

Sermon Title: **“The Prophetic Call: *Fasting and Prayer Lead Into Kingdom Revitalization*”**

Series: Foundations: *Learn, Live, and Lead*

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Text: Nehemiah 7-10

Introduction



“While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” -Acts 13:2-3. In Christ it is never *goodbye* but *see you later*. Transitions are hard, but at the Spirit’s leading, they can also be fruitful for the Kingdom and Glory of Jesus Christ. This world is not our home, we in Christ are here to take all of Jesus into all the world. *Together, we **learn** from Jesus, **live** like Jesus, and **lead** to Jesus.*



Foundations is a final series of messages from my heart, as your Pastor, to you and the continuing ministry of Cornerstone

Chapel. May the lamppost shine brighter and stronger for the Glory of Jesus Christ, His Spirit pouring out in greater stride. *And above all, through fasting and prayer, let us be the Body we are purchased, resourced, and called to be- All of Jesus for all the world- **beginning with each of us!***

I. Doors and Roll Calls (Nehemiah 7:1-5)

*“Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors, and the gatekeepers, **the singers**, and the Levites had been appointed, I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah the governor of the castle charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many. And I said to them, “Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. And while they are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts and some in front of their own homes.” The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt. Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy. And I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first, and I found written in it:” -**Nehemiah 7:1-5***

Nehemiah, a cup bearer anointed of God with the Prophetic Calling, is now in Israel serving as the Governor appointed by the Persian King, Artaxerxes. God has been at work both in sight and behind the scenes to bring His people back into their homeland. As world powers changed from Babylon to the Persians (all according to God’s prophetic revelation), the deported Jewish people returned in three waves. The **first** under Zerubbabel and Joshua, which saw the Temple

Rebuilt (2nd Temple Era). The **second** led by Ezra, which saw the reinstatement of the Jewish calendar of feasts and sacrifices. This **third**, led by Nehemiah, would see the city walls of Jerusalem being rebuilt, establishing Israel's National presence in their homeland once again.

After 52 days of intense obstacle overcoming, the wall was rebuilt. Though smaller than the expansion done by Solomon, the city got back to the basics and grew strong from that onward. Israel was poised to step back into being a national presence once again. Yet, having city walls and a temple do not make one right with God. It is always about the heart posture in light of who God is. Will the Nation truly turn back to God? Nehemiah realizes that the outward reform does not necessarily mean inward reform. *For that, there would need to be a heart revitalization. **Revival is needed.***

What is Revival? I appeal to the Psalmist for this answer, who happened to be a Levitical singer like the one Nehemiah just appointed, named Asaph.

*“Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted, and for the son whom you made strong for yourself. They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your face! **But let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself! Then we shall not turn back from you; give us life, and we will call upon your name! Restore us, O Lord God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!**”*

-Psalm 80:14-19

This Psalm forecasts the burning judgment of Babylon, having destroyed the walls now rebuilt. *What brought the destruction upon Israel though?* God knows, but needed to lead us to understand- we cannot save ourselves. On our best effort, even with God's assistance, we turn to sin. We needed a Messiah to conquer sin on our behalf; and this is the over arching message of the entire Old Testament.

Restore here in the Hebrew means to *turn us back around, bring us back, revive us*. This was an appeal to God to favor His right hand, who would be His Son, Jesus, in order to through Him Revive His People. There is so much captured in this Psalm that time does not allow us to explore here, but understand **Kingdom Revival** is *God initiated, God empowered, and God delivering* from start to finish.

As the walls had been rebuilt, *doors* were built to serve in strengthening the walls by keeping ill intent out until the heat and brightness of the day came. This enabled genuine commerce to come in and out, strengthening rather than pillaging and weakening the city. However, the walls would only live to their potential if the people who opened and closed the doors were wise. The rebuilt walls would mean little if the people's hearts inside opened the doors to things that would corrupt them again from the inside out. *To ensure this solemn reminder, Nehemiah sets up worship centers around the doors to keep the focus on God.*

*“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.” **-Proverbs 4:23***

Further, the Spirit of God moved upon Nehemiah to weed through the false claims of entitlement to the promises of God. Not all who came back with Zerubbabel and Joshua were genuinely of Israel. Further, some of the loudest opposition for Israel giving God their YES! came from the likes of Tobias who had networked himself in through marriage to manipulate toward selfish gain. Lineage is important because it would affirm the Messiah; and for today in Nehemiah's day, it will ensure the right people step into the right roles seeing God glorified.

“Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.” -Galatians 4:28-31

Are the doors of your heart functioning for God's Glory and are you a child of the Kingdom through Jesus? These are the foundational questions leading us into the season of *Revitalization*.

II. Ears to Hear (Nehemiah 8:1-4)

*“And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. **And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.** And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose.” -Nehemiah 8:1-4*

You will remember, when Babylon conquered Judah (Judah and Benjamin), they plundered the Temple in stages until they ultimately destroyed it and Jerusalem. This included the instruments they used to worship God with along with the scrolls containing their Scriptures. All of this, along with the same from other conquered people groups, were kept in Babylon as a trophy. As time went on, and Persia took the throne, these items would be released back to Israel in the staging of their return. **Like being grounded from something, then getting it back when we could prove ourselves more responsible with it! We often don't value something until it is gone.**

However, even before this release, a Jewish scribe who also happened to be a Priest, had unique access to these Scriptures, and studied them diligently in order to know the heart of his God. His name was *Ezra*, which in the Hebrew means, *help*. (Reference *help from Pilgrims Progress*)

“For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.” -Ezra 7:10

Power of Unity. Now, Ezra takes the platform (like a stage) along with others (most likely priests) whose presence affirmed both Ezra's reading and then teaching of God's Word. This

was a corporate gathering (Like our Sunday Worship together) would see Israel's leaders *lead by example* by standing with Ezra and displaying agreement to submit to God's Word. *Sorry folks, which leader showed up late?*

Ears being attentive means there was nothing blocking the reception of God's Revelation to them. God had excavated their ability to hear Him, digging deep into their ear to penetrate their hearts. David cried out,

"In sacrifice and offering you have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required." **-Psalm 40:6**

It's not that sacrifice wasn't necessary, it's about the role sacrifices, feasts, traditions have. They are to be the fruit of the relationship Israel had with God- because they are loved by Him, they are in submission (alignment) with Him to fill them and overflow through them through their worship. *They sacrifice, observe feasts and traditions, because they are loved by God-* not to earn God's love through obedient observation. ***Their obedience demonstrates their love.***

When it's not calibrated to be like this, such things become burdens and secondary. We see this today as believers regarding corporate worship, daily Bible reading, prayer, etc. They have become a burden to us because we have lost sight of Jesus, and our ears have gotten clogged up. *But like Israel then, the church today has a God who is faithful to clear our ears and penetrate our hearts!*

III. Celebrating God's Faithfulness (Nehemiah 8:9-18)

"And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." (there's no crying in baseball lol) For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, "Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved." And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them." **-Nehemiah 8:9-12**

As the people realized the emptiness of what they had been giving to God, coming to see how much God loves and is faithful toward them, their hearts melt and they begin to **weep**, which is to cry out in *anguish*. *They were being convicted by God's Word!* Oh Ezra, I feel like you are preaching to me! Nehemiah sees this response and redirects the people- the focus is not on us, nor our failure, but on God and His faithfulness! This is who our God is; let us rejoice in His faithfulness. ***Let His joy be our strength to celebrate Him!***

"The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. I will gather

those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach.”

-Zephaniah 3:17-18

*“On the second day the heads of fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the Law. And they found it written in the Law that the Lord had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should proclaim it and publish it in all their towns and in Jerusalem, “Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths, as it is written.” So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim. **And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing.** And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the rule.”*

-Nehemiah 8:13-18

All in accordance with what God spoke through Moses, the ***Feast of Booths*** is celebrated. This was a feast in the Fall which was meant to celebrate God’s faithfulness- His deliverance from Egyptian bondage, His sustaining work through the wilderness (clothing didn’t wear out, manna, water, etc), and His ultimate delivering into the Land of Promise. After Israel came in to possess the land under Joshua’s leadership, this Feast was celebrated as described in Nehemiah to help the Nation never forget all that God has done, in order to be renewed in their faith in His love toward them, trusting in Him to be the same tomorrow.

The focus is the same for you and I, and why I love celebrated Communion every week with my wife, children, and family in Christ- central to our lives, foundational to our faith, is God’s faithfulness toward us through Christ, in which every promise toward you and I is Yes and Amen! From this heart posture, Paul writes,

*“And I am sure of this, **that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.** It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” **-Philippians 1:6-11***

One final note on this celebration, we see a return to the heart of worship on behalf of the Nation- and the celebration now was greater than before. *Greater was forward for them with God, not behind in yesterday. **Dear Saints, greater is forward for us in Christ, not behind us in yesterday!***

IV. Confession and Repentance Set the Course (Nehemiah 9-10)

What follows in the next two chapters results from celebrating the *Feast of Booths*, after having read and been instructed in *God's Word*. *Revitalization is happening!* There is a pattern which surfaces I want to look at, while asking of us something unique to do this week together for our Going Deeper (read out loud daily)

a. **Affirming** God's Holiness and Faithfulness.

*"You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. You are the Lord, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite. **And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous.**" -**Nehemiah 9:6-8***

b. **Owning** and Confessing sin.

*"But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt." -**Nehemiah 9:16-17***

c. **Receiving** God's justness in Discipline for Correction.

*"Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. 31 Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God...Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly." -**Nehemiah 9:30-31, 33***

d. **Embracing** His Grace to forgive, cleanse, and restore.

*"But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, 'This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,' and had committed great blasphemies, you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell." -**Nehemiah 9:17-21***

Because of who God is, this is who His children are. And it is from this place of confession and repentance, they commit, in His Spirit, to move forward in submission to Him. This submission

will be an alignment that allows God's Kingdom to flow into them, filling them, and then overflowing from them outward into the world. This has always been God's Will for how His Kingdom is both present and coming!

*“Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests...The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the Law of God, their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding, join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law that was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord our Lord and his rules and his statutes. We will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. And if the peoples of the land bring in goods or any grain on the Sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on a holy day. And we will forego the crops of the seventh year and the exaction of every debt.” -**Nehemiah 9:38; 10:28-31***

This covenant agreement was not another add on rule for them to carry, *but is an expression of faith in motion for the Nation of Israel.* It's not enough to come on Sunday and celebrate God, go through the rhythms, and then leave and go back to the muck and mire of the world we were supposedly delivered from. That leads to empty, heavy burdens. No, God's faithfulness is the soil in which our faith grows, embracing all that God is and gives us, to learn-live-lead. This covenant was specifically putting their faith into practice- this is specifically what we are going to be doing differently. ***This would enable everyone to hold each other accountable to stir one another on toward faithful living!***

As we close this message, let's recap what the Spirit is saying to us today individually and corporately.

New Doors. We are the Gatekeepers to our lives- what do we need to close out or let in? What needs cast out? *Dear Saint's, in Jesus' Name you have the authority.*

Ears to Hear. Does God's Word touch your heart? Do His Words pierce, prune, wound, heal, strengthen, and restore you? *Let the Spirit clean those ears!*

God is faithful. From start to finish, and all the in between that life with Him in this world is, we will arrive because He is faithful. Rest in His Promises; take refuge in Him.

Course Heading. Where is your life going? Because God is faithful, His Spirit will continually strive to redirect your life into His Will. Are there needed course corrections? *Confess and repent- He is faithful to forgive, heal, and restore.* Do you feel lost right now? *Come to Jesus, rest in Him, then allow Him to lead you forward.* We are here to take this journey alongside of you.

Kingdom Revitalization begins with each of us in Christ.

Then it overflows into us as His Church.