

Ezra Preaches the Bible

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- [0 : 00] Well, as I think I mentioned, our books of Ezra and Nehemiah were originally one book called the Book of Ezra.
- But as happened to the books of Samuel and Kings and Chronicles, it was decided that they were too long, so they were cut in two. So we have one Samuel, two Samuel, one Kings, two Kings, one Chronicles, two Chronicles.
- And the book of Ezra was cut in two, and one bit was called Ezra and the other Nehemiah. Though, as you will observe, if you listen carefully to the reading, Ezra pops up here in the book of Nehemiah.
- Because, of course, he and Nehemiah were contemporaries. Nehemiah was appointed as the governor, and Ezra was a priest who was commissioned to teach the word of God.
- If you could keep a finger in Nehemiah chapter 8 and just turn back for a moment to Ezra chapter 7. This is, as was just the book before Nehemiah, this is where we meet Ezra for the first time in the book of Ezra.
- [1 : 08] Though the whole book is called Ezra, he only appears in chapter 7 and verse 1. And I'd like to read a few excerpts from that chapter. After these things, during the reign of Artaxerxes, Ezra, son of Sarai, and so on, the chief, son of Aaron, the chief priest.
- So he was of the priestly family. Verse 6, this Ezra came up from Babylon. Notice the description of him. He's a priest, but his special job was that of teaching.
- He was a teacher well-versed in the law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given. We think of priests in the Old Testament as those who offered sacrifices. That's quite right.
- But their other job was to teach the law of God, the law of Moses, to the people. And we read that Ezra arrived in Jerusalem on the fifth month, on the seventh year of the king.
- He'd begun his journey from Babylon the first day of the first month. He arrived in Jerusalem the first day of the fifth month. And here's the great little phrase, for the gracious hand of his God was on him.
- [2 : 22] And then verse 10 summarizes the kind of person Ezra was. Listen to this very carefully. For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the law of the Lord and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.
- We can summarize that as saying Ezra devoted himself to study the law of God, to do the law of God and to teach the law of God.
- Isn't that wonderful? He, as it says, he had set his heart or devoted himself to study the law of God, to do it and to teach it.
- Well, how wonderful. I imagine there were some priests who were busy doing it but never studied it. So they didn't know what they were talking about. Others who'd studied it but weren't bothered doing it themselves.
- They just talked about it to others. And perhaps some priests who studied it and did it but didn't bother teaching it. Do you see the point? How wonderful it was that Ezra studied it, did it himself and taught it to others.

[3 : 31] If I were preaching next Tuesday night, I think I'd probably preach from Ezra chapter 7 and verse 10 and encourage you, dear brother, to study the Bible, to do what it says and to teach it.

Do you? Do you? My fee is 200 guineas, of course, for such appearances. Where was I?

Well, it's this Ezra we meet in Nehemiah. So back to chapter 7 of Nehemiah. In our studies, we've looked at the theme of praying from Nehemiah chapter 1.

And I encouraged you to take the Bible prayers as your model prayers. And I hope some of you have been doing that. I might say that on these Wednesday nights when people have led us in prayer, I've been so moved because the prayers have been so biblical and so contemporary and so powerful.

They're wonderful prayers. And the more observant of you may notice that in Ezra chapter 9, there is a very long prayer.

[4 : 42] And if you had, you know, a weekend spare, you could turn Ezra 9 into a prayer as well. That would keep you quiet for a while or keep you noisy for a while, I should say. So we focused on praying.

We focused on trusting in Nehemiah chapter 4. Trusting because the Lord their God was fighting for them as they worked to protect the city. And then last week from Nehemiah 5, we discovered that there was rottenness inside the people of God.

Jews were selling fellow Jews and extorting them for their money. And so we saw the responsibility we have to love others and to use the great phrase from Nehemiah chapter 5, to fear God.

That is to rightly respect God and shape our lives by God. Tonight, we turn to the theme of receiving God's words, understanding God's words, obeying God's words, trusting God's words and committing to keep God's words.

One of the saddest experiences of my life is to talk to people, to couples who have decided to separate and divorce.

[5 : 56] And when I hear one side of the story from the husband, say, and hear what the marriage is like and what the wife is like, and then at a separate occasion I hear from the wife what the marriage is like and what the husband is like, I think, I can't believe you're talking about the same marriage.

You obviously haven't communicated for a very long time. That is, you may have lived in the same house, shared the same family life, but if one of you talked, the other one wasn't listening.

And if the other one talked, the other one wasn't listening. And it's interesting, isn't it, that we've included in our themes from Nehemiah, praying to God, that is talking to God, and here in this chapter, listening to God.

And as you'll know, if you do it seriously, listening is hard work. It's easy to listen without paying attention.

I do it all the time. When the radio is on, they chat away, and occasionally I listen in, but mostly I'm thinking about something else entirely. I was trained as a classical musician, and we were taught never to use classical music as background, because that trained you to use music as background and not actually listen to it.

[7 : 32] It's great advice. So I don't like hearing music in the background, because I think, what am I concentrating on, the music or the conversation? You see, disciplined listening, serious listening, takes love and attention.

George Herbert has the great phrase, quick-eyed love. He means love is quick-eyed to see the other person. Well, I'd like to change that phrase slightly to quick-eared love.

That is, true love is quick to listen attentively. And I think in a busy world, one of the greatest gifts we can give people is to listen attentively to them, to hear what they're saying.

And of most importance is that we listen attentively to God as he speaks to us day by day through his words.

If we don't do this, we'll eventually find we're living in a different world to God's world. So the big theme of tonight is receiving God's words, understanding God's words, obeying God's words, trusting God's words, committing to keep God's words.

[8 : 52] And this, in fact, we find this coming out through the whole of Nehemiah chapters 8 to 10.

We heard in the reading from chapter 8 about the people hearing and receiving the word of God. We find in chapter 9 that they start praying and confessing their sins because they've heard God's word and they're begging God to act in faithfulness to his word.

And then in chapter 10 of Nehemiah, they make a commitment to keep God's word. They promise to walk in God's law and do all that he says.

If you turn forward, we will get to Nehemiah 8 in a moment. But just look forward to Nehemiah chapter 10, verse 29. They make this great promise. They make a solemn, abiding agreement.

It's described as that at the end of chapter 9. They put it in writing and they all seal it. They sign it with their seals. They're saying, yes, these are the promises we're making. And you can see a list of the Nehemiah, the governor and the and the leaders and the Levites and the leaders of the people.

[10 : 06] And all the rest of the people make this same promise. All these now join their fellow Israelites, the nobles and bind themselves with a curse and an oath.

Now, our version has to follow the law of God given through Moses. Literally, it is to walk according to the law of God given through Moses. To bind themselves with a curse and an oath is to say, may we be cursed if we do not follow these walk in these laws.

And to bind themselves with an oath is to say, we will walk in the laws of our God. The word follow is OK, but I think walk sounds more intentional, doesn't it?

To walk in something is to, well, to walk this way rather than that way. It's not just to follow. It's to decide to walk a certain way. And the phrase walking in the Bible is such a lovely phrase, isn't it?

Enoch walked with God. What a great thing to do with walk, to walk with God on God's journey. Abraham was told, walk before me. And we're told in Colossians chapter two, that as we've received Christ Jesus, the Lord, so we should walk in him.

[11 : 26] So the big picture here is that they are hearing and responding to God's words as a community of God's people.

They promise to walk in God's law and do all his says. So God's people, we see, are trusting in God's promise, walking in God's words, living in God's presence and under his protection.

Well, let's go back to the beginning of Nehemiah chapter eight. I love a good miracle.

I even like the one where the two young boys are insulting the bald prophet. Go up, thou bald head.

And he calls out a she bear to come and eat them. I think that's very appropriate myself. And I've often tried to do it with no great effect. But I do seriously like the miracles of the Bible.

[12 : 32] And I particularly love the miracles that we find here in Nehemiah chapter seven and chapter eight and chapter nine and chapter 10. It looks very unmiraculous.

We don't see a mountain split or food pouring down from heaven or water gushing out to feed people. It doesn't look like a miracle.

But let me tell you, there are there are lots and lots of miracles happening in this chapter and the same miracles I trust happening in your church Sunday by Sunday.

What's the first miracle? Well, the first one I notice is in chapter eight, verse one. The people came together as one in the square before the water gate. They told Ezra, the teacher of the law, to bring out the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel.

How wonderful. What a miracle that is when the people of God say, please teach us the Bible. In the words of John Wesley, there is a book about God.

[13 : 47] Give me that book. And not just some individuals were saying it, not just some very keen Christians, sorry, believers, followers at the time were saying it.

The whole people gathered together and said, we want this book. Now, I know many people in ministry, many ministers who are working hard in churches trying to teach from the scriptures and the people don't want the Bible.

A friend of mine was preaching at his church in England about 10 years ago. And what the congregation did when he got up to preach was to shut their books.

As a sign that they didn't want to listen to a sermon from the Bible. Another more extreme example, which I still find hard to believe, is of an elderly and respectable lady church warden in a parish in England.

When the curate got up to preach from the scriptures, she would pick up her hasick, that is her kneeling pad, and hold it in front of her face so she couldn't see him.

[14 : 52] So much for English politeness. And lots of ministers give up preaching the scriptures because the people don't want it.

And indeed, you might remember from the end of 2 Chronicles, that the reason the people had been sent off to exile originally, because they did not want the word of God.

Let me read from 2 Chronicles 36. The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place.

But listen to this, listen to the response. They mocked God's messengers, despising his words, and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.

Well, isn't this, in Nehemiah chapter 8, a miracle of God's grace? God's people who had refused to hear God's words, who'd mocked his prophets, shut their ears to God's word, refused to hear God, now say, please give us God's words.

[16 : 10] That, dear friends, is a miracle. And if it happens in your church next Sunday, that'll be a miracle, praise God for it.

And a great thing to pray would be that in all churches around Australia and indeed around the world, that the people of God want the word of God.

It sounds an odd thing to pray, but it is a needed prayer, let me tell you. That's the first miracle. I think it's wonderful. I love it.

The second miracle is that God provided Ezra, who was, as we saw, a man who had devoted himself to study the law of God, the word of God, to observe it himself.

Isn't that splendid? Isn't that splendid? And to teach it to others. And I meet many Christians in churches where they come to conventions to get some Bible teaching because they say, our minister doesn't preach from the scriptures.

[17 : 20] What a tragedy that is. When God is silenced by a minister. And so here's the second miracle.

The first miracle was that the people wanted the Bible. The second miracle is that God provided an able Bible teacher for them.

What a great honor and privilege that was for the people to have a Bible teacher. And how we praise God for those churches around Melbourne and indeed around Australia, where God has graciously and generously provided a preacher, a teacher who will speak from the scriptures.

A friend of mine in England said to me a couple of years ago, I'm getting sick of boring biblical sermons. I said, you should try listening to some boring unbiblical sermons for a while.

That would cure you. What a miraculous gift of God to provide Ezra.

[18 : 36] And Ezra did what they asked. Verse three. He read the law. Allowed from daybreak until noon.

You wanted a Bible reading. That's a good length, isn't it? Six hours. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the water gate in the presence of men and women and others who could understand.

And here it is. All the people listened attentively to the book of the law. I remember when I was first at St. Jude's, we had a lovely Indian boy who came to study at the university and he joined the church.

And after a few months, I asked him if he was enjoying the church. He said, yes. But he said, I have one question. Why do you only have one sermon in your services?

We always have two at home. And I said to him, I've never been asked to preach two sermons. People have occasionally suggested I don't preach any, but no one's ever said, let's have two sermons.

[19 : 41] What a joy that was. What a dear, what a dear church he must have come from. So the miracle is the people want the word of God. The second miracle is that God provides us to teach it.

And then we find the first pulpit in the Bible. You'll be pleased to find this. If you like Bible trivia, here it is. Ezra, the teacher of the law, stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion.

It was a rather more substantial one than that one because he had Levites and so forth up there with him to encourage him and keep him going. Well, he opened the book.

We've read the summary. Now we're getting the detail in verse five. All the people could see because he was standing above them. As he opened it, the people all stood up. That's a miracle, isn't it? Why would you stand up?

Why you stand up because God is present. And God is present in his words. We don't have that custom, do we, of standing up when the Bible is read.

[20 : 43] It might be a good thing to do occasionally because if God came in, I imagine we would stand up or perhaps fall to our knees. We certainly wouldn't sit back and fall asleep, would we, if God were present.

But God is present in his words. Every time the Bible is read, who is speaking to us? God.

He's present in his words. Present speaking to his people. He was speaking tonight as the Bible was read. I love saying to people, I play a trick on people occasionally.

Do you want to hear what a special message the Holy Spirit has for you, especially tonight? People think, oh yes, this is going to be good. Then I pick up the Bible and start reading. That is God's special message for tonight.

Here it is. They're all spirit-inspired words. Not only do people want the word of God, they knew that God was present when the word of God was spoken.

[21 : 51] However, you want to symbolize that by falling on your face or standing up or doing a cartwheel. I don't mind. But at least make sure you know that God is speaking through his words.

Ezra praised, verse 6, Ezra praised the Lord, the great God, and all the people lifted their... This sounds like calisthenics. They're standing up.

Now they lift their hands and respond, Amen, Amen. Well, I occasionally watch Greek and Italian funerals. And I think they're far more, much more fun than the kind of funerals of my family.

In my family, we all go to funerals like this. No emotion is shown. No sentiment at all.

But their funerals look much more fun to me. People weeping and crying all over the place. I think it's terrific. And we... It's just a cultural thing, isn't it? But we...

[22 : 49] I love the words in one of L.P. Hartley's books about a family heading off to church. With their wooden Sunday faces.

No emotion will be expressed. Well, that might be our loss, I think. We're nervous about standing up and raising our hands, but it seems to be a good idea.

And even Paul knelt down to pray, as did Jesus, I seem to remember. It can't be all bad. They lifted up their hands and responded, Amen, Amen.

Then they bowed down and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. It was quite athletic, wasn't it? If you're elderly, please don't try and do this tonight without some medical advice. And then the Levites, they help out.

They walk around the people, among the people, instructing the people in the law while the people were standing up. They read from the book of the law, making it clear. That may have... That may mean translating it from Hebrew into Aramaic, which many people would have spoken.

[24 : 03] Or else it means, or and it means, help them understand it. Giving them meaning so that the people... Here it is, I love this phrase, they understood what was being read.

We found that theme back in verse 3, that others who could understand. So, not just listening, but understanding. Understanding. Understanding. And understanding takes attentive listening, doesn't it?

Active listening, we call it. Not passive listening, where you let the words kind of flood over you, but active listening, where you think, I wonder what that means. Yes, that's a great phrase.

I must remember that one. Active listening is when you pay attention to what somebody is saying. Active reading is when you read the Bible with... And you think of questions in your mind, and you think, I wonder what that means.

How does that link to that verse? Yes, I see how that fits in. Oh, yes, that's the right example to use. That's active listening. We should do it to others. We should certainly do it to God's word.

[25 : 02] So, they are understanding what was being read. What a miracle that was too. Another miracle, as a matter of fact. And here's the next miracle. The Nehemiah, the governor, Ezra, the priest, and the Levites were instructing the people and said to them, This day is holy to the Lord your God.

Do not mourn or weep. Well, they'd been standing up, raising their hands, faces to the ground. Now they're mourning and weeping because they suddenly realise what they've missed out on all these years.

What a great treasure was provided for them, which they had ignored. And what a scandal it was that their ancestors had refused these precious words.

Do you weep when you read the Bible? Do you weep and mourn when you hear a sermon?

Because you realise the gap between God's great promises and our little faith. The gap between God's great gifts and our slow response.

[26 : 14] I hope you do. There's plenty of room for it. They'd been weeping as they listened to the words of the law.

But Nehemiah says, go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks and send some to those who have nothing. For this day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So in the midst of their grief, they have to know this is actually a joyful day.

It's a mixture, isn't it, of sadness and joy. Sadness because they've neglected this word of God. Joy because they're finally hearing it. So it's a mixture of sadness and joy.

Well, the people went away to eat and drink, verse 12, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.

So that's on the first day. On the second day, a little Bible study group is set up with the heads of the families, with the priests and Levites gathered around Ezra the teacher to give attention to the words of the law.

[27 : 20] This is the leaders. And they found written the law, which the Lord had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites would live in temporary shelters during the festival of the seventh month. That was the month they were in.

The Feast of Tabernacles, this is called. And the people used to, in response to God's instruction, create, we call them humpies nowadays, I think, in Australia, but sort of tents with branches over the top, to remind them that their ancestors had lived in temporary shelters throughout their wilderness wanderings.

It was a reminder of the Exodus, a reminder of God's great provision to them when they were in the desert for those 40 years, and how generously God had guided them and provided for them.

And so the leaders sent out their instruction that it's now time to celebrate this festival of the tabernacles. So they went out, they brought back branches, built themselves temporary shelters on their own roofs.

That may be a shock to you. Of course, they were flat roofs, so that wasn't as dangerous as it sounds. In their courtyards, the courts of the house of God, and the square by the water gate. And we read the comment that they hadn't celebrated as a bigger festival of tabernacles since the day of Joshua, which is many years ago.

[28 : 39] And then throughout that festival, day after day, verse 18, here's the third round of Bible study. From the first day to the last, Ezra read from the book of the law of God. They celebrated the festival for seven days.

On the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly. I may have mentioned the fact that I used to find the book of Acts a great book with all those snakes and people being put to death and always found the end of the book a bit boring.

It was just Paul doing a Bible study in Rome. A bit of an anticlimax, I thought. A bit like the end of Luke, actually, strangely enough, where Jesus had been doing miracles around the place and dying on the cross and rising again.

What does he end up doing in Luke 24? Taking a Bible study, wasn't he? Not an anticlimax, but exactly the right response to the work of God and to the word of God.

And then, in chapter 9, we have this extraordinary moment where the people confess their sins. They confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors.

[29 : 50] They stood where they were and read from the book of the law, the Lord of God, for the quarter of the day and spent another quarter in confession and in worshipping the Lord, their God. So, it's not just that they're hearing the Bible and understanding it, not just that they're responding emotionally to it, not just that they're obeying it, but they're now praising God for it and confessing the sins of which God has made them aware.

Well, if your Bible reading never leads you to confess your sins, something is wrong. And if the Bible reading in church never leads the church as a whole to confess its communal sins, something is wrong.

Because if God has spoken, one of the results will be we realise the gap between our lives and God's ways. And that's true for individual Christians.

It's also true for churches. The main focus of this actually is not individual Bible reading, is it? Though that's a great thing to do. The focus here is on God's people welcoming God's words and God's people as a body responding to God's words.

And when we confess our sins in church on Sunday, we should not only think of our own personal sins, though it's appropriate to do that, but also be bringing to God the sins of our church. And if you haven't thought what the sins of your church are, it's probably time you began.

[31 : 30] Because that's exactly what the people of God are doing in Nehemiah chapter 9. We can't go through the prayer in great detail, but please notice the instruction is stand up and praise the Lord your God.

And they start by praising God. Quite right too. Blessed be your glorious name. Verse 9. May it be exalted above all blessing and praise. You alone are the Lord. You alone you made the heavens the highest heaven and so on.

So, they praise God. They know who God is. They're focusing on who God is. What a great way to start a prayer. Not, what do I want? But who is the God to whom I'm praying, to whom I'm praising.

And then they remind God of all that God has done. Verse 7. You chose Abraham. Verse 9. You saw the suffering of our ancestors in Egypt. Verse 13.

You came down on Mount Sinai. You spoke to them from heaven. You told them to go in and take possession of the land. But then we get in verse 16 their response.

[32 : 31] But our ancestors, they became arrogant and stiff-necked. They did not obey your commands. They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. How does God respond? Verse 19.

Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the wilderness. Instead, you gave them kingdoms and nations. Verse 22. But in response to all of God's gifts, verse 26, they were disobedient and rebelled against you.

They turned their backs on your law. But in your great compassion, verse 27, you rescued them. Verse 28.

As soon as they were at rest, they did what was evil in your sight. It's a dismal story, isn't it, of God's generosity and the people's waywardness. Verse 29. You warned them in order to turn them back to your law.

And then here's the focus of the prayer. Verse 32. Now therefore, our God, the great God, mighty and awesome, who keeps his covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes.

[33 : 36] The hardship that has come upon us, our kings and our leaders, our priests and our prophets. In all that has happened, verse 33, you've remained righteous, you've acted faithfully while we acted wickedly.

Verse 36. But see, we are slaves today, slaves in the land you gave to our ancestors. We are in great distress. So what the law of God, the reading of the law of God has done has been to remind people of God's great promises and realize how often they've turned away from God's promises.

How often God has been compassionate and kind and generous to them, yet they've continued to turn away from his God's promises and they're facing now the consequences of their disobedience and they're praying to God for his mercy.

Well, that's a miracle. that is a miracle when people realize who God is and who they are. And the more we are convinced and overwhelmed by God's power and God's faithfulness and God's generosity, the more we will rightly be overwhelmed for our sins.

But that's not the only miracle. The next miracle is found in chapter 10. I referred to it briefly a moment ago and that is verse 38 of chapter 9.

[35 : 04] In view of this, we're making a binding agreement, putting it in writing and our leaders and our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it. Here's a public commitment, you see.

And what is it to do? It is in verse 29. We bind ourselves with a curse and an oath to walk in the law of God given through Moses and obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the Lord our God and then they list the particular ones that they're going to focus on.

Well, there's a miracle, isn't it? It's a bit like when the law was first given, the people responded, all the laws had said, all the Lord has said, we will do and be obedient.

Well, it's a brave thing to promise, isn't it? But making this kind of covenant promise is a good thing to do even if we know we're going to fail.

It's good to be heading in the right direction even if we trip over every day. It's good to be walking in God's ways even if we stumble occasionally. It's good to decide to walk in God's promises, to walk in God's ways, to walk according to God's words, even if we occasionally forget them and go our own way.

[36 : 25] It's good to have the big direction of our lives set firmly even if we know we will occasionally be wayward. And what is it to walk in the words of God?

To walk in the words of God is to believe the promises of God. To walk in the words of God is to heed the warnings of God.

To walk in the words of God is to receive God's gifts and know them with thankfulness and receive them with gratitude.

To walk in the words of God is to encourage others to walk with us in the words of God. To walk in the words of God is to walk in God's grace and kindness and compassion.

To walk in the words of God is to walk in the promise of God's forgiveness of our sins through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. To walk in the words of God is to walk in the spirit.

[37 : 32] what a great thing to make a public declaration. I will walk in God's words this day this week this year.

What a great thing for a church even more exciting I think when a church makes a declaration like that because if the whole church makes the declaration then everyone's encouraged aren't they?

Everyone's caught up in the same worship and service of God. We will walk in God's words this day this week this year.

Please notice that the response of the people to the word of God is response of head heart life and public commitment.

A response of head they understood they paid enough attention to understand. A response of heart first of all they were full of grief then they were full of joy.

[38 : 49] A response well you can have an intellectual response can't you an emotional response but it might make no difference to your actions at all. I know people who know every Bible verse there is but don't live by it and I know people who are severely moved whenever they hear the scriptures read but don't ever obey what the scriptures say.

No the response is head and heart and life and please notice here and public commitment. people sometimes say to me I don't remember sermons or Bible studies I say no neither do I and I give them but you see what we're meant to do with the word of God is not be able to recite it like a well-educated parrot but to receive it so deeply that it changes us in the deeper springs of our lives.

changes our values, changes our hopes, changes our fears, changes our desires, changes the deepest patterns of our relationships.

That's the kind of listening we must do and fortunately we have a God who speaks his powerful words to affect exactly those changes. No we don't want to have a church in which people know Bible trivia.

God save us from that. we want people and congregations and churches who are changed, transformed by the deep work of the Spirit through his words, the scriptures to all of us.

[40 : 34] Well you might have noticed I've been encouraging you to do a kind of triple listening. I'm trying to get you to listen for yourself. I'm trying to get you to listen for others. That is I want you to use what you've heard over these studies in encouraging other people and as a matter of fact if you do that it will encourage you as well.

I find every time I encourage somebody else I think oh yes I must do that too. So when you encourage somebody else with a truth from the Bible what happens is you're encouraged and they're encouraged as well.

But I've also tried to encourage you to listen as members of churches and to think not just well this is for me as an individual but this is for us as a church.

Now I know there are a number of churches, members of different churches present here tonight so we can't make promises on behalf of our churches, I know that.

But I'm going to ask you to make a public commitment that you will walk in God's words and that you will encourage others to walk in God's words as well and I want you to make that public commitment by standing.

[41 : 48] If you're willing to do so then I'll lead us in a public prayer of commitment. Blessed be your glorious name and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise.

You alone are the Lord. You made the heavens even the highest heavens and all their starry host, the earth and all that is in it, the seas and all that is in them.

You give life to everything and the multitudes of heaven worship you. And you are the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whom you sent to be our Saviour.

And you are the God who sent your Holy Spirit to guide us into all the truth through the scriptures. Please make us attentive to your words.

Please help us to listen with deep concentration and to receive your words deeply into our lives. Please help us to understand, to feel and to live your words so that we may walk in them.

[43 : 03] And tonight our gracious Heavenly Father we resolve to do this, this day, this week, this year and for the rest of our lives.

And we make this solemn promise in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.