

**Sermon – 27/08/2006 pm**

## **Read the Word Regularly**

Study Text: Deuteronomy 31:9-13

From time to time the Bible Society and other groups arrange for the Bible to be read aloud in a public place in our city. All through the morning or afternoon, or both, people take it in turn to read. The Bible is of course read in public from our churches each Lord's day – or should be. In some churches Bible reading is minimal, or even non-existent.

The Bible is the inspired word of God. It is a living and powerful word. This word has power to touch hearts and change them. This word is for instruction in righteousness, righteousness that exalts a nation. This word is profitable for teaching and correction of every man, woman and child. Many around us are calling for our children to be better taught. Well here is the way to do just that!

In the nation of Israel the Book of the Law was to be read every seven years. Not very often you might say – but how long is it since it has been read to our nation? How long is it since it has been read in your home? The people of God were to hear this law regularly. They were to hear, and fear the Lord, and to adhere to his commands.

Moses wrote the law which he had just spoken to the people on the plains of Moab. He gave this to the priests to be kept with the Ark of the Covenant, for which they had responsibility (31:9, 26). He commanded the priests and elders to read this law before all Israel at the end of every seven years. In this Sabbath year, or year of release, slaves were set free and debts were cancelled. It was an appropriate time to remember the God's goodness and mercy.

In this Sabbath year the Book of the Law was read during the feast of Tabernacles or Booths. At this annual feast the people built tents in their yards or on their roof tops, and lived in these for seven days (Nehemiah 8). This was to remind them of the days when they, or their parents, were kept by the Lord as they traversed the wilderness. The Lord gave them food and water, and their clothes did not wear out. Hearing the Book of the Law they would have been reminded of those days (29:5, 6).

### **Hear**

This book was to be read before the whole assembly of Israel. *Gather the people together, men, women and children, and the stranger who is within your gates* (31:12). It was for all the people, not just a select few. This word could be understood by all. It was for all the people for all time. If this is so, why is it that some churches have an old people's service and a separate young people's service, a service for this group and a service for that group? Is there not one Bible and one God whom we all worship?

This Book of the Law is the word of God. It would be a lamp to their feet and a light to their path; young, old and stranger alike. Without this word they would wander from the path. They would turn away from the Lord and begin to follow the dictates of their own heart. As we will see this is just what happened. They could not even continue reading the Book every seven years.

Most of the teaching in those days would have been oral. Even today many societies are predominately illiterate so the people have to hear the word read. On one visit to a village in India I heard the Ramayana, a Hindu holy book, being read over a loud speaker. It went on all day. One minister in India has loud speakers on the top of his church so the people around can hear when he reads the Bible.

Having heard the word of God read the people would learn it, and teach it to their children. This is what Moses commanded – so it was not as if they only heard it every seven years. Parents were to teach their children morning and evening every day. They were to write the words of the Law on their doorposts and their gates (6:7-9). As the children were taught, so the whole family would be reminded of the commands of the Lord their God.

Are you hearing the word of God day and night? We are so privileged to have our very own copy of the word of God. We are so blessed to be able to read it. Millions of people in this world cannot afford to buy a Bible, or cannot read. Children should hear this word even before they learn to read. Let the Bible be among the first books they start to read. Let this word of God take a prominent place in all our homes – before newspapers, TV or radio. Let it not only be prominent on our bookshelf but out on the table being read. When your pastor visits do not say ‘Oh, we have a Bible somewhere in the house’.

Israel failed to obey this command given by Moses. For decades, even centuries the Book of the law did not see the light of day in Israel. In the days of King Josiah, Hilkiah the priest came across this book while cleaning up the temple (II Chronicles 34:14). When it was read before all the people they threw out their idols and re-instituted Yahweh worship, including the Passover.

When Ezra and Nehemiah returned from exile in Babylon they lead the people in covenant renewal. Ezra the priest read from the Book of the law from morning till midday (Nehemiah 8:3). The reading was accompanied by explanation where necessary. *He read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense and helped them to understand the reading* (Nehemiah 8:8). Was this not what we call preaching?

## **Fear**

*That they might hear and that they may learn to fear the Lord your God* (31:12, 13). When Josiah heard the words of the Book of the law he tore his clothes and wept (II Chronicles 34:27). When the people heard Ezra read the Book of the law they all wept (Nehemiah 8:9). *The word of God is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit* (Hebrews 4:12).

Ezra and Nehemiah proclaimed that day as holy to the Lord. They comforted the people and encouraged them as they turned back to the Lord their God in fear. *Do not sorrow for the joy of the Lord is your strength* (Nehemiah 8:10).

How long will it be till we witness the word of God being read in this manner? How long will it be till those hearing the word of God weep over their sin? How long will it be till we see the fear of the Lord that overcame Josiah, and Ezra and Nehemiah? How long will it be till we see the fear of God that came upon the church in Jerusalem when God’s wrath was revealed – *and none dared join them* (Acts 5:11, 13).

Are you walking in the fear of the Lord? Fear God and keep his commandments (Ecclesiastes 11:13). The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10). Turn from sin that so easily entangles and run with perseverance the race set before you, looking unto Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

## **Adhere**

*And carefully observe all the words of this law* commanded Moses (31:12). Hear, fear and adhere to the word of God. *Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves* (James 1:22). Some Christians think that to fear the Lord means to do nothing. They will withdraw from the world and live in their own little community, lest they sin.

I remember when we had an acting principal at our college. He sat in the principal's chair but did nothing. He signed no papers, and made no decisions. He was afraid of doing the wrong thing or offending someone. Some Christians approach the Lord in this way. They have as little contact with the world as possible in case they sin. Sitting at home they feel safe from all evil.

Jesus told a parable about such people. In this parable a man gave each of his servants a sum of money and went away. Two servants traded and made interest on that money but one just sat on it. He said to his master 'I feared you, so I did nothing' (Luke 19:21). Was the Lord pleased with this servant? No! Is this the way in which you fear the Lord?

The fear of God empowers us to walk in his ways and to serve him. It is not an excuse to sit and do nothing. Serve the Lord with fear and trembling. That is what the apostle Paul did (I Corinthians 2:3). *Serve the Lord acceptably with reverence and godly fear* (Hebrews 12:28). *Do not sorrow for the joy of the Lord is your strength* said Nehemiah. We can walk in the fear of the Lord and the joy of the Lord at that same time.

Beware of idle hands. It was idleness that led to David's downfall. He was wandering around at home when he should have been in the battle. *Fight the good fight of faith* Paul told Timothy (I Timothy 6:12). We are called to be soldiers of Jesus Christ (II Timothy 2:3). Foot soldiers not desk soldiers. What sort of soldiers do we see in the church today? What sort of soldier are you?

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