

“Spiritual Bread”  
(Acts 15:21)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. This morning, we’re resuming our study on the History of Redemption.
  - a. We’ve seen that from the time of the Fall onward, the Lord was preparing to send His Son into the world.
    - (i) This wasn’t merely something He did in response to man’s fall, but was His plan from eternity.
    - (ii) He implemented it as soon as the first sin cursed His children with death and brought corruption on the Creation.
    - (iii) He gave them the promise of a coming Redeemer; and as the time approached that He would send Him into the world, He gave them clearer and clearer light.
  - b. Last time, we saw that as the Lord was preparing to send His Son, He brought His people back into the Promised Land through the Persian kings.
    - (i) He first overthrew the Babylonian Empire through Persia.
    - (ii) Then, He began to move on the heart of the Persian kings to restore His people to the land.
      - (a) Cyrus, the Persian, allowed the Jews to return and rebuild their Temple.
      - (b) Darius, the Persian, when the Jews were stopped by their enemies, ordered that the work continue at their expense.
      - (c) Artaxerxes, the Persian, commissioned Ezra to return to establish order and granted him a very generous provision to get the work done. He also commissioned Nehemiah to return and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.
      - (d) The Lord did all this to prepare His people for the coming of His Son, through whom the true Temple of the Lord would again be filled with His glory.
      - (e) And He did it when *outwardly* it looked as though there was no hope the Jews would ever return.
2. This is a very encouraging reminder that the Lord is ultimately in control.
  - a. Even when things look hopeless, there is hope.
    - (i) Though it looks like the world is racing down to destruction, the Lord will complete His work and nothing in heaven or earth can stop Him.
    - (ii) Though it looks sometimes like you’re not going to make it through your particular trials, you will: the Lord will complete the work He began in you.
  - b. We do not need to be afraid: if we are on the Lord’s side, He is on ours.

## B. Preview.

1. We saw one more way the Lord advanced His work a couple months back: that was the revival the Lord sent to advance His work in Ezra's day and the additional revelation He gave at that time.
  - a. Artaxerxes had sent Ezra to reestablish order in Jerusalem.
    - (i) The Lord made sure that this took place spiritually, as well as governmentally, by granting His Spirit.
    - (ii) The people listened, they began to seek the Lord, and they reformed.
  - b. The Lord also gave further revelation
    - (i) He gave the books of Ezra and Chronicles through Ezra.
    - (ii) This further established the church and prepared them for the coming of His Son.
2. But there was one more thing:
  - a. The Lord also set up a very important practice in these days to keep His church revived and looking forward in their hearts to His Redeemer and to heaven, something that is still very important for us today – He established the reading of His Law in the synagogue.
  - b. Let's consider two things this morning:
    - (i) First, that the reading of the Law was established in the synagogues in Ezra's day as a means of preserving God's people.
    - (ii) Second, how it's still important for us to read God's Word on a regular basis, if we are to be preserved from error.

## II. Sermon.

- A. First, the reading of the Law was established in the synagogues in Ezra's day as a means of preserving God's people from idolatry.
  1. Revivals generally have several elements:
    - a. First, there is repentance and prayer: "Now while Ezra was praying and making confession, weeping and prostrating himself before the house of God, a very large assembly, men, women and children, gathered to him from Israel; for the people wept bitterly" (Ezra 10:1).
    - b. Usually, this is brought about by the reading of the God's Law/Word: "And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the LORD had given to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who *could* listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law" (Nehemiah 8:1-3).
    - c. But of course, there is that all important element of God's sovereignty.
      - (i) Reading God's Word should always bring us to faith, repentance and prayer.

- (ii) But if it is to have a wider impact – such as on our city, state or nation – the Lord has to be in it – it has to be His plan to bring revival.
  - (iii) We cannot engineer it or force His hand. We are always subject to His will.
  - (iv) Sometimes, of course, our actions are brought about by the fact that He intends to bring a revival. We don't want to discount this fact.
2. Personal revival, which often leads to corporate revival, usually begins, with the reading of God's Word, especially His Law. This is one very important development in Ezra's day: They began to copy the Law and read it more frequently in the synagogue.
- a. Before the captivity, there were only a few copies of the law in the land of Israel and only a few times that it was publicly to be read.
    - (i) The original copy was set beside the Ark of the Covenant. Moses commanded the Levites, "Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you" (Deu. 31:26).
    - (ii) The king was required to make his own copy, to read it frequently and to follow it that it might preserve him, his house, and the nation over which he ruled: "Now it shall come about when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. It shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted up above his countrymen and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, to the right or the left, so that he and his sons may continue long in his kingdom in the midst of Israel" (Deu. 17:19-20).
    - (iii) And the law was to be read to the whole congregation of Israel once every seven years, "Then Moses commanded them, saying, 'At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing'" (Deu. 31:10-11).
    - (iv) Of course, this doesn't mean that either the king or the priest were faithful in carrying this out.
      - (a) During times of spiritual declension, it wasn't read at all.
      - (b) In King Josiah's day, the book of the Law was forgotten; but it was rediscovered, and reading it, they saw how far they had fallen, "When the king heard the words of the law, he tore his clothes" (2 Chr. 34:14).
      - (c) By that time, the exile was inevitable.
  - (v) Before the captivity, there was no other stated public reading of the law besides this.
    - (a) They might go to the priest, or to the Levite, or to the prophet for instruction in the Law.

- (b) They might also ask questions from those gathered at the meeting places of God in the land – which were destroyed along with the Temple at the Captivity, “They have burned Your sanctuary to the ground; they have defiled the dwelling place of Your name. They said in their heart, ‘Let us completely subdue them.’ They have burned all the meeting places of God in the land” (Ps. 74:7-8).
  - (c) But there were very few copies and no regular public reading of the Law, aside from what we’ve seen.
- b. All this appears to have changed in Ezra’s day.
- (i) Both Jews and Christians believe that it was in his time that the Law began to be copied and read more widely in the synagogues.
  - (ii) Later, other books of the OT canon were read as well.
  - (iii) By the time of Christ, there was Scripture reading in every synagogue on every Sabbath, as we see in our text.
  - (iv) The Lord did this to safeguard them, to preserve them, from error and from idolatry, until Christ came.
  - (v) Even after Christ came, it continued as a part of NT worship. Paul wrote to Timothy, “Until I come, give attention to the *public* reading of *Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching. . . . Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4:13, 16).
  - (vi) The Lord knew that His people needed to be bathed in the truth constantly, so that they would be ready for the coming of His Son and be preserved from error (although, not absolutely).
- B. Second, let’s consider how important it is that we read God’s Word if we are to be preserved from error.
1. We mustn’t forget the warfare we’ve involved in with the kingdom of darkness.
    - a. Satan and his demons are constantly scheming to get us to fall from the Lord.
    - b. Our indwelling sin – which is essentially of the same nature as Satan – is working toward the same goal.
    - c. To help us in our fight against them, the Lord has given us spiritual armor, and a spiritual sword, which is the Word of God.
    - d. But to wield it, we must read, understand and apply it accurately.
  2. Let’s consider one example of Satan’s attacks that can be thwarted by reading the Bible from Thomas Brooke’s book on spiritual warfare, *Precious Remedies against Satan’s Devices*.
    - a. Brooks points out how Satan distorts the truth “of salvation by grace through faith alone. Instead of understanding that Christ saves us to walk in holiness of life, he will try to convince us that we have been saved to continue in sin without fear.”
    - b. Here is how Satan might distort it: “As that Jesus Christ has done all for us, *therefore there is nothing for us to do but to joy and rejoice*. He has perfectly

justified us, and fulfilled the law, and satisfied divine justice, and pacified his Father's wrath, and has gone to heaven to prepare a place for us, and in the mean time to intercede for us; *and therefore away with praying, and mourning, and hearing.* Ah! what a world of professors has Satan drawn in these days from religious services, by working them to make such sad, wild, and strange inferences from the sweet and excellent things that the Lord Jesus has done for his beloved ones" (italics added).

- c. What does Brooks suggest as a remedy against this deception?
- (i) We must read the Bible, especially those parts having to do with our duty.
  - (ii) "The first remedy against this device of Satan is, To dwell as much on those Scriptures that show you the duties and services that Christ requires of you, as upon those Scriptures that declare to you the precious and glorious things that Christ has done for you."
  - (iii) "It is a sad and dangerous thing to have two eyes to behold our dignity and privileges, and not one to see our duties and services. I should look with one eye upon the choice and excellent things that Christ has done for me, to raise up my heart to love Christ with the purest love, and to rejoice in Christ with the strongest joy, and to lift up Christ above all, who has made Himself to be my all. And I should look with the other eye upon those services and duties that the Scriptures require of those for whom Christ has done such blessed things, as upon that of the apostle: 'Do you not know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body' (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). 'Therefore, my beloved brethren, be you steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord' (1 Cor. 15:58). 'And let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not' (Gal 6:9). And that of the apostle 'Rejoice always' (1 Thess. 5:16), and 'Pray without ceasing' (1 Thess. 5:17). And that in the Philippians: 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling' (2:12); and that, 'This do until I come' (1 Tim. 4:13); and that, 'Let us consider one another, to provoke one another to love, and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is – but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching' (Heb. 10:24, 25)."
  - (iv) We must not only read them, but memorize them, meditate on them, keep them in front of our eyes. "Now, a soul that would not be drawn away by this device of Satan, he must not look with a squint eye upon these blessed scriptures, and abundance more of like import – but he must dwell upon them; he must make these scriptures to be his chief and his choicest companions, and this will be a happy means to keep him close to Christ and his service in these times, wherein many turn their backs upon Christ, under pretense of being interested in the great glorious things that have been accomplished by Christ. The Jews were much in turning over the leaves of the Scripture – but they did not weigh the matter of them (John 5:39): 'You search the Scriptures.'"

3. We have an advantage that the Jews in those days didn't have: we have our own copies of the Bible that we can read anytime and anywhere.
  - a. We should certainly take advantage of this, and read and treasure it as David did (Ps. 19).
  - b. We should read it in our quiet times with the Lord, in our family worship to our children.
  - c. We should come to where it is being read and preached publicly for our spiritual wellbeing and growth in Christ.
  - d. We should pray that the Lord will help us to understand it and live according to it.
  - e. We should pray as well that the people of this nation and our leaders would read it and submit to it.
  - f. The Bible is so important to our spiritual wellbeing.
    - (i) If we don't read it, we're walking in the dark, unaware of the traps Satan has laid out to cause us to fall.
    - (ii) But if we do, then the road is illumined before us to help us avoid those snares and walk in the right direction.
    - (iii) May the Lord help us then to read His Word more often and take it more to heart. Amen.