapter is about the transformative power of God’s Word. Kayaking helped me slow down to contemplate what this passage teaches about God’s Word. Like a good paddling technique, there is a sustainable rhythm of Scripture produced growth which God has for us. Think of four words: **Reading Receiving Rejoicing Returning** How did this happen in Nehemiah’s story? In 8:6 is the succinct prayer: “**Amen! Amen!**” Standing, raised hands, and bowed heads testifies to the power of Scripture. Consider the four-fold way God’s Word transforms us.

### ⇒ Reading the Word of God - vv. 1-5

First, we see an **appetite** for the Word of God. The people requested that Ezra read the book of the Law (v. 1) and listened from “early morning until midday” (v. 3). But this was not just Ezra’s personal agenda – he was surrounded by leaders (v. 4). The Word of God needed to be **inculcated** [“instill, implant by persistent instruction”] into their lives.

What stirs us to seek God’s voice? If we are invested in a *sincere* effort to bring glory to God (i.e. wall building) we will hunger to hear from Him. How is your appetite for God’s Word? Do you need to be inculcated with Scripture? Neglecting God’s Word is primarily a *relational* issue, not just an *informational* issue [i.e. reading, study].

## ⇒ Receiving the Word of God - vv. 6-8

In I Thessalonians 2:13 wrote, “we never stop thanking God that when you received his message from us, you didn’t think of our words as mere human ideas. You accepted what we said as the very word of God – which, of course, it is. And this word continues to work **[operates]** in you who believe.”

Nehemiah also recorded the operating of Scripture upon people, who were in agreement – “Amen”!

In addition, the Scriptures were explained and translated, the people could **connect** with the commands of God (vv. 7-8). Star Trek captain Jean-Luc Picard (Patrick Stewart) said such lines as “Seize the time. Live now! Now will never come again. Things are only impossible until they are not. Make it so.” Are we saying an enthusiastic “make it so” (amen) to God?

## ⇒ Rejoicing in the Word of God - vv. 9-12

What brought joy to these Jews? At first, there was weeping which was likely conviction and sorrow for their “kingdom neglect” (v. 9). But there had to be more to their joy than the instruction to celebrate instead of mourning (vv. 9-10). When we truly encounter God’s Word, saying “amen” to its instruction in our lives, the result will be **joy & freedom**.

In Psalm 139:23-24 David prayed, “*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting!*”

This is the work of the Word – to reflect our insufficiency – to reveal Jesus’ sufficiency! James 1:22-25 reminds us that observing must become obedience for freedom to result. That is why the people of Jerusalem rejoiced when “*they understood the words which had been made known to them*” (v. 12) because they then know God’s forgiveness. Thus the “joy of the Lord” brought strength (v. 10).

## ⇒ Returning to the Word God - vv. 13-18

The final benefit of God’s Word is that it helps us to return for more nourishment. Having heard God’s Word a second day, the people addressed an area of “kingdom neglect”. For many, many years Israel had failed to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles (also called the [Festival of Booths](#); v. 17)

Tabernacles; *Sukkot*). This was a joyful, thankful, harvest festival. More specifically, it portrayed the wilderness wandering in which Israel lived redeemed, but far from the full inheritance of their relationship with God. In celebrating this festival, the people would be reminded that God had not only redeemed them from Egypt (in bondage to sin) but that He was also bringing them into Canaan (the fullness of joy and abundant life in Christ).

Ruth Haley Barton suggests that mature followers of Jesus “must have some basic spiritual practices in place to keep them in a posture of willing surrender to God.” (*Pursuing God’s Will Together*, IVP, 2012, 39) Such was the Festival of Booths. And such is the power of God’s Word. Regular feeding upon the Word of God is a vital spiritual practice that keeps us moving “out of the wilderness” and into “promise land living”.

### REFLECT

Have you got a sense of the pattern of God’s Word, operational in our day to day lives? Take a moment to consider how you can engage in...

reading ⇄ receiving ⇄ rejoicing ⇄ returning



Do you remember Paddle-to-the-Sea? It was a book (1941) by Holling C. Holling and a National Film Board production (1966) by Bill Mason. As the tale goes, the carefully carved Indian and canoe was released in the waterways near Lake Superior and travelled to the Atlantic at the Gulf of St Lawrence. But paddle was vulnerable to every wind and wave.

**Pause and think about** all the “winds and waves” of un-truth that are coming against the canoe of your life!

Rather than being tossed about by untruth (see **James 1:6; Jude 12**) Christians have the Word of God as light, guide, and foundation! The Bible brings change, forgiveness, joy, freedom, and strength. Are you engaging in God’s Word or neglecting it?

**Pause and think about** the way the early Church functioned during a crisis. What was the pattern of a “missional community” in this passage that is applicable for us today? **see Acts 2:42-47**

For more input, please watch [“What Does Missional Community Life Look Like”](#) featuring Jeff Vanderstelt’s ministry in Tacoma, WA.