

Teaching: Nehemiah 8

Sunday, July 23, 2023
Covenant Church
Pastor Zack Phillips

Nehemiah 7:73b—8:12

7:73b ...When the seventh month came—the people of Israel being settled in their towns—^{8:1} all the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel. ² Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. ³ 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 those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. ⁴ The scribe Ezra stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uria, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. ⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. ⁸ So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

⁹ And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, “This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.” For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” ¹¹ So the Levites stilled 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.

A. Introduction

Increasingly, we don't seem to want teaching, sermons, or Bible reading.¹

B. Brain Science

Implicit bias; people with brain injuries; fMRIs

We are not “brains-on-a-stick” (Jamie Smith) and we may be “riders-on-elephants” (J. Haidt).

¹ See <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/april/state-of-bible-reading-decline-report-26-million.html>Re

C. The Importance of Teaching

The Shema (Deut 6:4-9); the Emmaus Road (Luke 24); the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20); Jesus' own ministry; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Paul's pattern ("be who you are!")

Outline of the Gospel of Matthew

1:1-2:23: Introduction: The new obedience
[1] 3:1-7:29: Teaching on the higher righteousness
[2] 8:1-11:1: Teaching on true discipleship
[3] 11:2-13:52: Teaching on the kingdom of heaven
[4] 13:53-19:2: Teaching on the forgiving church
[5] 19:3-26:1: Teaching on judgment: doing God's will
26:2-28:20: Conclusion: Obedience and resurrection²

D. The Goal(s) of Teaching

Mind, heart, and gut

Some Recommended Reading

Jim Wilder and Michel Hendricks, *The Other Half of Church: Christian Community, Brain Science, and Overcoming Spiritual Stagnation* (Chicago: Moody, 2020)

James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016)

Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2013)

Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (New York: Random House, 2014)

James Clear, *Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones* (New York: Avery, 2018)

Anna Lembke, *Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance in the Age of Indulgence Hardcover* (New York: Dutton, 2021)

Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013)

Question: What is one thing that God may have said to you through this sermon?

² B. W. Bacon first made the proposal by noting the seeming division of the gospel into five teaching blocks. The schema presented here is a version of that which appears in the textbook *The Anatomy of the New Testament*.