

SOLA SCRIPTURA

INTRODUCTION

2017 marks the 500-year anniversary of the Reformation, when reformers such as Martin Luther reacted against the abuses of the Catholic church by advocating a return to pure, Biblical doctrine and teaching. We will be celebrating this great turning-point in church history by examining the 5 'Sola's' of the Reformation. These are Latin phrases that came into usage during that period, to summarise the reformers' beliefs about the essentials of Christianity. This week, we turn our attention to the first of these, Sola Scriptura.

The dictum 'Sola Scriptura' encapsulates the belief that our ultimate authority for faith and practice is Scripture, and Scripture alone. This belief is powerfully and movingly captured in the book of Nehemiah, Chapter 8, when the people of Israel experience a great revival, following their return to the land after the Babylonian Exile. Central to this revival is a renewed love for, and obedience to, the Word of God.

Accepting Scripture as the ultimate authority in our lives and the life of the church means that we need to appreciate the value of careful study of the text. As you read Nehemiah 8: 1-18, pay attention to the repetition of words and phrases. As we go along, we will be considering what important messages are being conveyed by the repeated use of these words.

SERMON POINTS

1. SCENE 1: THE PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THE SCRIPTURES

- Read Nehemiah 8:1-8

One of the words that should have jumped out at you as you read through Nehemiah 8 is 'people' and 'all the people.' What we have here is a picture of the whole population rallying around the Word of God! It tells us that this chapter is all about the role of God's Word among the people of God. Notice also the frequency of the word 'understand': it isn't enough simply to be exposed to the Scriptures - in order for it to change you, you need understanding!

This passage teaches us a few things about the nature of understanding Scripture, and the importance of such understanding amongst the people of the church.

1. 8:1-2 – Understanding begins with hunger.
2. 8:3 – Understanding requires attentiveness.

3. 8:4-6 - Understanding is a community effort.
4. 8:6 - Understanding plays a role in corporate worship.

Q.

What is meant by 'revival'?

How did the revival that God brought about in Nehemiah 8 impact the way in which the people viewed and responded to the Word?

Q.

Which words in 8:1-2 indicate that the people were eager for the Word?

Is this kind of hunger for the Word a part of your daily life?

Q.

What do the words 'he was above all the people' (8:5) indicate about the position the Scriptures should hold in the lives of believers and the church?

Why was this such a pressing issue for the 17th century reformers?

2. SCENE 2: THE PEOPLE REJOICE IN THE SCRIPTURES

- Read Nehemiah 8:9-12

When the people started to understand what Ezra was preaching – that the Babylonian captivity was due to their sin, that the brokenness of Jerusalem's walls was due to their sin – they were overcome with grief. They had understood God's law, and were convicted of their sin. But that was not where the work of the Word ended that day - the teachers told the people to stop weeping and to rejoice, because there was good news: God was not casting them off! They could grieve over the sin of which they had been convicted, but then they could rejoice because God is merciful and forgiving! The same principle applies today: sorrow for sin; joy in God's forgiveness and the assurance of his love. That's the gospel!

Q.

The first day of the seventh month (8:2) was the Feast of Trumpets (see Leviticus 23:23-25). Was this a solemn or a joyful feast? Why?

Of what did the Feast of Booths serve to remind the Israelites (8:14-16)?

Which great feast in the Jewish calendar did it precede?

Q.

For Christians, what is the meaning of 'they joy of the Lord is your strength' (8:10)?

What other things do you sometimes resort to as 'your strength'?

How does the truth that 'the joy of the Lord is your strength' play out in your life?

3. SCENE 3: THE PEOPLE OBEY THE SCRIPTURES

- Read Nehemiah 8:13-18

In these verses, we see the Israelites respond with unqualified obedience to God's instructions regarding the Feast of Booths.

Q. In 8:13, who comes together to study the Scriptures?

Q. Who obeyed the instructions they found?

Q. What was the result of their obedience (8:17)?