

Nehemiah 7:4 – 8:8 How Does God Speak?

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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We've been saying throughout this book that Nehemiah was not a prophet, he was not a priest, he was a professional – a civilian employee working for the federal government of his day and so, we've been poking and prodding and asking the question – how might God want to use each of you – in your professional capacity, or at home or school, to serve Him and love others, what kind of a calling is He putting on your life?

And maybe you've been asking, "How am I supposed to know?" Well, this morning, among other things, we'll see two ways we can know what God is calling us to do. The first one is right here. Remember, last week they had just completed rebuilding the wall.

Nehemiah 7:4 Now the city was large and spacious, but the people in it were few, and the houses were not rebuilt. 5 Then my God put it into my heart to gather the nobles, the rulers, and the people, that they might be registered by genealogy.

So there it is - Nehemiah says, "God put it into my heart" to do this. We'll come back to that later when we get into Chapter Eight – but I want you to notice, that's one way you can know what God wants you to do – He can "put it in your heart."

And I found a register of the genealogy of those who had come up in the first return (this is copied almost verbatim from Ezra 2 – Ezra was a priest who had been sent earlier to rebuild the Temple), and found written in it:

6 These are the people of the province who came back from the captivity, of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, everyone to his city.

7 Those who came with Zerubbabel were (these 11 guys) Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah.

The number of the men of the people of Israel:

8 the sons of Parosh, 2172;

9 the sons of Shephatiah, 372;

10 the sons of Arah, 652;

We're not going to read all of these names, but we are going to read a few of them, because I want you to notice something. Some of these families have huge numbers:

11 the sons of Pahath-Moab, of the sons of Jeshua and Joab, 2818;
17 the sons of Azgad, 2322;
38 the sons of Senaah, 3930.

By comparison, some families were tiny:

25 the sons of Gibeon, 95;
28 the men of Beth Azmaveth, 42;
33 the men of the other Nebo, 52;

Here's the point: It doesn't matter if there's a whole crowd of people with you, or if you're practically going it alone – when you're serving God, all that matters is WHAT you're doing. Whether these families had many people with them or only a few, at some point they had set off into the unknown, headed back to a city they'd never seen or hadn't seen in years, just to be there for whatever God might do.

It reminds me of the opening ceremony of the Olympics as the different nations paraded in – powerhouses like the United States sent 226 athletes, Russia sent 223, Canada sent 215, but then you had countries like Nepal with one athlete - Dachhiri Sherpa. He's a bricklayer currently working in France and he has no hope whatsoever of taking gold. He told a French newspaper, "I think there is a very big chance I will finish last. But the placing is not important if I can teach young people in Nepal about the Olympic spirit. This spirit is in my heart."¹ He wants to do something more than stand on a podium - he wants to be the catalyst that sparks interest in others, and he's willing to do it without 225 other teammates – he's willing to go for it alone until others follow.

You know there was at least one guy like that among the men of Beth Azmaveth, and among the "other" Nebo. At least one guy, or one lady, who was like, "Let's go for it! I know there aren't many of us, but... its Jerusalem – let's go, and maybe one day, others will follow."

I want to encourage you to have the same kind of spirit – the same willingness to do things and go places for God. Life was *easier* in Babylon, where they had been living, but it was *better* in Jerusalem!

William Carey, the father of the modern missions movement used to say, "Attempt Great things for God, and expect Great things from God." Be willing to go on adventures for and with God – whether you are many, or whether you are few, whether you think you're ready, or not, whether you think you're worthy or not. Don't focus on who *you* are, focus on who He is and what He might do through you if you would simply say yes.

Can you do that with me now? You don't have to say it out loud, but at least in your mind, in your heart, in your soul, can you practice saying, "Yes, Lord."

¹ <http://olympictalk.nbcsports.com/2014/01/31/dachhiri-sherpa-nepal-cross-country->

Keep doing that, over and over, don't say, "Not yet Lord." Don't say, "Not me Lord." Don't say, "Not them, or not there, or not that, Lord." Say, "Yes, Lord." And keep repeating it over and over and over – and see what God might do, not because of you, but in spite of you.

There are a few more groups listed here - verse 39 we see the priests, about four thousand of them, and then the Levites in verse 43. The priests took care of the actual sacrifices at the Temple, we might call them pastors or elders today, and the Levites helped out with more of the day to day stuff that needed to be done – we might call them deacons or lay ministers. They included the Temple's worship team (verse 44) and the ushers and greeters (45).

You also have a group of folks in verses 63-65 who couldn't prove their lineage with the available documents, and that was important because you had to be of a certain ancestry to be a priest.

Then, in verse 66 you get the total number of everyone who had come back to Jerusalem, 42,360. Verses 67-69 tell us they had servants, entertainers, horses, mules, camels, and donkeys – but remember, owning a camel was like owning a full size pickup truck today – it was a tool, something that could help you do extra work, these animals were valuable assets to their owners.

70 And some of the heads of the fathers' houses gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury one thousand gold drachmas, fifty basins, and five hundred and thirty priestly garments. 71 Some of the heads of the fathers' houses gave to the treasury of the work twenty thousand gold drachmas, and two thousand two hundred silver minas. 72 And that which the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand gold drachmas, two thousand silver minas, and sixty-seven priestly garments.

So, the people who returned to Jerusalem were givers – they gave of their time to help rebuild the Temple and the Wall of the city. But they also gave of their financial resources to support the work. Now, we don't need priestly garments in the church today, but we still have to pay rent each month and take care of other expenses – like supporting missionaries, buying supplies for children's ministry, coffee for the back table, and things like the radio ministry.

We don't talk a lot about money around here, but since the subject came up in the text, I'll simply tell you – if you want to give *to the Lord, through this church*, there are several ways you can do it. There's a box for tithes and offerings over on the book table, you can drop something in there. You can also mail a check to the PO Box listed in the bulletin or on the website, some people even do the online banking thing and send a check to the PO Box each month. Or, you can give online via PayPal through the church's website, there's a link there on the front page right under the big picture; there's even a tab for it on the mobile version of the site if you want to use your phone. If you have any questions, just see Pastor Doug.

73 So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, *some* of the people, the Nethinim, and all Israel dwelt in their cities.

When the seventh month came, the children of Israel *were* in their cities.

But then, they all had a big get together:

8: 1 Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel.

2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who *could* hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month. 3 Then he read from it in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* to the Book of the Law.

4 So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood (6 guys) Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand (7 guys) Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, *and* Meshullam. 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. 6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God.

Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground.

7 Also (these 13 guys) Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people *stood* in their place.

8 So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading.

So here's the second way that you can know what God is calling you to do – you can hear it from the Bible – from God's Word.

Let's make a few observations about that.

First of all notice that the people asked to be taught, (vs 1) "[they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses.](#)" They showed up because they wanted to hear, they wanted to know what God said. I believe the same thing about you.

There are a lot of different approaches to doing church – most of you have probably been to other churches and seen things done differently. There's no particular section in the Bible

that says, “Church has to be done just like this.” So there’s freedom for churches to decide some things. And one of the things they decide is how to reach people – some churches think you have to work to get people’s attention – so they try to be relevant to the culture, or they try to have a nice building with comfortable chairs and maybe a coffee bar in the foyer when you walk in, I went to a church once that opened with a scene from a Jim Carey movie just to get everyone’s attention. Now, whatever they’re doing, if they’re doing it for Jesus and trying, honestly, to reach out in His name and connect with people, that’s great – and may God bless them for it.

I’d love a building, and I’m pro-coffee. But God hasn’t given us those things yet, and I’m OK with that too because I don’t think we need a lot of frills. I’m not here trying to capture anybody’s attention. If someone doesn’t want to be here, or doesn’t like the music, or doesn’t like my teaching style, or the fact that we meet in cafetorium, or whatever, that’s OK. Really, it is. Because I know we can’t please everybody at the same time, and since we have to make some choices that determine our approach, I have chosen to assume that you *want* to be here.

In the front of my Bible, for several years now, there has been this little note I made, it says: “I am going to begin with the fundamental assumption that these people, be they believers or not, want to know about Jesus and the Bible, and I will try to teach them.”

This Bible, this “Book of the Law of Moses” and all the rest of it, is all I have to offer you. I’m not a great conversationalist. I’m not witty. I don’t tell good jokes, or the kind of stories you could sit and listen to for hours. But if you want to know what the Bible says about God and about us, and about Jesus, well, I’ll give all I’ve got to trying to help out.

I want with all that is within me to be like verse 8 [So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading.](#) Because I believe that if you know what God’s saying, and if you understand all that He has done for you and offers to you, I believe it will change your life, and nothing else can even come close.

So, we might not have the best ministry programs, or the best building, or the most comfortable chairs, we might not even have a bunch of people just like you for you for you to be friends with, but if you want the Bible, I guarantee you’ll find it here, every Sunday.

Notice as well, these people recognized the authority of the Book of the Law of Moses because [“the LORD had commanded \[it to\] Israel.”](#)

They recognized that these weren’t just some good ideas or lofty thoughts, this was inspired – it is what God would say to you if He was standing right here. And so, if you want to know what God has for you – start here – start with the Word, seek to understand it and ask, “How does this apply to my life?”

And if you have questions, ask. Remember there was that group of guys who [“helped the people to understand the Law”](#)? Almost every Sunday I make the announcement that if you

have any questions, I'll be in the back. And Pastor Doug is here, and Pastor Bill, and our emails are in the bulletin, and there are plenty of others – men and women, who can help you find the answers you're looking for. There's even a group that meets twice a month before the service to go over the basics of the faith – there's information on it in the bulletin. The point is, if you have questions about what the Bible says, or what it means, or about God – ask. People are happy to help you find answers.

And then notice, when these people heard the Word of God what did they do? They worshipped! (Verse 6) *Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.*

They worshipped because of what they HEARD from this book. Not just what they have seen or experienced, but because of the words found in a book – a book given *to men by God*. They worshipped because in this Book they discovered more of who God was, what He was like, about His character. And they heard about themselves. They understood what God had promised.

And they did all of this out in the open by the Water Gate, not in the Temple – in other words, there was a connection with the life they lived on earth and the God they worshipped in Heaven – just like we have seen time and time again with Nehemiah.

Which brings us back to the question we asked when we started this morning – how do you know what God might want *you* to do?

And we've seen two ways – first, sometimes God puts something on your heart. You might say "I feel like God is calling me to" or "I feel like is showing me." It's a personal, subjective kind of experience and it begins when we aren't even saved, because God starts convicting us of our sin and helping us to see that we need Him.

But then once you become a Christian it continues – the Holy Spirit dwells inside you and promises to guide and direct you. Even in things that don't seem so spiritual. Notice Nehemiah didn't say, "God put it in my heart to join the worship team, or to start a prayer group." No, God can and does do that kind of thing, but sometimes He directs us about things to do at work or in our everyday lives. And that's the kind of stuff we usually blow off or talk ourselves out of. But it's God trying to break into our daily lives and allow Heaven to make a difference here on earth.

And then, as we've noted, there's God unchanging Word – the Bible is full of instructions on how we ought to live and what we ought to value. It's the best place to go because it speaks more clearly than our feelings and it never changes. It also speaks clearly about the forgiveness we can find in Christ when we blow it by not doing what we should.

Next week we'll see even more of how the people responded to what they heard in the Bible. But I want to ask you right now – how are you responding to God? Are you busy collecting data about Him, do you come to church each week just like you watch your

favorite show? Or does what you've been seeing, hearing, and doing here make a difference in what you do with the rest of your life - what you're trying to achieve, how you respond to people, and what you do for them?

God wants to take everyday men and women and kids like you, and pour eternity into you. He wants to forgive you for what you've been and lead you into what He wants you to be. Will you let Him?

Will you surrender your life to Him? Will you listen to Him, and the things He is saying in the words of this Book, the things He is putting in your heart, and will you respond?

If so, will you stand right now? If you want to become a Christian, or if you feel like God is putting something in your heart, or calling you to ministry, will you stand right now? Will you say, "Yes Lord" and let today mark the day when you committed to doing what God has been calling you to do?