

Small Groups @ TBC Sermon Discussion Notes **Date of Sermon:** 17th January 2016

**Speaker:** Paul Ferguson

**Title:** Hearing Scripture

**Introduction:** The aim of this talk was to explore the idea that scripture is a primary means by which God speaks. This is not just in a propositional sense - God has spoke and there are truths to believe - this of course is true. But we were seeking to consider that scripture is, or should be, an encounter with the living God. Therefore, how do we read scripture? Where do we position ourselves to scripture, over or under? How do we respond to scripture?

**Review:** (invite one or more who have heard the talk to give their own brief review) **Read:** Nehemiah 8: 1-12

**Reflect:** Paul began by talking about Israel's return from Exile. Nehemiah, formally to cup bearer to the king of Persia Artaxerxes, and now the governor of Judea. He had come back to the land and was engaged in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. This is the context of the reading: Nehemiah, Ezra and the people seeking to reestablish the city of Jerusalem, their life and culture, following year of exile. The key factor in this work of renewal was a new and fresh encounter with God through the reading of and listening to the Law - scripture. Consider how God's word has worked in your life?

**Thoughts to consider:**

**Letting the bible speak for itself.** Ch 8: 3. Ezra the priest, in the first instance, read the Law aloud to the people from daybreak to noon. It seems that our engagement with scripture can fall short because we can seek to set the terms of engagement. "I am searching the scriptures so that can find what I want to find" - sort of thing. Or we can adopt an approach that views the bible as a manual for living, looking for principles, a pop up book of promises etc. Of course this book is full of wisdom and help but the problem with this approach is that it puts us in the driving seat instead of God. Can you see in the Nehemiah account how the

scriptures were allowed free reign? How might we allow God's word to speak for itself in our lives?

**Encountering God through the scriptures.** It is significant to note that the reading of the Law didn't, in the first instance, promote an increase in knowledge but an experiential response from the people - we see weeping, worship and joy. How much do we expect God to meet us through the reading of scripture or do we often see it as an information gathering exercise? Discuss.

**Location Location Location.** Paul also talked about the location of Ezra's reading. Not in the temple amongst the priests but the square before the Water Gate. This location has all sorts of significance but the fact that it was not in the temple and amongst men, women and all who can understand, places scripture, God's word, in the hands of all who will listen. We have, historically speaking, unprecedented access to the bible. We can all hear the bible speak. I wonder why it is easy take the scripture for granted? How many Bibles do each group member own? What place does bible reading have in your daily life?

**Studying the scriptures.** We have said that scripture is accessible to all, and that as we read we should expect to meet with God. However, this in no way replaces the need for study and instruction. We can see that the Levites were told to explain the Law to the people so that they could understand it. God gives the gift of the teacher to the church. How does the thought that we can hear God's voice through study and instruction appeal to you? Is bible study part of your life as a Christian? Perhaps you could access some study aids and resources - see David or Paul for help if required.

**Eager to hear.** We note that the people were eager to hear the word read and also responsive. **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.** It can be very easy to read the bible without expectation and not to take the time to allow the word to illicit a 'heart' response. What could be some of the things that cause us to lack expectation and

hurry our reading/engagement with scripture? Share amongst the group some of the strategies employed for bible reading.

**Respond:**

**Love for God:** Ezra and people worshipped as they heard God speak through the reading of the Law. How might we develop our private & devotional engagement with bible and we seek to hear him speak?

**Love for one another:** The renewal movement led by Nehemiah and Ezra was a community wide event. They gathered under the word. How might we employ the bible in our gatherings, be they with friends, small groups or wherever?

**Love for neighbour & world:** If a Christian community finds it's identity from gathering around God's word in order to hear his voice. Consider how we can show this identity to our friends and neighbours?

**And finally:**

Before you conclude, ask each person:

- What is the main thing you are taking away as an action point? • How can we pray for you?
- Is there anything we can check on next time we meet?

**Leaders: feel free to be selective and creative with your use of these notes.**

**Don't feel you have to use all of the material, but do try to keep the shape of**

**Review - Read - Reflect - Respond**