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Every year, for as many years as I can remember, one of my favourite verses in the Bible at this time of year, is one I think of as the **Harvest Covenant**. After the catastrophic global flood subsided, God gave Noah the all-clear to step out of the floating zoo that was his home for about 16 months, and made this covenant with Noah: “*For as long as earth lasts, planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, will never stop.*”<sup>1</sup>

Going back in time to creation, God gave the first man and woman charge of His created world and said “*I've given you every sort of seed-bearing plant on Earth, every kind of fruit-bearing tree, I've given to you for food.*”<sup>2</sup>

We gather today, to celebrate God's faithfulness in keeping His part of the Harvest Covenant, a covenant which ensures, His created rhythm of day and night, the cycle of seasons, the patterns of weather, all work together to ensure, the miracle of the seed continues to sustain us; it is the miracle of **seed-to-fruit -> fruit-to-seed**, which feeds, nourishes and keeps us alive!

As we move along in the historical narrative of Nehemiah's activities, this miracle of the seed is played out once again, but in a slightly different context.

Remember Jesus' parable about the Sower who cast seed as he walked back and forth the length of a field, some fell by the wayside, some on rocky ground, some among thorns and weeds, and some on good ground? Jesus may have been sitting in place where a sower was casting seed in a field nearby, and He used that live scene to illustrate a point about the Word of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 8:21-22

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:29-30 (MSG)

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To those who did not understand the illustration, Jesus explained, ***The seed is the Word of God***, and he went on to explain what happens to the Word of God when it is heard, or given or received by people with different priorities, concerns and pursuits in life.

***The Word of God is not only powerful, but it is life giving, like a seed.*** The prophet Isaiah paints a lovely picture about the Word of God, *The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.*<sup>3</sup> It is like the seed which lives on and on, to re-fresh and re-create life.

Last Sunday we read, the wall around Jerusalem was finished. As we noted earlier, ***my*** wall in front of my house became ***our*** wall around ***our*** city. Jerusalem could now proudly join the ranks as a fortified city!

They were now equal to the many larger kingdoms around who had fortified cities, and the people's mood changed. Nehemiah makes this note, ***When all our enemies heard the news, and all the surrounding nations saw it, our enemies totally lost their nerve. They knew that God was behind this work.***<sup>4</sup>

The Jewish community knew, when God fulfils His promise, when does does the miraculous, when God does what we cannot or have failed to do, our response should be praise God and thank Him! Their worship manual, the Psalms, has specific instructions.

First, *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name.*<sup>5</sup>

Then sing, *There is no one like You among the gods, O Lord, Nor are there any works like Yours. All nations whom You have made shall come and worship*

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 40:8

<sup>4</sup> Nehemiah 6:16

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 29:1-2

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*before You, O Lord, And they shall glorify Your name. For You are great and do wondrous deeds; You alone are God.<sup>6</sup>*

*Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory, for the sake of Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness!<sup>7</sup>*

*Followed by, I will give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify Your name forever<sup>8</sup>,... because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise You.<sup>9</sup>*

Spontaneous praise! Their enemies realise, to complete the wall around Jerusalem in 52 days, **HAS** to be supernatural. Its time to do what our worship manual, the Psalms, tells us to do.

The people ask Ezra the priest, to bring out the Word of God, which is in his possession. What follows, is a treasured lesson on how we should handle the Word of God.

## **1. God's Word should be preserved**

When I was with the Bible Society, I met a Vietnamese man who was Chief Accountant at the Bible Society of Vietnam. This man, with his immediate family, was on the last ship to leave Saigon harbour before the city fell to Ho Chi Minh. He carried no personal belongings only the Bible Society's books of account which, to him were treasured volumes telling the story of the Bible Society in Vietnam.

Carted off into exile, Ezra would have taken with him, the *Book of the Law of Moses* and made sure it was safe. As a priest, this was his duty. The people knew this, and so they **told** Ezra to bring it out, and so he

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<sup>6</sup> Psalm 86:8-10

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 115:1

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 86:12

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 63:3

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did. He had preserved the Word of God through the exile, for a time such as this.

To preserve the Word of God is not to value one translation over another, nor to save bound copies. To preserve the Word of God is make sure, during times when the Word of God is distorted and used by people for their own aims and purposes, that it remains true and honest to what was in God's heart and in His mind, when He gave us His Law.

## **2. The Word of God should be heard.**

It is most likely, Ezra did **not** read all of the first five books of the Bible, **the Torah** to the Jews. He would have most likely read out aloud, all 34 chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, known literally as "second law," (Greek *deuteros + nomos*).

Most of the book<sup>10</sup> consist of three sermons delivered by Moses shortly before they enter the Promised Land. The intention of reading the book aloud was to refresh peoples' memory of what God had done to look after and preserve them<sup>11</sup>, to remind them of the perfect law of God<sup>12</sup>, and to assure the people that God's gift of life and His care through all of life, is secure, even when they disobey and violate the law of God<sup>13</sup>, because God's love is such that He forgives when we repent. The last four chapters of Deuteronomy are a doxology, the Song of Moses, the Blessing of Moses, and instructions how the mantle of leadership will pass from Moses to Joshua and, finally, the death of Moses on Mount Nebo.

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<sup>10</sup> Chapters 1–30

<sup>11</sup> sermon 1

<sup>12</sup> sermon 2

<sup>13</sup> sermon 3

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It is probably not very much different from the way we in this generation, use Remembrance Sunday to recount how we survived through the dark days of two world wars, except that these days, we do not give much credit to God for saving us, certainly not as much as we prayed during the war, asking God to save us!

The **Word of God** should be read aloud for us to remember, not just our history, but to be refreshed in our understanding of the character of God.

### **3. The Word of God should be understood.**

As the Word of God was being read aloud in public, those who could understand it, explained it to others who could not. God gives this responsibility to those who have a trusted relationship with Him, whom He therefore, can trust, to understand **AND** faithfully explain His Word to others.

### **4. God's Word should be treasured and cherished**

Hearing God's Word can have the effect of driving people to tears, because we are confronted with Holiness and we realise our unholiness. ***This day is Holy*** says Moses, because you have come face-to-face with the Holiness of God, but don't let this frighten you! ***The joy of the Lord is your strength!*** Treasure and cherish your encounter with God, because His Law sets you free, and this freedom is your joy and your strength.

### **5. Finally, God's Word should be lived!**

If you have understood the Word of God, appreciate its practicality in life, its usefulness in guidance and wisdom, then go **LIVE IT!** The book of Deuteronomy is all about worship. It tells us that living life in

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obedience to God's Law, is worship. God's love for us is so great, despite our failures and shortcomings, and distractions and preoccupations in life, a simple act of sincere repentance is all it takes for God to lavish His gifts of life on those who love Him, and we should consider it a privilege, not only to enjoy the gifts of life God showers on us, but to share God's gift to us, with anyone and everyone.

As we bring to God today, not only our offering of harvest joy, we also rededicate our lives to the One who lavishes on us, the treasures of Heaven, good health, good relationships, peace, joy and satisfaction in all our endeavours, enough to enjoy each day, and to look forward with faith, that tomorrow will be better.

Lest anyone misunderstands, we do not rejoice in the material things God showers on us; we rejoice in Him, from whom all these blessings flow, blessings to enjoy this life and bless others too, and blessings to anticipate eternal life with Him, because Jesus His Son, has on the Cross, broken the chains of death.      **AMEN.**