

God's Powerful Word (Nehemiah 8:1-12)

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[0 : 00] So the reading is from Nehemiah chapter 8, verses 1 to 12. All the people came together as one in the square before the water gate.

They told Ezra, the teacher of the law, to bring out the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel. So on the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand.

He read aloud from daybreak to 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. Ezra, the teacher of the law, stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion.

Beside him, on his right, stood Matithiah, Shema, Aniah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseah.

[1 : 17] And on his left were Padidhiah, Mishael, Meokijah, Hashem, Hashbatana, Zechariah and Mishulim.

Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them. And as he opened it, the people all stood up.

Ezra praised the Lord, the great God. And all the people lifted their hands and responded, Amen, Amen.

Then they bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. The Levites, Yeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akub, Shepshbethi, Hodiah, Measeah, Kalaita, Azaria, Jezebeth, Hanan and Paliah instructed the people in the law while the people were standing there.

They read from the book of the law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.

[2 : 52] Then Nehemiah, the governor, Ezra, the priest and teacher of the law, and the Levites who were instructing the people, said to them all, This day is holy to the Lord your God.

Do not mourn or weep. For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Lord. Nehemiah said, Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks and send some to those who have nothing prepared.

This day is holy to our God, to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. The Levites calmed all the people, saying, Be still, for this is a holy day.

Do not grieve. Then all the people went away to eat and drink and sent portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

Amen. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much.

[4 : 30] Let's pray together. Dear Lord, we thank you for this wonderful day and the opportunity we have freely to come into your house to worship and to enjoy one another's company and to hear your word.

And we pray, Lord, that you'll speak to each one of us now. And may we be blessed. May we be challenged. May we be encouraged. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Well, I must get out the clicker. And shall we go on to the... Is it up there? Oh, it's there. Great.

I wonder, how many of you have done Alpha course? You do Alpha in your church? If you've done Alpha, you'll know about Nicky Gumbel, right?

Have you heard about Nicky Gumbel? Yeah, Nicky Gumbel, he's the one who's very much behind the growth of Alpha in the world. Millions and millions of people have done it.

[5 : 36] In our church, we have Alpha four times a year. And every time people come to faith. Because it's a course to help you explain the faith.

But anyway, Nicky Gumbel, his father was a secular Jew. That means he was not really practicing Judaism. He was just Jewish by ethnicity.

His mum was a nominal Christian. So that means just in name. She probably never went to church, except Christmas maybe. So Nicky Gumbel grew up with no Christian influence at all in his life.

And in fact, when he was a teenager, in his own words, he said he was a very argumentative atheist. That's how he described himself. And during his first year at Cambridge University in the UK, he warned his good friend, Nicky Lee.

I don't know if any of you have done the marriage course. Any of you have done the marriage course? Let me see if these glasses help me. No. So I'll just leave it. Nicky Lee and his wife said that run the marriage course anyway.

[6 : 44] But Nicky Lee back then was his good friend. And Nicky Gumbel said to Nicky Lee, don't you ever get friends with any of those crazy Christians? He just warned him, you know.

And then a few months later, Nicky Lee came up to Nicky Gumbel and said, I've become a Christian. And Nicky Gumbel was so shocked, he decided he'd better read the Bible.

He'd never looked at it before. So that night, he started reading Matthew, Mark, Luke. Halfway through John's Gospel, he fell asleep.

That's pretty good. Matthew, Mark, Luke and half of John. The next day, he woke up and he kept on reading. And for the next two days, he read. And he finished the New Testament in three days.

And, you know, I saw in an interview with Nicky Gumbel. That's it. And this is what he said. He said, reading the New Testament that night, I encountered Jesus.

[7 : 45] And the words of Jesus came to life. They seemed so relevant to my life, so challenging. There was the ring of truth about it.

And then I also heard him in another little clip. He said this, I had an encounter with the person I was reading about in the New Testament.

And that encounter totally changed my life, transformed my life. And the person he was reading about, of course, was Jesus.

So, clearly, God spoke to Nicky Gumbel through his reading when he was reading the Bible. Why? Because the Bible is God's Word.

God speaks. He speaks to us when we open the Bible. It's not a dry and dusty book, actually. If you go to the Bible and say, God speak to me, he will.

[8 : 39] Because it's God breathed. You know, the Bible points to Jesus. And John, in his Gospel, he starts John's Gospel with these words. He says, in the beginning was the Word.

Actually, when you think about in the beginning, do you remember, it says, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And they said, God said, let there be light.

God said, God said, all the way through that, Genesis 1. The Word. The Word in the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God.

And he's talking about Jesus. Jesus is the Word. So in the written Word, in the Bible, the written Word, we meet the living Word. The written Word tells us about the living Word, Jesus.

And it's Jesus who transformed Nicky Gumbel's life. Now today, in your series, we've come to Nehemiah, chapter 8.

[9 : 43] And it's one of the most thrilling chapters, actually, in the whole of the Old Testament. And you'll all know that the people of God had come back from 70 years in exile in Babylon.

And they were beginning to rebuild. 52 days, remember? You've already covered that. Rebuilt the walls. The city was still pretty much in ruins.

But the people were back and they were in safety. The walls had been rebuilt, connected up again. And the gates and so on. And they were getting settled. And then we come to chapter, the last verse of chapter 7.

Of course, in the Bible, it doesn't have chapters and verses. You know that, eh? Okay. So, you know, we've, in later years, people put in chapters and verses to help us follow through.

And so on. It helps you find your way in the Bible. So, in actual fact, it just carries straight on. Chapter 7, the last verse. And the first verse of chapter 8. This is what it says. When the seventh month came, and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people came together as one in the square before the water gate.

[10 : 53] And they told Ezra, the teacher of the law, to bring out the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel. Now, the seventh month. What's the seventh month?

January, February, March, April, May, June, July. Is it July? Not in the Jewish calendar, right? So, this is the Jewish calendar, which, like the Chinese calendar, is on the lunar.

It's a lunar system. So, the seventh month was a lunar calendar for the Jewish people. And it was around September, October. So, right now. Seventh month in the Jewish calendar.

And it's the new year. Jewish new year. And it began. There were actually three festivals in that month. In the seventh month. The first one.

The first day of the month was the blast of the trumpets. It was the feast of trumpets. Announcing the Chinese. Not Chinese new year. Jewish new year. And then, on the tenth day, it was the day of atonement.

[11 : 50] That's a big one. Remembering the lamb sacrifice. So, anyway. And then, on the fifteenth day of the month, of the seventh month, which is about now, actually, was the start of the seven days of the festival of tabernacles.

And so, that was another very special celebration. And that we see that at the end of chapter eight. And I'm sure you'll be learning. You'll be going into that next week, I would think.

So, it must have been very exciting. Because here they were. They're back from exile in Babylon. Seventy years away from the homeland. Back in Jerusalem.

And there's the first time they're celebrating this special celebration with the walls rebuilt. And they're beginning to settle and feel at home. And this brings us to my first heading, which is reading God's word.

The people gather, united and expectant. You know, in verse one, did you notice it said all the people came together as one. It was a spontaneous gathering.

[12 : 57] And we later read there's men and women, boys and girls, all who could understand. And some people estimate it could have been 50,000 people gathered in that big open square.

It could fit everybody. No one was excluded. And it's wonderful when a church, oh, is this PCPC? Yeah. When a church welcomes everyone, right?

Men and women, boys and girls. Young and not so young. And rich and poor. People who mature in their faith. People who knew Christians. People who maybe not even yet Christians.

Maybe seekers. And the church welcomes us all. We all belong, if we're followers of Jesus, to the one family of God. And it's a wonderful thing to be a Christian and to belong.

Of course. Do families ever squabble? Do families ever fight one another and argue with one another? Sadly, they do. And sadly, the church sometimes is not as united as it should be.

[14 : 00] But when we are united as one, when we come as one in unity, it is a beautiful thing. Come together to serve, to worship, and to witness with expectant and obedient hearts.

Now, one thing struck me when I read these verses, when I was preparing. It's in verse 1. It's the people said to Ezra, the teacher of the law, bring out the book.

The book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel. And the people themselves, the people. It's like the church congregation saying to Pastor William, bring out the book, Pastor William.

Pastor Albert, bring out the book. Let's have God's word. And that's what it was. And he comes to explain, to preach, to read the word of God. This is the first time that Ezra is mentioned in Nehemiah.

Because, you know, Nehemiah is about Nehemiah coming and building the wall and so on. But Ezra actually came back 13 years earlier than Nehemiah's coming. And in this chapter, we begin to see how God had been using Nehemiah as a leader of people rebuilding the wall of the city.

[15 : 19] But now he's using Ezra to rebuild the people spiritually. The spiritual rebuilding going on now. Reviving God's people. So they say, bring out the book.

Well, it's really the scroll, the Torah. It's the first five books of Moses, right? Which, do you know what they are? First five books of the Bible? Genesis?

Exodus? Leviticus? Numbers? Oh, you're all good here, eh? The first five books of the Bible. And, you know, that law, that scripture, the scriptures were given to God's people 1,000 years before Ezra.

Given to Moses. And those first five books are so important. Because they tell us, well, we just said a moment ago, God created the heavens and the earth.

It talks about creation. It talks about where sin comes from. It talks about how God chose Abraham. Called Abraham. Said, I'm going to bless you. And bless the nations through you. And I'm going to build a nation out of you.

[16 : 29] Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. And the stories of Joseph. And then all the way to Moses and the people coming into the land. So all of that's in the first five books. So when the people of God heard this being read.

It's their history. It's God's call. It's God's mission for them. It must have really impacted them. And so we read there. You know, where Moses actually told the people.

This is 1,000 years before Ezra. This is what Moses said to the people. Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds. Teach them to your children.

Talking about them. When you sit at home. And when you walk along the road. And when you lie down. And when you get up. This is what the Jewish people were supposed to be doing.

But they had neglected the word. They had neglected the Torah. But anyway. Now some 1,000 years later. They're back.

[17 : 27] And something incredible is happening. And it tells us there. That Ezra read it aloud. From daybreak till noon. As he faced the square before the water gate.

In the presence of the men. The women. The others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively. To the book of the law. The people were hungry.

They were hungry to hear the word of God. And the Holy Spirit was powerfully at work. And all these folks. Young and old. They listened for. How long?

Six hours. Okay. So what time do we finish now? It's now. Yeah. You've got a few hours to listen still there.

I think you'd all fall asleep. Long before then. But anyway. They were so hungry. To hear the word of God. They were listening intently. All this time. And the Holy Spirit moved upon them.

[18 : 24] And the word of God. Touched their hearts and minds. Now the public reading. And teaching of scripture. On that first day of the seventh month. Proved to be a time of revival.

The people came. With those expectant hearts. They were yearning. For the truth. For spiritual food. And that's how we need to come. Isn't it? We need to come. When we come to open the word of God.

We need to say. Lord. Speak to me. I want to. I want to hear from you. I want to know what you want me to think. What do you want me to do? We come to church.

To come. Come hungry. To hear from God's word. And the people were deeply touched. You know people don't need. The words of man. They don't need the wisdom.

Of men. We need. The word of God. Right? And the church. The church that preaches. And teaches the word of God. Is a church where people are fed. Where people's hearts are touched.

[19 : 21] And people's lives are transformed. Now it's no wonder. In the New Testament. You remember Paul. He had young Timothy. Who was his disciple. A co-worker.

And he was a young pastor. He'd sent him to look after church in Ephesus. And in 1st Timothy. He told Timothy. Devote yourself to the public reading of scripture.

To preaching. And to teaching. So. You know. When you and I. Read the Bible. On our own. Or when we study in a small group. Or when we gather for worship.

And listen to the word of God. We need to come. With hungry. Humble. Expectant hearts. So that's the first point. The reading. Of God's word.

Now the second point. I've got for you today. Is understanding God's word. The teachers explain clearly. And accurately. In verse 4. We see that.

[20 : 20] They built this high platform. For the occasion. And there were those 13 men. Poor Elizabeth had to read all their names. On his. On his right.

Sorry. On his left. Was six men. And on his right. Was seven men. And their names are mentioned. I think there's a reason. Why the names are mentioned. By the way. But I'll mention that in a moment. And the word was read boldly.

And that's how it should be read today. I remember actually. When I was at college. In London. A long time ago. London School of Theology. One chapel service. One of my fellow students.

Was asked to read the passage. And it wasn't a difficult one. Like poor Elizabeth. Has to read all these names. But it was. It was. It was Acts chapter 27. Which was all about the shipwreck of Paul.

Going on the ship. And you know. The storm. And shipwrecked. And Malta. And all that. And then off to Rome. And he read it with such passion. And such feeling.

[21 : 22] You almost felt like you were there. It was so dramatic. Now. The reading of the scripture at that time. May not have sounded so dramatic all the time. But there was something that was really going on.

Because the spirit of God was at work. The spirit of God was amazing. Seen. Can you imagine? Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him. Because he was standing up there above them.

He opened it. The people. All stood up. Everybody stood up. It's like. A great deep respect. Because he's now going to open the book.

He's going to open the scroll. And they stood up. And then Ezra praised the Lord. The great God. And what did all the people do? They lifted their hands.

And responded. Amen. Amen. Has that ever happened in church? When Pastor William's preaching. You all raise your hand and say. Amen. Amen. It'd be nice to.

[22 : 20] I think. Can I have an amen? I seldom hear it in the church. But I remember in Africa quite a few times. I hear people say.

Amen brother. You know. And at least you know. That the people are still awake. And so. Sometimes. Sometimes in our church. The other week. The preacher.

He was. I thought what he said was so good. I felt. I said amen. And Elizabeth. Okay. She said. You. Don't draw attention to yourself.

You see. But I just felt like. Woo. Amen. Anyway. So. Maybe in our culture. Do you Chinese? Hmm. Oh. Some do. Some do.

Some. Some. The little flock. They say. In you praying. They say amen. Before you've even finished a sentence. But then it can be a little bit rote. You know. But if you really mean it. If you really.

[23 : 17] Say. Thank you Lord. Amen. Amen. So that's good. Anyway. What else did they do? This was amazing. They bowed down. And worshipped the Lord. With their faces to the ground.

Now that. That I've never seen in a. I don't think I've ever seen that in a church. But imagine if it happened. It would be a true sign of the moving of the Holy Spirit.

That people are so moved. They just want to worship God. Well something else. Very important. We can learn from this passage. Not only.

Was it red. And the Holy Spirit. Moved upon the people like that. But. There was. Interpreting. The explaining. Of the word. To the people.

And that's where these. These guys. The six and the seven. All of them. With Ezra. Were so important. In the story. He read it. Ezra read it. And then these men.

[24 : 13] And a bunch of others. We learned. Those other Levites. They were. Moved amongst the people. And they answered questions. And they asked. You got any. You know. Any problem.

Any. What does this mean. Do you. Do you understand. So. They explained clearly. So in verse eight. It says. They read from the book. Of the law of God. Making it clear.

And that can be translated. Translated it. Because maybe some of the people. Didn't understand Hebrew. They all spoke Aramaic. Which Jesus spoke actually.

Spoke Aramaic. People today. In parts of. You know. Iraq. And Syria. Still speak Aramaic today. It's interesting.

Hey. So. They might have needed translation. From the Hebrew. Into Aramaic. But. But it also could have been simply that. Making it clear. Is related to the next phrase.

[25 : 07] Giving the meaning. So it's like expounding. Explaining. What was in. That's what they were doing. They were making it clear. Giving the meaning. So this is so important.

And this is what Paul. Also told Timothy. In second Timothy. He said to you. Do. He said to him. Do your best. To present yourself. To God. As one approved.

A workman. Who does not need. To be ashamed. Who correctly handles. The word of truth. So he's telling. Timothy. To be approved. To God.

Be someone. As a young pastor. You are to serve. And to preach. And to teach. For an audience of one. You know what that means? God is the one you're seeking to please.

Not to please people. But to be. Pleasing to God. In your life. Your way you live. The way you serve. And not only that. He was to be a workman.

[26 : 04] Who does not. Does not need to be ashamed. Like. Like. Like a carpenter. Like a leather worker. Like a construction engineer. Leo back there.

Studying. What engineering was it again? Structural engineering. Yeah. And so. When he's a structural engineer. One day. He's going to have to be.

Very accurate. He's got to get the right measurements. Got the right. You know. Otherwise the building's going to fall down. The thing that Leo signs off. Will fall down. Unless he studies well.

And gets it accurate. And the other day. Yesterday. We had some guys coming to our place. To fix. The railing from our. From our deck. As upstairs deck. And it was all rotten away.

So. They put new piece of wood plank in there. And they. They measured the upright things. I saw them marking it all very carefully. Getting the right angles. And now it's all nicely done. And it's all firm and decent.

[27 : 01] I'm glad those carpenters did their measurements carefully. And that's what Paul is telling Timothy. You work. As a someone who's no need to be ashamed. Like a good carpenter.

Like a good leather worker. Like an engineer. And work hard. With precision and accuracy. And Timothy. You handle the word of God like that. And for all who preach.

And teach God's word. We need to work diligently. We need to share God's word. Honestly. Accurately. Clearly. Now you folks at PCBC.

Are very blessed. Because I know. Pastor Albert. Pastor William. Pastor Mary. Pastor James. How many other pastors have you got?

There are quite a few right? They're all great guys. And I believe that you. You have faithful teachers and preachers. Of the word of God in this church. Church. And.

[27 : 56] It's wonderful. You're blessed. You know. The aim of the preacher. Is not to have people. At the end of the service. Say. Wow. What a clever guy he is.

He quoted all this Greek. And Hebrew. And stuff. And oh. He's. Oh. He really is something else. No. You want people to say. Oh. The Bible is amazing. It's so. I understood it.

Isn't Jesus fantastic? That's what they should be saying. At the end of the sermon. Let us also remember. That God. Not only used Ezra. And those.

The priest. But he used the Levites. He used all those other guys. To go out among the people. And to help them understand. The word of God. So yes.

We need pastors. We need people. Who can preach. And teach the word of God. But we also need lay workers. So called lay people. People who are not full time.

[28 : 52] Necessarily in the church. People to lead. Home group Bible studies. Lead. Teach in a Sunday school. Help with a youth ministry. Make coffee. Even when you've broken your leg.

Or foot. You can still help. And make some coffee there. So. This is fantastic. So. In fact. Every one of us. Can be involved. In serving. Right? And this is the joy.

That's why I think. All those names are mentioned. Why put all those funny names in there? I think it's because God knows. He knows. I've learned Joel's name.

So I'm just showing off now. At least I know Joel. What was your name again? Isaac. See. God knows all your names. Right? He knows all the things you're doing.

And he's very happy about it. I can say that. God loves to see us serving. So I think those names are in there. Because. It's like saying. Everyone's important.

[29 : 51] It's not just Ezra. Nehemiah. Everyone's important. Anyway. We can share the good news. And may the Lord help us. We don't have to know all the answers. But we can serve.

And that's why I think going on that thing with Eva. Is it Eva? Eva mentioned. That sounds very interesting. Whoa. I can think of a few people maybe we should encourage to go.

Because we can all learn how to share the faith. How to study the word. And share the good news more effectively. More winsomely. With our friends.

Now finally. Finally. Are you still awake? And he's in Amen anywhere? Amen. Oh yeah. He's still awake. Okay. So the third and final point is applying God's word. So we've had reading God's word.

We've had understanding God's word. And now this is applying God's word. The people respond with repentance and joy. And it says there in verse 9. All the people had been weeping.

[30 : 51] As they listened to the words of the law. Whoa. You know I think the Holy Spirit had been so working in them. They were so convicted. What would they be convicted about?

They'd have been convicted. Wow. This God who made the universe. Who made the stars. This God who called Abraham. And called us to be a people. We've disobeyed him.

We've gone off into exile. Because we've sinned. Oh. Oh. We've missed out on what God wants us to do and to be. I can imagine. They were convicted. And they began to mourn.

And to weep. And that is true revival. Isn't it? When the Holy Spirit starts working. And convicting us. Of our need. That's what happened on the day of Pentecost.

As another revival. Of course in the Bible. In the New Testament. There was Peter. Preaching to the crowds. After the Holy Spirit had been poured out on those 120.

[31 : 49] In the upper room. Preaching to the thousands there in Jerusalem. And when the people heard this. They were cut to the heart. The word of God. Cut to the heart.

And they said to Peter and the other apostles. Brothers what shall we do? And Peter replied. He says repent. And be baptized. Every one of you. In the name of Jesus Christ.

For the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive. The gift of the Holy Spirit. And that day. More than 3000 people. Followed Christ.

Became Christians. That's another revival. Isn't it? I read. Just this last week or two. I read this article. By a very famous Christian leader.

Bible teacher. In Sri Lanka. It's called Ajith Fernando. And he wrote this article. Called. Beg God. To move again. Seven marks.

- [32 : 46] Of true revival. Beg God. To move again. Seven marks. Of true revival. And in the first. The first mark. Of revival. He talked about. Was faithful preaching.
- Huh. Interesting. Faithful preaching. And this is what he wrote. As all the revivals. In the history of the church show. The preaching of God's word.
- Is a key ingredient. The Holy Spirit. Often lights the flames. Of revival. When pastors. Systematically. And faithfully. Preach the word.
- Often. Pre. Revival. Preaching. Is characterized. By a call. To total commitment. To God. Repentance. And the extolling.
- Of the beauty. Of holiness. Oh. I love that quote. I think it's so true. And I mentioned. A moment ago. That you blessed.
- [33 : 41] At PCBC. To have pastors. Who faithfully. Teach God's word. Because it is so important. And it's faithful. Biblical preaching. That leads to true.
- Transformation. True. True. And lasting revival. In the church. And in society. When the church. Loses the message. The church is. No use.
- Can't be. Can't be. Transformative. Can't impact society. Well. After. The amazing response. We read how. Now.
- Nehemiah. Comes. And joins Ezra. Nehemiah. The civic leader. And Ezra. The spiritual leader. They worked together. It was a powerful partnership. Wasn't it? They weren't in competition.
- They worked together. They told the people. The people. You see. Had been weeping. They'd been repenting. And then. They were able to say to them. Okay folks. This day.
- [34 : 37] Is holy to the Lord. Your God. Do not mourn. Or weep. And Nehemiah. Goes on in verse 10. To say. This day. Is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve.
- For the joy of the Lord. Is your strength. So. The joy only comes. After the weeping. Right? They had repented. They turned to God.
- In true heartfelt repentance. And now. They can be encouraged. To rejoice. It's a bit like. What Jesus. You know. Jesus. Went. And preached the gospel.
- In Galilee. Proclaiming the good news of God. He said. The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent. And believe. The good news. So there's bad news.
- We need to repent of. We need to repent of our sin. And then we have the good news. Of forgiveness. And new life. We can rejoice. So the Bible talks a lot about repentance.
- [35 : 33] Repent and believe. And when we repent. When we turn away. From our sin. We can find healing. We can find forgiveness. And hope. You know.
- A few months ago. There was a guy in our church. He was. He's from China. Come here on a work visa. I think in the building. Building industry.
- And. He came to Alpha. And he became a Christian. And. I'll never forget him. With beaming face. Beaming face. Said to me. I feel so blessed.
- Jesus took all my sins away. I'm clean. I'm forgiven. And I saw him just today. This morning. At our church. And I said to him.
- Uh. Xiao Wang. Wo jintian xia wu. Yau yau chu. Pakuranga. Chinese Baptist Church. Woyau ti chii nide mingzi.
- [36 : 28] Woyau ti chii nide mingzi. Kui ma. I said. Because he's Chinese. He doesn't speak much English. But I said to him. Is this true? Mind what I'm going to tell him.
- He said it's true. And then the tears came down his face again this morning. And he said it's true. It's true. Jesus has set me free. So this is a wonderful truth.

When we repent. And believe. Then the heavy burden. The guilt. Is taken away. The shame is taken away. And our heart can be filled with joy.

Joy. So. Having heard the word. People. Understood the word. And they applied the word. And God did a great work in their hearts.

And so the Levites went there. They encouraged the people. Be calm. This is a holy day. Do not grieve. And notice. We go back to that verse. That Nehemiah himself said to them.

[37 : 29] This day is holy to the Lord our God. Do not grieve. For the joy of the Lord is your strength. These are wonderful words for the believer. Aren't they? When we face trials.

Difficulties. Temptations. Sufferings. We know that Jesus is with us. And we might be tempted to despair. To give up. To fear.

To doubt. To grieve. But the joy of the Lord can be our strength. And lift us above the storm. And give us hope. And perseverance. And courage.

And faith. Now I'm sure many of you know. I've noticed out there. You've got lots of copies of Our Daily Bread. And Elizabeth and I and her dad.

Every day we read Our Daily Bread together. And her dad. He's 89. He only became a Christian when he was 82. She's prayed for him for many, many years.

[38 : 24] And now he's a Christian. And he comes every afternoon. And we have a little reading together. And he tells us what he read in Our Daily Bread. Well I read Our Daily Bread just on Wednesday.

And I read these words. Jesus promises joy to those who believe in him. Telling us it comes through remaining in his love. And prayerfully bringing our needs to him.

And so that's. It's a gift of the Holy Spirit isn't it? How the joy of the Lord comes to us as we live in the Lord Jesus. As we remain in his love.

And so all the people. They went away. As they were told. Go away now. This is the festival of tabernacles beginning now. Go and. Can have a feast.

Can have a feast. Can rejoice now. Because they now understood the words that had been made known to them. The people found that new courage. New joy. New freedom.

[39 : 24] They understood the word of God. And they applied the word of God. And they obeyed the word of God. And they could rejoice. Not just because it was the autumn festivals.

All those festivals. But because they really had come to feast on the word of God. Now I'm reminded of those two guys. On the day that Jesus rose from the dead.

They were walking all sad. On the way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Right? They're walking along. They are talking about the people. Ah. Ah. Ah. Is it possible?

He died? How can he have been? We heard somebody said he had risen again from there. Ah. And then there's a third person starts walking along with them. And starts telling them. but you know in the scriptures and explaining all in all the scriptures the places that it talks about him and then they get to the place where they say come in, it's a bit late now I don't know if they had watches like this but come in, it's a bit late and when they had the meal he broke the bread he gave thanks, he gave it to them and their eyes were opened they recognized the Lord and that moment disappeared and they said it's the Lord and they ran back to Jerusalem, quite a long way those guys were just off they're going to tell the other disciples and they said to each other this is what they said to each other were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the scriptures to us that's what happens the scriptures when we read the scriptures our sadness our despair turns to joy we realize the Lord is alive he speaks to us he encourages us he helps us to see his plan and his purpose so yes when the scriptures are opened and our hearts are touched we discover who Jesus is and just as skeptic and atheistic young

Nicky Gumbel discovered when he read the New Testament that Jesus was real we too can encounter Christ and as we study and obey understand the word of God our lives will be transformed and we too can begin to experience the joy of the Lord which is our strength it's a wonderful truth isn't it now we're going to close that's all I've got to say you're lucky funny we just finished but I wonder if you'd like to turn to the person next to you and just say one thing that maybe struck you from this passage one thing can you turn to someone next to you and say this struck me not what I said but something from the Bible passage anything