Authority and the response to it

Nehemiah 8:1-12
Background

- Nehemiah 1-4: Wall built
- City protected
- People secure- at home, settled
- The job is not complete
Nehemiah 8:1, 2b

1 all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel.

8 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.

All of the people
Authority / leader – Ezra the scribe

- Role: transmitter of tradition
- Why did they come to him?
  - Not because he = the transmitter
  - Because he had the tradition
- The people called for the book, not the man
- The book of the Law- how should we then live?
Ezra’s role (v. 2)

- To all the people; men, women, children old enough to comprehend
- Ezra’s task?
- To give his take on the situation?
- To preach?

1. Do we shortchange some of our congregation- think ‘they’ll never be able to get this; I am too sophisticated for them!'
Nehemiah 8:3

3 He read it aloud from daybreak till 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.

To read.
Response- listen attentively
V. 5

5 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.

Why did they stand?

Reverence / respect for the message, not the man

God’s word represented God himself.

Lost today: loss of respect, proper response. Lack of cultural/ social literacy – what is appropriate.
V. 6- Praise

Ezra praised the Lord, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

Lifting hands – importance of context
Here // standing at home-run ball
Amen- we agree, preach it brother!
Bowed down- respect and awe

Lifting hands can mean different things in different contexts: before man with gun, in first, in classroom, with hand open from side to side, ....
Vv. 7-8: Hermeneutics and homiletics

Source of authority = the word
Authority is without meaning unless it is understood.
Word needs comprehension and reaction
Not a magical charm of implicit power
Levites // Ezra- hemeneuts / interpreters
Translators
Is this not our role as preachers / teachers?

7 The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. 8 They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read. Or God, translating it
Romans 10:14-15

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent?

Messengers of the unknown message
Interpreters of the unknown message
V. 9- Hearing and weeping

For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

Why did they weep?

Saw the authority - it exists.

Recognized authority – is related to me

Convicted by authority – it is greater than me
V. 10 - Grief

10 Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Grief relates to the past: what has been, what has been lost (Ezra 3:12)

Joy relates to the present-future: what is and is coming

12 But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy.
Role of the leader

- Be aware of the seasons – keep your eye on the weather
- At times the congregation needs places to rejoice
- At times the congregation needs places to weep
- Leader needs to know when it is necessary to do both
V. 12 - Rejoicing

Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

Deuteronomy 14:22-26

A leader recognizes the time to have a party
Hermeneutics worked

- The people understood the text (exegesis)
- The people saw the relevance of the text to their own situation (application)
- Now need to act on it
- Understanding without application is useless
Authority and relativity – 2
Chronicles 29-30

29:1-5, 15-17, 32-36 – leader’s vision is too small
30:1-5, 15-20, 23-31:1 – worship leads to renewal
Authority relates to the words, but because of their source in the speaker.
Final authority lies in the Author
His authority isn’t real until it is realized
Matthew 7:28-29  Jesus’ authority

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Teachers transmitted tradition, often interpreting it in their own way; authorities

Jesus was the source of the tradition and its interpretation; he was the Authority

They were ‘Rabbi’- ‘great one’; he was ‘LORD’
Dangers of authority today

- We think we are the source of the tradition
- I am the authority
- The interpreter overshadows the interpreted
- Our interpretation becomes authoritative
- Danger of second guessing divine revelation
- Gen 3:1
- Acts 10:9-16

4. Problem with some commentators – don’t let anyone know that there are any alternate views.

6 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”