

## I. The Church's Foundation: The Word of God

We are glad you are here this morning. As you know, we have been studying the Word of God as far as the gates in the book of Nehemiah. We know that the book of Nehemiah is a book that really lays out for us how to build a church in an Old Testament format. It shows you the principles involved in the New Testament that really shows you what a church should be like. We are trying to build a church here that is based on New Testament principles. It is kind of a radical thing today. You are going to find that we probably do some things and believe some things that most churches do not believe today or do today, but we do it because we know they are in the Bible. Our format is the Word of God, simple, plain and simple. We do not have any agenda other than that. As God brings people in, we will develop ministries.

I appreciate my son-in-law Danny leading the singing and all that. I know down the line God will give us a piano player someday, and then God will give us a piano, and then God will give us this, and God will give us that, and we will have everything we need. But we are having a great time because you know what we have? We do not have a piano. We do not have a choir other than you guys. We do not have any multimedia presentations. We were supposed to have them here today, but for some reason the truck did not show up. We do not have any big flashy things going on, but let me tell you what we do have. We have the Word of God, and that is all we need.

God has given us a great building. Some great people who run this building, they love us and they just bend over backward. They are glad we are here. God has supplied this. But if we did not have this, we would meet in my house. We would meet in the backyard. We would meet someplace. We would meet out in the field someplace. The most central thing we have is the book, because without that we do not have anything. With that, you have everything.

## II. The Significance of the Gates in Nehemiah

So that is where we are at today, and that is what we are talking about in Nehemiah. We are talking about nine gates, and those gates are the openings that go into the city by which the people pass through, and each one of those gates represents something that this church should have. The city of Jerusalem was the plan of God in the Old Testament. It is where the plan of God for the nation of Israel was really fulfilled. It is where the temple was built under Solomon. It was at the apex, the highest point of Israel's time, under David and Solomon, when literally the whole world was aware that there was a God in Jerusalem and there was a temple in Jerusalem, and literally the whole world came to Jerusalem to worship God. You do not get that at UMKC. You do not get that at Longview College. You do not get that anywhere. You do not even get it in most Bible colleges. But it is true. There was a time on this earth when God's central plan was Jerusalem to reach this world with the knowledge of God.

By the time you get to Nehemiah, that plan is pretty well destroyed. The children of Israel did not do what was right, and God came down as He promised He would if they did not do what

was right, and Jerusalem lays in destruction. Now we see in the book of Ezra and Nehemiah where they go back, and Nehemiah begins to rebuild that city. He wants to get it back to where it once was, and he realizes that it has to have the gates and the wall that go into that city.

In a New Testament scenario, and we have kind of redefined this every week just so you stay fresh with where we are at, the church is God's program. The church is not any building, not any place where you just go, but the collection of God's people. You are the church. If you are saved this morning, your body is the Temple of God. I have said many, many times, in the Old Testament there was a temple in Jerusalem that all the world came to. In the New Testament, it is not that way. God does not dwell in buildings made with hands. God dwells in you, and your body is the Temple of God. But in the same commission where in the Old Testament all the world came to the Temple, in the New Testament we are to take our Temple to the world. That is what this church is about. That is what we are endeavoring to do. That is the Great Commission. That is what we will be held accountable for at the Judgment Seat of Christ, along with a lot of other things when we stand before God.

### III. The Watergate: The Preaching Ministry

I want to talk to you today out of the book of Nehemiah. Last week we got into the Watergate. We really just had an introduction into the Watergate. We talked about that the Watergate was the preaching ministry of our church. There is more talked about on this gate than all the other gates that we have looked at so far, not in chapter 3 where we looked at it last week, but we are going to go to chapter 8 here in just a moment, and you are going to see some things about the Watergate which I think are very important.

We talked about how that the Word of God was given by inspiration of God, that it was profitable. We talked about how it was profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. We talked about how it was doctrine to show you what was right, reproof to show you what was wrong, correction to show you how to fix what is wrong, and instruction in righteousness to show you how to keep it right. The Bible is everything that we need.

Today we are going to take a closer look at it, and we are going to look at this amazing gate called the Watergate. As I said, there is more information on this gate than all the others, and that is because the preaching ministry of any church is the center of all that it is done. This is where Christ gets exalted from. This is where the Word of God is preached, and we know that the job of the church, Ephesians 4:12, when it is all said and done, the bottom line for our existence other than giving glory to God is for the edifying of the body of Christ. That you may leave here today a little stronger in the Word, a little closer to God, a little more confident in what you believe, and a little more in tune with what God wants you to do in your life.

### IV. The Church's Role in a Fallen Society

I realize today that America has a lot of problems, and just like the time of Nehemiah where Jerusalem was in disarray, the church is in disarray. Churches today are famous. You can turn to

any Christian radio station or you can go to most churches and most preachers probably in the city today at some point. Every time something bad happens in America, every time you see some scandal in America, every time something in America that is really a bad situation and it is very sinful and all those things, or the gay movement we have talked about before and the homosexuals and all that, or all the things that are going on today in our society, preachers like to preach on that. They like to preach on sin. They like to preach on, they like to blame America's problems on the sin in America. They like to blame America's problems on the devil. They especially like to blame it on unsaved people. They look at our government and they do not like Hillary Clinton. Well, I do not like Hillary Clinton. I do not like Bill Clinton. I mean, I do not like anybody that is against the Word of God. I mean, I pray for them. I like to see them get saved, but we are not going to be bosom buddies. You are on one side of the aisle and I am on the other.

I will tell you what, I am not a Republican. I am not a Democrat. I am a Bible-believing Christian. See, I am smarter than the average person. Well, maybe not smarter than the average person. I am more informed than the average person. I know this: I know there is not much difference between the Republicans and the Democrats. There are cooks on both sides. When you get into politics, there is one thing you have to do to be a politician: that is not stand for anything that is absolute. I cannot be part of that. I will vote for either one that gives me the ability to preach the Word of God.

You know when Clinton was coming up for re-election and you know all that. You get all this stuff back and forth about, "Well, don't vote for Clinton because he will bring in all the kind of mess," and, "Vote for this guy because he stands for what is right," and all those things. You know, I do not know if God looks at it that way. I know where I am at in history. I know that as the Bible says, "as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the coming of the Son of Man." I know that the times I am living in are wicked times. I am not sure I want to just go the party line. I want whatever God wants. Let me tell you something. If voting for Bill Clinton or anybody else will get the Lord here quicker, that is who I am voting for. I do not care. I am not looking to prolong life on planet Earth any longer than God wants it here. I have a place that is better than this.

But I am not the kind of guy that goes around blaming all the problems in America on politicians. I do not blame it on the poor homosexuals or the poor lesbians. I do not blame it on sin in general. You know why I believe America is in the mess that it is? I believe it is in the mess that it is today, just like Israel was a mess that it is in the Old Testament, because preachers have not done what is right with the Word of God. I believe it is a preachers' problem.

I know what the Word of God is. The Word of God is a preserving salt. I know that if you want to preserve something, you have got to put it in salt. I know the Word of God does something that no other book does on this planet. It holds men accountable. I know when you do not have the preaching of this book, any society, any country, any nation, any church, any individual is going to go down the tubes. This is a supernatural book. It is different than any other book the world has ever seen. It will do something that no other book will do. It will preserve nations. It

will preserve countries. It will preserve churches. It will preserve your family and individuals. I believe that. That is what I preach.

So when I look at the mess we are in, I see the problem was caused and started and put in effect by men in the pulpit. I am not talking about liberals. I am talking about men who are saved, men who claim to love God and love the Word of God, but simply do not preach the Word of God the way it needs to be preached. I promise you, you give me 10,000 men of God that will stand in the pulpit and stay out of politics, stay out of all the other stuff, and just take this book and preach the Word of God, you will change some things in America.

Now it is not going to happen. We are past that. It is not ever going to take place on that scale. But let me tell you something, it will take place here. I am not looking to affect the world. I do not have any illusions that someday I am going to see myself on the 800 Club. I would not go down to the 700 Club, but I would get on the 800 Club because that is what I would start. I would call it the 900 Club. I would call it the 1611 Club is what I would call it. I am not looking to start one of those. I realize that time is past for that. You are not going to turn this country around to God again. It is too late for that. I know where we are at. I know we are right on the verge of the rapture of the church. God has not called me to do that, nor has He called any pastor to do that at this time. God has called us to preach the truth, to bring in those that are out there that need to hear the truth for your families, to build them in the Word of God in your family, and to build them strong with the Word of God, and to raise your kids, to love your wife, to love your husband, and all the parts of your family, to bring them in and ground them in the Word of God. That is what we are back to, and that is where we are at. That is what I am telling you. That is what needs to be done today.

## V. The Attitude of the Church

When we come to the book of Nehemiah, we see a Watergate. That Watergate represents what this church needs to be about. Because I said last week that churches have personalities. They do. Just like people have personalities. But churches also have attitudes of heart, just like people do. When you come to the book of Nehemiah, you not only see the personality that a church needs to be, you see the attitude of heart that a church should have.

I want to begin reading in Nehemiah 8:1.

Nehemiah 8:1-9

*1 And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel.*

*2 And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.*

*3 And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.*

*4 And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.*

*5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up:*

*6 And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.*

*7 Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place.*

*8 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.*

*9 And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest, the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.*

Father, we thank You and praise You today for the Lord Jesus. We thank You for those that are here today, and we ask You, Father, to open up Your Word and to take the Word of God and to give us those things that we need today. We pray for those that are not here today, Father. We pray for those that are ill, pray for those that are out of town dropping their kids off at school. Father, You just bless them, make that time, that transition easy, and pray You will bring them back safely to us next week. We love them. We love these people, but most of all, Father, we love You and we love Your Word. Help us to be a church that stands on the truth, that preaches the truth, does not compromise with the truth. Help us to be a church that has nothing to lose and everything to gain by just staying faithful to Your Word. Taking young men and young ladies, preaching the Word of God, taking moms and dads, taking boys and girls, and Lord, taking men and women and just training them, grounding them to be better in all that You have called them to do. Help us to do that and be faithful in doing that. We will thank You and praise You for all You do for us now in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it, Amen.

## VI. Characteristics of a Godly Church

In Nehemiah 8:1, I want to draw your attention first of all, he says this, that all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the Watergate. The first thing I want you to see that builds into the attitude of heart of the church is a oneness, a unity, no division.

You know the church at Corinth without a doubt was the most carnal church in the New Testament. In fact, when you go through the book of 1 Corinthians, in every case, in every chapter, Paul deals with them on something that they are messed up on. They are arguing about

who is baptized and who. They are arguing about who won who to Christ and who is more spiritual because somebody of notoriety won them to Christ and somebody else of no notoriety won this person to Christ. They are messed up on spiritual gifts. They are talking in some kind of unknown tongue. It is a mess.

Paul says to the church at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 1:10-11, "I wish there was no division among you, but there is contention among you." The church at Corinth is a church that is a fleshly church. It is a church that is not doing what is right, and it is divided. There is no unity. There is division in it. Of course, the Bible says in the book of Ephesians, that great book that really lays out the mindset and the heartbeat of a church, he says down there in Ephesians 4:1-6 that we are "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Then he says there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. The hallmark word for the body of Christ for this church needs to be unity.

If the devil tries to destroy any work, if he ever accomplishes that, I will tell you where he starts. He starts with getting somebody and somebody else to begin a division that begins to separate the body of Christ. I do not care what problem comes into any church. I do not care what you have got to deal with. There is a biblical way to deal with it that maintains the unity, that brings no division. There are a lot of things that can happen in churches. People get mad. Something takes place. Something they do not like the way it was done. People, human beings are the most fickle people the world has ever seen, and we have an affinity for getting mad about something that is absolutely ridiculous. What happens, and it is famous in churches, you have people who always gossip, people who always are looking for the hot new piece of news, and they begin to divide things with it. You have people who just look for things that they are upset about, and they begin to divide. The key here in this church, and the first thing he says, is that when all the people came together at the Watergate to hear the Word of God, there was a unity. They came as one man. The one man understanding that there is one God, there is one book, there is one hope, there is one faith, there is one baptism. It is a unity and a oneness that makes any church available for God to use to do what He wants to do because God is one. God is one, and just as God is the Father and God is the Son and God is the Holy Spirit, and yet these three are one, the Bible says, just as the three are separate yet there is one, there are different jobs within the body of Christ yet there is a unity and there is a oneness. Just like there is no division between God and the Trinity, there is no division or should be no division in any church, but there is. That is something that the church needs to guard against.

I will tell you how you guard against it. He goes on and he says down here in Nehemiah 8:4, "And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose." A pulpit of wood. He takes the Word of God and he lays out the Word of God from a pulpit of wood.

I do not know what you know about the history of the church. I do not know what you know about the development of why, how, the way we are today. But if you go back in church history, you are going to find that the Bible-believing crowd really did not meet in churches. They met in homes. But obviously, as they got bigger and the homes were not there, they met other places, and it worked its way around that a lot of times being a Bible-believing Christian was against the

law. It was a capital offense, punishable by death. So they had to hide, they had to meet here, they had to meet in secret. But after the Reformation, things changed. Now they are allowed to meet. You find great bodies of believers coming together. You will find that out of the Reformation come Methodists and Presbyterians and Anglicans and Lutherans. If you would go back in any book on church history that has a lot of pictures in it at that time period, a lot of paintings, you will find that in the church.

I remember John Knox's defense for his teachings. A picture is painted during that period. There is a bunch of people down there, and John Knox is up in a little, back then they used to have the, in those kinds of churches, they had the, it was elevated. It was like a little balcony. The guy stood up there, but it was over on the side. When the guy preached, he preached from this side or he preached from that side. The pulpit and the message came from either one side or the other. You will see all the paintings and all the things that take place during that period that the preacher is off to the corner. He may be elevated a little birdcage type thing up there, but he stands up there over the people in the corner of the building and he preaches. Well, that is true. It is true of the Methodists. It is true of the Presbyterians, Anglicans, Lutherans, any of those churches that came out of the Reformation, which we call Protestant churches, but it is not true of the Baptists.

I do not know where it started. I do not know who was the first guy to put it together, but someplace when Baptist churches started to meet together in buildings, somebody said, "We do not want the pulpit over there. We do not want it over here. Where are we going to put it? We are going to put it right in the middle." Somebody said, "Why?" "Because we want people to know, we want people to understand that the central thing of this church is the preaching of the Word of God. We want that pulpit right smack dab in the middle, because the most important thing that this church is built on needs to be the focal point of everybody sitting there, not off to the left, not off to the right, right in the middle is where the Word of God needs to be preached." For time and eternity, Baptist churches have had the pulpit preaching in the middle.

Now that is not in the Bible. That is not a doctrine. That is not something that you, you know, you lose your salvation on if you put it someplace else. That does not mean you even have to have a pulpit, but symbolically, somebody coming up through the church history understood the importance of the Word of God to such a degree that they wanted their people to know by example, not by doctrine, but by example, that the central thing in that church was the preaching of the Word of God, the Watergate. So you find it all down through history, all down through history. It is in the middle. That is the first thing you see. When a man gets up to preach, everything is focused on the Word of God. It is the central thing, just like it was back in the book of Nehemiah.

Then the next thing he says in Nehemiah 8:3, "And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law." There was an attentiveness to the Word of God.

I want to ask you a question. I do not want an answer. Answer it inside. I ask this of many, many people. When I start to deal with people one on one in counseling situations, you know, I will let them tell me their problems and go through everything. Then instinctively, I will ask this question. I will ask a form of this question. I will say, "Let me ask you a question before we go any further. Just so I know where we are at. What is your relationship personally with God in the Word of God?" Now that gets me in the door. See, that gets me after, because I know, let them talk about their problems. Fine. Whatever your problem is, I know the book that is going to solve it. We have got to get there. So I always ask them, "Where are you at with the book and the Lord Jesus Christ, your own prayer?" Then they tell me, and then we work from there.

But the question I am asking is this, right along those lines: Do you really understand what you have in your hands this morning? Do you really comprehend what you have got in your hands this morning in this book? Most of God's people do not understand. Most people just do not grasp the reality of what they have in their hands. Somebody asked me a long time ago if I could name one thing that really changed my attitude toward the Word of God to the place where I believe it the way I believe it now. I can honestly say there are two places in my life. One of them I got just by reading on my own. The other one I was listening to a debate between two guys over the issue of the Bible. It just like somebody turned a light on.

I was a young man studying the Word of God, and I wanted to learn the Bible. I wanted to know the Bible, and I realized that you had to "study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." And all that, you know. I was reading through the Bible and coming to the Word of God. God gave me a verse. This honest to goodness, this verse changed my life. This verse, and I got it one night about two o'clock in the morning, and it ruined my sleep the rest of that night. Honest to God, it has ruined my life the rest of my life when it comes to looking anything out of the Word of God because I cannot see anything now other than the way God wants me to see it. It revolutionized my life. It is found in the book of John. One little verse God just tucked away. It just changed my attitude toward this book totally and completely because I was like most people. I wanted to know the Bible. I love God. I love the Bible. But that is not enough because you have to have an attitude toward the Word of God more than just saying I love it, more than just talking about it is special, or more than I have got the right book.

In John 21, I was reading down through there, and John has always been a favorite book of mine anyhow, and I was coming down through there, and I got that. I thought to myself, "Well, I am almost to the last chapter. I am going to finish this chapter, then I am going to go to bed." Oh, did God have other plans! I remember coming down through that thing. I got to John 21:25. You know how you are when you are tired and you just want to finish the thing, and you are reading about four verses at a time, you know, and not paying attention to it. Boy, I will tell you what, it is just like God's radar put me on John 21:25, and it said that this is how he closed out the book of John.

John 21:25

*25 And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.*

When I saw that, I thought to myself, "Wow, you know what that says? That says that God did other things than found in His book." There are lots of other things that He did that did not get recorded. I mean, we read John, you know, the woman at the well, we think that is the only woman at the well He ever met. We see the people healed in the Bible, we think that is all there ever was. That Bible says that many other things that Jesus did, that if they were written down, that the world itself could not hold the books. You know what that told me? Boy, that hit me like a ton of bricks. That told me that of all those things, God handpicked what He wanted me to have in one book. He handpicked out of everything else and put it in one book. That necessitates that never again can I just read that book like any other book. God Almighty, from eternity past to eternity future, who everything He did in the coming of Christ, if everything would have been written down, the world could not contain it. God handpicked it for me and put it in a book. Now, how do you just read that haphazardly anymore in your life? How do you just come to that book and say, "Oh, that really does not mean anything," or "this"? My friend, it simply said, I have preached this ever since that day, everything in that Bible has a meaning. Everything is written there, maybe not to you, but it is written for you, and there is lots written to you, but everything in there God handpicked that you and I would have exactly what He wanted us to have. It changed my life. I have never been the same since. I cannot just haphazardly read the Bible anymore. I may not know all the answers somebody may say. "What does this mean?" I may not know the answer. I do not claim to know everything about the Bible, but I know that there is an answer, and it is there for a reason. There are no accidents when it comes to this book. Any other book you buy, there are accidents. Somebody's opinions, error, things that may be true, things that may not be true, but in this book, God Almighty, God Almighty reached down and He came down, and for three and a half years He said enough and did enough that would fill the world with volumes, and out of that picked exactly what He wanted Bob Alexander to have, and then gave it to me. I have an attitude about that book.

Then I will tell you the next thing. God always gives me God. See, I am slow, and when you, but I have tenacity, and God knows that you cannot knock me down with just one punch. I have got to get two punches. So God hit me with that one, and it came around and got me with the other one. About a year later, I am listening to a debate with two guys over the translations of the Bible, and the one guy is taking the position that God gave us a perfect absolute Bible that anybody in this world can read, and you need no Greek, no Hebrew, that God gave the Bible to every man, and I believe that. The other guy was taking the other position, and his reasoning was, "Well, brother, the originals were written in Greek and written in Hebrew, and when you translate from the Greek to the English, you do not get exactly what was said because in every language there is what they call idioms, and in Bible translations there is what they are called idioms." They are close. He says there are idioms, and the idioms mean that you cannot translate something exactly here and get an exact translation. So he says that is why no English translation could ever be perfect and be right because you did not get exactly what God said. Makes sense.

But this old boy had been around for a while, and he said, "Well, let me ask you a question. Back in Exodus, back in Genesis, Moses, he goes in to see Pharaoh. Moses speaks Hebrew. Pharaoh speaks Egyptian. Pharaoh did not love the Hebrew God. He had no respect for the Hebrews. He spoke in Egyptian. Moses spoke in Hebrew. That conversation is recorded. Joseph, he is the Pharaoh. His brethren come in. They speak Hebrew. The Bible tells you that Moses conversed to a translator in Egyptian, but it is recorded in Hebrew." You know what you got? You did not get exactly what Moses and Joseph said. What did I get? I got exactly what God wanted me to have. It changed my life. I cannot come to this book anymore and just say, "Oh, oh, hum," because I will tell you what they, and I am not saying the Greek and the Hebrew does not have some value, but I am telling you this because less than one million, I mean the Greek today, nobody even speaks that the Bible is written. It is a dead language. You do not go to Greek and they speak the same Greek. It is a sham.

Let me tell you something. I want you to know that God's people use as an excuse because I know human nature. How do you know it? Because I am human. Somebody said, "Well, here is what you are thinking. You thought this? I know you thought this, and don't look at me like you did not think it because I know you thought it." Now you did not think it, Mindy, because you are sweet, but everybody else thought it. I will tell you how human nature goes. "Well, I need to study my Bible, but you know, I really do not understand all the original languages, so I am really not going to get that much out of it, so I think I will watch the ballgame." We sell it as a cop-out. We look for, as human beings, we look for any excuse not to delve into that Bible. Well, I am glad you are here today, but from this point on in your life, you will never be able to use that excuse again because you were cross-haired and fired on today, my friend, that that book is the absolute standard of the Word of God, and the bottom line is God gave you in an English form exactly what He wanted you to have. Perfect.

When those people back there in Nehemiah, they saw, they realized what they had. The question today is, do you realize what you have? If you do not, that is why you are not attentive, attentive unto the book of the law. He said in Nehemiah 8:3 that when he opened that book, the people were attentive. They knew they had the Word of God, and they were not going to miss one word of it. I am telling you, I have a lot of problems, and I do not do what I am supposed to do all the time, and I know I fail in the Word of God, and even reading it sometimes, but I am telling you, I know down in my heart that this is exactly the book that God picked out of everything else that He said. He handpicked this to me, and He gave it to me without any error, and I am going to be held accountable someday, and that forces me to have attentiveness to the Word of God. Everything I read, I pay attention to.

Now if you did not like that one, you are not going to like this one. Nehemiah 8:5, "And Ezra opened up the book in sight of all the people, for he was above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up." You see, not only was there an attentiveness unto the book of the law, but when he opened that book, they stood up. There was a respect for the Word of God. Somebody asked me, and I have been in churches where they actually read a chapter of the Word of God, and everybody stands up. Somebody said, "Well, why don't you have your people stand up when you read the Word of God?" Well, I will tell you what, I have a tough time getting some

of God's people just to get up to come hear the Word of God. He said, "Stand up to hear the Word of God." I ask you a question again. Do you understand what you have? Do you realize what you have today?

My Bible says that in Philippians 2 that one day every knee is going to bow and every tongue is going to confess that Jesus Christ, everyone will bow, every tongue will confess. Why, when I come through the New Testament alone, there are over 400 names and titles for the Lord Jesus Christ. He is called the Branch. He is called, we could just go on and on and on and that is not even getting into the Old Testament. We sing about that name. We sang the song this morning, "Tell me the story of Jesus. Write on my heart every word. Help me that story most precious. Greatest words ever were heard." Oh, we pray in the name of Jesus. We sing in the name of Jesus. We preach in the name of Jesus. The Bible says that there in Nehemiah 9:5, he said, "Blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise." He said, "Blessed be thy glorious name," the name of Jesus, "which is exalted." Jesus said, "If I be lifted up, I will draw men unto me." He said that in the name of Jesus every knee will bow, every tongue will confess. We pray in the name of Jesus. We sing in the name of Jesus, and on down through our lives, Jesus, Jesus, sweetest name I know. But he says, and he says, "Blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise." Blessing, praise, and the name of Jesus exalted above that.

Go to Psalms 138:2, and he says this:

Psalms 138:2

*2 I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.*

There is no greater name on this planet than the name of Jesus, and yet he tells you that he has magnified that Word above all thy name. What are you going to do with that? How does that affect you in your attitude toward the Word of God? How does that affect you in your attentiveness, in your respect? To what? In Christianity today, we have got a lot of things. We have got big churches, we have got fancy PAs, fancy organs, fancy productions, this and that, but I will tell you what, there is no respect and there is no attentiveness to the Word of God. People come, and boy, if you are not done, they start looking at their watch. "But you are not done in 25 minutes." Most pastors in churches, they do not even preach anymore. They get a little stool and sit up here and they talk to you, or they have a little 25-minute little sermonette, and they are all done, and you put them out there, and you can package them up, you know, and you can buy them, you know, little sermonettes on little cassettes by little preacherettes.

Oh, I come down here, let me tell you something, I am telling you, man, you do what you want to do with it, I do not care. I know he says, and he has opened the book instead of all the people, for he is above the people, and when you come down through there, I am going to tell you something, instead they stood up from the morning to noon, six to twelve, six hours standing while somebody read the Word of God, and nobody left, nobody complained, nobody says, "This is really stupid," nobody said, "What is he doing? Don't you know it is hot? Don't you know my legs are tired? Why did not, why did not somebody tell me to bring a lawn chair? I mean, when

are we going to eat? My roast is in the oven. Why did not you, you told me to come to hear this, why did not you tell me we are going to be here for six hours?" No, there is a oneness. You know why? There is an attentiveness unto the Word of God. There is a respect for the Word of God, and they love the Word of God.

I am telling you, I am telling you, I am not mad at you today. I love you. You people, as I look at you, are the basic foundation of building a New Testament church. Every one of you, even if you are here for the first time, I look within you, you have everything. Do not be mad at me today. I love you. I am not picking anybody out of here. I did not, I did not call up last night and find out who was coming to church and preached this message. This is just in the stride of where I am going, and I believe everybody, in honest to goodness, God is my witness on my King James Bible, I believe that everybody in here has the ability to be everything God wants you to be, and I am just telling, I am preaching to me as much as I am preaching to you. I am telling you this is a reality check for me because I am going to tell you something, when you get to the Judgment Seat of Christ, God is not going to ask you what you did here, what you did there, how many this, how many that. He is going to want to know what, what you did with that book.

I am going to give you two scenarios. God is right and holy and just. Amen. Everybody believe that? Is God unfair? No, God is fair. Well, if, and is anybody here, do not, do not believe that God someday is going to judge you by what is in His book? This book is the mind of Christ. Sure He is. Well, how does God judge you at the Judgment Seat of Christ for what you did or what you did not do for Him if He did not give you an absolute standard that you yourself could get to find out what He wanted you to do and then do it? He could not. It would be ludicrous. It would be like me going to high school and the teacher not giving me a history book and then flunking me for the history test and and put me back another year because, "Well, you did not pass the test." "You did not give me the book." "What is that got to do with it? What is it got to do with it? I did not know what to study for." The Judgment Seat of Christ will be a fiasco. "What, You wanted me to go to the mission field? How was I supposed to know that? You wanted me to preach? And how was I supposed to know that?" God is going to say, "I gave you a book that told you everything from Me that I handpicked for you, not for the church, for you, for you, for you, for you, for you, for you, and for me." No excuse.

The bottom line is this, here is the other side: that book is not what God, I said it is, and what God said is, "Don't worry about it." What is God going to do? He is going to beat you up, kick you around because you did not do what He told you to do, and He never told you what to do. If that book is the book that God says it is, we are in trouble as the body of Christ in 2003. If it is not, we will slide right through. Do not count on it. Do not count on it. Do not count on it. The book is the book is the book, and God gave me and you a book handpicked by God that out of everything that He did, He handpicked what He wanted me to have and put it in 66 books, 1,189 chapters, 31,175 verses, and says, "This is My mind. I am going to hold you accountable for what you do with it." My job is to be attentive to it, respect it, and then Nehemiah 8:8, to love it.

## VII. Understanding and Loving the Word

So they read the book. Well, everybody reads the book. Show me a false cult that does not read the book. You have all kinds of people out there believe all kinds of stuff. So they read the book. Big deal. Wait a minute. "So they read the book distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

First of all, it says they read the book distinctly. That means they kept it within context. Your Bible has a context. Every chapter has a context. A verse without a context is a pretext. Your Bible has a context. It is written to one or two groups of people: either the Jew, the Gentile, or the church. Every screwed up church in the world, every screwed up doctrine in the world that somebody is out of line with the Bible comes into play because somebody gets a verse out of context and applies something to the Jew to the church or vice versa. They read it distinctly. That means they were accurate in what they read. Distinctly, it had a context. It had a context.

Then it says they gave the sense. The Bible says in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God," not your preacher, not your wife, not your husband, not your kid. They are all important, but not the first important. First point in your study to show yourself approved unto God. It is His book, not mine. A workman, it is going to take some time, what need is not to be ashamed, Judgment Seat of Christ, rightly dividing the word of truth. Your Bible has divisions in it. Your Bible has a doctrinal meaning, historical meaning, an inspirational meaning. I am not giving you a course on the Bible study course today. I am just saying there is a, they read it distinctly, they had a context, they gave the sense, they knew what it was talking about.

Then other people look down at Nehemiah 8:7. Oh, here come these names again, these guys. Let us just do it that way. These guys: Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah. And you find these guys all throughout here. These guys caused the people to understand the law, and the people stood in their place. You know what those guys did? They helped the younger Christians or the younger people understand what was being said because you know what it is like. It is like a Bible study. It is like this morning, there are things here that maybe I have said that you do not understand, and there are people here, older guys, older gals, that will take you aside. It happens every Sunday. It happens every Thursday night. I watch it after Bible study. Somebody is over in the corner explaining something to somebody, or they will come to me and I will explain it. I try to explain it, but I cannot tough on on Sunday morning because you have got to preach. You do not have time to take questions, but I will talk to you afterwards.

I will tell you the greatest thing we have to offer, and I say this every week. I know you get tired of hearing it, but the visitors never heard it before. We do not give away pens. I do not have a card that says, "We are glad you are here." I do not get a little name thing so we can come track you down this weekend. We love you. We are glad you are here, but you know what? I understand this church is not for everybody. I do not have a lot of things to give you other than this book. Here is the only deal I can give you. I do not care who you are, if you want to learn the Bible, want to study the Bible, I will meet with you an hour a week and help you understand the Bible at your own pace, at your own speed. I will work with you however you want to. That is my goal because that is what the job of the church is.

So they read the book. They read it distinctly. They gave the sense, and some of these guys caused them to understand the reading. Somebody helped somebody else understand the Word of God. You do not all pick it up the first time. You do not pick it up for time, Mindy, and she helps you understand the Bible, has not she? Huh? She did not just bring you to church and you get saved and just leave you, did she, sweetheart? She sits down with you and she teaches you. You ask her questions, do not you? Huh? That is the way it is all about. Jan, you have done the same thing. Nancy, you have done it. All of you have done it. You have all done it. Pam, everybody, everybody has done it. Everybody has done it. Somebody has got you, you have got people at work, and that is what it is about. You understand it. Some of you have been with me for 20, 30 years, John and Jan. I remember them when they were just that high. We have been together 30 years. Some of us, you know the Bible. Next week we have our baptism. John is preaching. Week after that, something, the next time we do it, somebody else will preach. We do our communion. Jimmy did it last time, did you, Jimmy? John. Then next time somebody, we have got a list, somebody else will do it. You know what? There are men and women here who know the Bible, and they in their lives, they meet people, they bring people, and we just do not leave you hanging. Somebody says, "I do not understand." What you do is you take the Word of God and you help them and cause them to understand the reading. That is what I do. What you do. What we are supposed to do.

Then the last thing, and I am finished, was their attitude. Look at Nehemiah 8:9, "And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest, the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law."

Hey, I do not want to be melodramatic. Have you ever wept over the Word of God? Have you really? It never ceases to amaze me. It just blows my mind how people become so callous to their greatest book the world has ever seen. I have spent my whole life training young men and young ladies to love the Word of God. I will spend the rest of my life. I, I, God, I believe God will give me, if He does not come, I believe I have got 20, 30, 40 years left. I am only 28. I believe I can go on for a long time. Hey, let me tell you something, if God gives me that time, I know what I will be doing when He comes about taking young men and young ladies and helping them understand the greatest book the world has ever seen, taking men and women and teaching them how to preach.

I will tell you what, my greatest joy, and I, my greatest joy, I just say that, I say it all the time, if you get tired of hearing, I am sorry. My greatest joy is my family. My boy right there leading singing, my little boy back here doing the tapes, and my wife down here that just is the greatest wife in all the world, my two daughters in there with the kids right now. Always tell everybody is together, everybody just doing for God. I mean, the ministry, it is, it is, that is the way it is. Boy, I will tell you what, I thank God every day. I, I have not always done what is right in my life, and I do not take any credit for it. My wife is the one who takes credit for it. I am an idiot. She is a stable force in our factor. In fact, I sit down, let her preach. But I am telling you this, you say, "How did you get that way?" I will tell you why, because God honors and blesses the book. He does. He does. I am just trying to tell you that. I am trying to tell you that. I am telling you, I

appreciate the families that are in here, and I know we go through tough times with our kids. I do not, I, that is just the way it is. That is the way it is. But you know what? You are here today. The kids are saved. God bless you. God bless you. Do you love the book?

I will tell you what is missing in God's people's lives today. It is just not a love for the book. It is a passion for the book, a passion for it. The Bible says in Nehemiah 8:9 that all people wept when they heard the words of the law. We take it for so much granted, and I, you know, please, you younger Christians, I mean, maybe you are not even there yet where you can identify, and I understand that it comes in a process, but I am telling you, man, I am telling you, I mean, these people sat down there for morning to noon, six hours versus 25, 35 minutes in most services today. You know, and I said somebody said, "Why don't you have them stand up?" Because I just want to get them to get up and be here, loving it, loving it.

You know, I heard a story years ago, and most of you heard this, but I need to hear it again, and there are visitors here. I heard a guy one time tell a story. He said that he was a great preacher, and he was talking about learning the Bible, and he said, "Then I have stolen it and used it and rehashed it and cut it. It is great." He says, "The key to learning the Bible is not studying it, though you have to study it. The key to learning the Bible is not reading it, though you have to read it. The key to learning the Bible, ladies and gentlemen, is loving it. If you love it, you will learn it."

There was a kid one day lived over in a foreign land, and in his village was a great wise man, one of the wisest men in all over the country. This kid dreamed as a young boy about becoming a wise man like this man, and he knew that he had taught other young men his wisdom. So he went to the young man, went to the old man one day, and he says, "I want to learn all that you know. I will come into your house. I will be your servant. I will do whatever you want me to do. The only thing that I ask is teach me your wisdom." The old man says, "Come into my house." About a week went by, nothing really significant happened. The young, the more got impatient like we all do, and he went to the old man, he says, "When, when are you going to start to teach me all this wisdom? I have been here a week. Come on, I want to get going here." "Okay," the old man says, "Let us go." Went down through town, down to the river. Kids thinking, "Wow, I am going to have some special anointing ceremony of wisdom here. I am going to have a big ceremony. I am going to get a little badge that says 'Wisdom Me in Training,' you know." Old man went down there and took him down in the water. Got a buddy to hear. Kids looking around. About that time, before he could do anything, the old man grabbed him and pulled him under the water. He did not even get a good breath of air. That kid down there choking and just about drowning. The old man just stood there holding him under the water, just holding him under the water. After about, you know, if you have met, you know, you pull that kid out. Kid just about dead. He brings that kid out, lays that kid on the bank, just stands there like that, and the kid just coughing, spitting up, you know, doing self-CPR and the whole nine yards, you know, trying to get herself all the water out of his lungs. You like this story, do not you? It is really good. You are going to get better here. I like you. You are my good champion. You just sit there and keep channeling me on. Anyway, he went down there. That kid got up, and he says, "What is, what is wrong with you? I came to you for wisdom. I came to you because everybody said you are the wisest man in

the world. I wanted to learn. You have not drowned me. How in the world can I learn wisdom like this?" The old man looked at him, said, "You know what, kid? You said when you want wisdom just like you wanted air, then you will get it." I am going to tell you, when you want that book like a dying man wants air, you will get it. It is a passion. It is a passion.

What does it take to measure your day out? You go to work. That night you are planning on stopping by the gym for your aerobic workout or whatever you do. You get to work and you forgot your gym bag. Believe it or not, it will mess up your whole day because you really want to go do that, and you forgot it, and now you have got to alter your whole plans, and I do not care how innocent if that is, you know what, your whole day is going to be messed up now because you are out of sync. You go to the office, get there ready to go to work. "I left my laptop at home." You ever try to have something like a laptop that you have all your work on and not have it and then try to work the day? You cannot. But what do you do? You have to go back home and get it and come back. Go to work. "Got a lot to do today. I forgot my glasses. I cannot see anything. I have got all these reports I have got to fill." Something so insignificant will throw your whole day off. You are a carpenter, plumber, electrician. You go to work. You took that tool out of your truck to do something for somebody else, and you left it in the garage, and now you are on the job. You are 40 miles from home. Ever been there, Paul? And you left your drill someplace or you saw someplace, and the boss says, "Cut me all this," and you are saying, "I left my saw at home." I know for me, when I was marking lines in the ground one day, I left my RD, which is the thing you find the telephone lines and around. I was down past over Kansas, and I was really busy, and I had to go all the way down to almost Fort Scott, which is like 70 miles. Had an emergency water main break. People are down there waiting. They page me on the line, you know, "Hurry up, true on site," you know, "People drowning, hurry up," you know, "Get down there, we cannot dig, do you mark the lines?" You know, so I am finished up, threw my stuff in the truck, and I am down there, and I am five minutes away. I just remembered I left my transmitter up to the transformer in the yard back there. Ruined my day. We have all had days like that. Upset your whole schedule. It does not take much to mess our days up. Just something little that we really need. I mean, throw your whole routine off, throw your whole day off. And yet, you know what, me and you tomorrow, last week, we can go to work and never miss not being in a book a day in our lives. I do not know for you, I do not know, I am not speaking for you. I am preaching to myself today. If it gets on you, I am glad. Come back, get some more next week. It is free. But I cannot. I do not get in the book in the morning, my whole day is screwed up. I am just, I just cannot get anything done right. I, and I know that there is no ritual to it. I know that. I am just saying a passion for the Word of God, a passion for the Word of God, a passion for the Word of God.

I want to tell you what, loving that book, these people when they built this, built this, started to build Jerusalem, he had called some people together, and they were together, they were one, and they had an attentiveness to the Word of God, and that pulpit was right there, and they opened up in that Watergate, and he opened up the Word of God, and all the people stood up. He began to read, boy, and there are people down there that some of them did not understand what was being said. Maybe they had not been around and knew what would have been on back in Abraham's time or Solomon's time or David's time, all that time back there, and somebody began to explain

it to him, and the people wept. They, unlike us, they knew what they had. We live in a world today called Christianity that has lost sight of the greatest book the world has ever seen, and we do not understand what we have today. We take it for granted.

Last week I told you a surefire test for spiritual growth, and that is, can you take hard preaching and go out of there saying, "Boy, that was sweet. I like it." Now I will give you one on how do you know if you love the book or not. If you miss it a day, how do you feel? Paderewski was a great piano player, still is. I have got some of his tapes, believe it or not. I like classical music. I am, I am quite the cultured person. He could play that keyboard up one side and down the other. You know what he said one time in an interview? He said he practices 10 hours a day. He says, "If I miss practice one day, I can tell it. If I miss practice two days, music critics can tell it. And if I do not practice for three days, everybody can tell it." Just same way with the book. If I miss it a day, I can tell it. If I miss it two days, my wife can tell it. If I am out of it for a week, everybody can tell it. Passion.

That is what this church has to be about. The central ministry of this church has to be preaching the Word of God, taking men who maybe their lives have had some problems, women, divorces, alcohol, drugs. I do not care whatever. I said it before, I do not care where you have been. God does not care where you have been. He just cares where you are at right now, and build them from there. Just like that little guy Thursday night, "I am not a Christian, but I like good preaching." You know what he had there? He had the right attitude about a book, and God used it to save him. This church here, we have to build on those things. It has to be a unity. Everybody has to be one. It does not mean we do not always agree. We always agree. It does not mean you have to look at the Bible everywhere I look at it. There is a latitude for that. We know what we have got to agree on. There is room for that. Not talking about that. I am talking about a oneness of spirit and purpose of what God has called us to do, understanding that the preaching ministry of this church is the number one thing, and that we love it, we respect it, we have an attitude of heart toward it because that will make or break you when it comes to your own personal life and to build the church. Every head bowed and every eye closed.