

# Sermon Text for September 3, 2023

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## *Nehemiah 8:5-9, I Timothy 4:11-16* **“Prayer, SCRIPTURE (1), Action”**

I had a good childhood growing up. I don't remember a time wondering if my parents loved me, I mean I didn't always like them and threatened to run away from home a few times in my elementary years, but as I look back I had a good childhood. One vivid memory from my childhood was dinnertime. It was a bit of a circus with four boys, but the circus was paused before every dinner as my mom or my dad would get out the Bible and they would read a verse or a Bible story and then we would pray, and then the circus could begin.

Now, I didn't believe in God all the way through high school until the end of my senior year, and when I was in the presence of God on January 14, when God audibly spoke to me and I heard Him claim me as my child, which I had been all along but I just didn't want to accept it, in that moment I remember in an instant all of the Scriptures that I had learned, all of the Bible stories that I had heard come together in a beautiful, perfect tapestry woven together to give me one message. That message was about God's unconditional love that was present for me throughout my life, even and especially in those times that I refused it.

The Bible, even during the time that I didn't believe, played a role, a formative role, in my individual life, in my family, and in how I view the potential that is there in society and culture. All of our stories are different and maybe the Bible didn't play that prominent of a role in your childhood or even later. But we do have access to Scripture now, so for now, at least, we are without excuse.

Both of our Scriptures today speak about the priority of Scripture and the role it ought to take in our lives for our own personal formation. Every person here needs to see the reading of Scripture, the hearing of Scripture as crucial in our faith formation. Let's read.

### **READ**

Well folks, the results are in. The PSA steering committee hasn't seen them yet, but I know a guy and he gave me some preliminary information. The reason we are doing this emphasis on prayer, Scripture, and action is to revitalize this congregation, and so the assumption is that this congregation needs revitalizing. Well, the numbers, certainly about Scripture, reflect that. From the surveys that 140 of you filled out. Can I just pause and say that

our goal was to get 100 of you to fill it out, the fact that 140 of you took the time, wow, that means a lot, thank you so much. So, that's the good news.

33% of us responded in regards to reading Scripture that you either never read it or you read it once every few weeks. 70% of us do not read it daily, so don't be pointing fingers. 50% of us have no reading routing of the Bible, like we don't have a set plan on reading the Bible. 85% of us do not read the Bible together as a family, as a couple or with our children. Now I know that doesn't apply to all of us, but we can do better, and this is what PSA is meant to do, help us do better.

There is a part of me that says that as a church we need to rediscover Scripture. This is exactly where the people of Israel were in our Scripture in Nehemiah. The people of Israel had just come back to Jerusalem after generations in captivity. Scripture was lost, their traditions were lost, they didn't know who God was. The whole history of God being present, of God leading the people out of Egypt, of God giving the law to Moses, David's Psalms, Solomon's wisdom in the Proverbs, the history of the people and the prophets before this time. All of this was lost and forgotten until they opened up this time capsule like thing, until they found the law again hidden and the people were reintroduced to it.

Imagine what it would be like to go generations without knowing anything about the Bible, this is what happened here in Nehemiah. This is why the people stood up at the reading of the Bible, they had never heard it before and yet this was their book. It is from this Scripture that they, and we, are defined by the phrase people of the book. As Christians we are people of the book, and so are the Jews, but the book had been lost and forgotten for generations.

They found themselves realizing that all along they had no guidance and no insight on how God wanted them to live, and without the Bible they were making things up as they went and society and culture was feeling like a ship without a rudder. Wandering from one bad decision to another, from one storm to another. I'm not sure if any of this resonates with you for the days and the times in which we are living now?

The first step in a remedy to change society and culture is for us, each one of us to take up a disciplined, consistent time of reading Scripture so that we can hear and understand the Word of God for our lives. We may complain that God has been taken out of school or out of society or out of things that we are used to hearing about God. My suggestion is to complain less about society and spend more time in our own life strengthening our faith as a people and as a church. We complain that society is falling apart around us. It isn't because they don't know

God, it is because we don't know God as well as we should because we don't take the time to read and pray.

You can't criticize the degradation of the morality in society when we don't actually know what God wants from us because we don't spend time with Him in the Scripture and in Prayer and in Action. In Nehemiah, the people of God heard the Word of God and wept, you can read that in vs. 9. This moment is significant because up to now the presence of God could only be felt in the temple and the temple had not been rebuilt yet. So now the full presence of God was able to be felt and understood as Scripture was read, which meant that the people were able to hear and understand God in their every day lives. This is something that we believe, that when we read the Scripture we can and we do experience the presence of God. Who wouldn't want that? We are people of the book.

Let's turn to Timothy, the setting is a bit different here. Paul who by now is an older pastor is writing to his son in the faith Timothy. Timothy who is probably about 37 and maybe a handful of years into his ministry, and Paul wants to give him insight on how to live his life and how to lead the people of the church to a vital ministry and faith in Jesus Christ. He tells Timothy in vs.13 that until Paul gets there to give more directions, make sure you tell the people and that you with the people read Scripture. This is a crucial piece to the journey of your faith. You cannot be a church that loves God if you don't know God and you get to know God by reading Scripture.

Now keep in mind people did not have their own Bibles back then. The only time that they would be able to read Scripture for the most part was when they went to the synagogues and they would hear it read in that setting, like in the church. We see in the Bible a variety of times when people of faith read the Scripture in public. Jesus reads it in Nazareth at the synagogue in Luke 4:16, Paul addresses the crowds after Scripture is read in Acts 13:14-16, Paul tells the churches of Colosseae and Thessalonica to read his letters not only in their church but in the other churches as well. We are commanded as the people of God to read Scripture, there is no getting around that. This isn't something that only the pastor has to do, he does have to do it, but so do each one of us individually.

We have to maintain a constant dialogue with Scripture. Because if we don't then we have a very high probability of unsaying with our life that which we say with our tongues. This is the essence of this Scripture. Make sure that you are an example for society and culture by your life, but how can you know how to live if you don't read Scripture? If we really want

things around us to be different, there is something we can do about it, but it has to begin by the reading of Scripture, otherwise how do we get our directions?

Those who try to correct others, must teach by their life, not just their words. Our opinions have to be backed up by concrete, courageous acts. Here is what the church is facing today, this is what we are facing: Society sees our lives open to criticism, they see what is most important to us is worldly. We admire wealth equally as they do, maybe even more. We have the same fear and horror of death, the same dread of poverty, the same impatience for disease and sickness, we are equally fond of glory and power...so how do we expect them to believe, much less to change?

Let's start with us, and wouldn't you know, you are in luck. Tomorrow we are beginning a journey of reading through the Bible together. This is a holiday weekend so maybe some folks are missing. I want you to take a Bible reading plan for you and maybe for a friend from the church. Every day read through the Bible, make it a goal to do it today. It will change your life, your family's life, the life of this church and ultimately, we expect to change culture and society around us as well. It takes a village to raise up a child. But it takes a church to raise a village. Amen.