

Nehemiah 7:1-73

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[0 : 00] Hear then the Word of God from Nehemiah 7. 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 yet 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.

Picking up at verse 66. The whole assembly together was 42,360, besides their male and female servants, of whom there were 7,337.

[1 : 19] And they had 245 singers, male and female. Their horses were 736. Their mules, 245.

And their camels, 435. And their donkeys, 6,720. Now some of the heads of fathers' houses gave to the work.

The governor gave to the treasury 1,000 derricks of gold, 50 basins, 30 priests' garments, and 500 minas of silver. And some of the heads of the fathers' houses gave into the treasury of the work.

20,000 derricks of gold and 2,200 minas of silver. And what the rest of the people gave was 20,000 derricks of gold, 2,000 minas of silver, and 67 priests' garments.

So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all Israel lived in their towns.

[2 : 20] And when the seventh month had come, the people of Israel were in their towns. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

Amen. What were Nehemiah's first concerns in a post-building campaign?

What was the first thing on his mind when the wall had been built? And more particularly, what will it mean for us to consider the accomplishment of a work and a life moving forward?

If the first six chapters of Nehemiah have showed us anything, they've been concerned with building together, but in particular, a place.

But at chapter 7, things turn, and it will carry through the remainder of the book. His first concerns were the building of a people.

[3 : 40] I want to look at this chapter along three lines. First of all, appointments that he made in the present, followed by the plans he had for the people in the future.

And then finally, I want you to see that both his appointments in the present and his plans for the future were building upon the foundation of the past.

Take a look. Chapter 7, verses 1 through 4. Appointments in the present. You'll see that word twice given.

Right there at the close of verse 1. Levites had been appointed. And then in the middle of verse 3. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

His first concern after finding himself behind a wall that was to represent a place where God rules into which God's pity people enter, and through which we are in relationship to God.

[5 : 03] His first concern is the appointment, in particular here, of Levites. I don't know if you know what Levites were, or in the scriptures where they originated from.

God had made a promise to Abraham that through his line, all the world would eventually be blessed.

A world that had fallen into sin and disrepair. Abraham had a son named Isaac. Isaac had a son named Jacob. Jacob had 12 sons, the third of which was named Levi. Levi was a strong, in one sense you could say violent man. We read of him early in the scriptures after his sister had been raped.

And he, along with his brother Simeon, went and put the sword through an entire town.

[6 : 15] Men, women, children, oxen, the whole thing. To execute justice, blood justice, in his own hand.

As a result, God said, your tribe is going to be scattered, for you are bloodthirsty for justice, but you take it unto yourself.

Later, though, the sons of Levi execute over 3,000 in the family at the time of the worshiping of a golden calf in Israel.

And in this moment, they were exemplars of those who were standing for God's holy justice and were aligning themselves with Moses and the purity of the people.

These then are the Levites that later in Numbers 8, 3, God will set apart for blood justice. They will be a people without any land inheritance, but they will serve in the temple.

[7 : 36] And so, the Levites are responsible for carrying the ark along the way in the wilderness. They're responsible for receiving all of the sacrificial offerings.

They're responsible for blood-mediating relationship between a sinful people and a holy God. By the time there had been Solomon's temple, they were actually responsible for all that would go on in the great feasts.

The Levites were mediaries between God and a fallen family through the execution of blood sacrifice.

It's interesting then that this is the first thing he does. To rebuild a people, he calls from among the people those who will properly administrate the sacrificial system.

This goes on through Israel's history even hundreds of years later when a Nazarene itinerant preacher will enter the temple and find himself disgusted with the profiteering on sacrifices and will be called himself a lamb of God who will take away the sins of the earth.

[9 : 05] Let me put it to you as clearly as I can. The church today does not appoint Levites and there's a reason for this. Thank God we no longer need perpetual, ongoing sacrifices for sin.

You don't need this repetitive ritual of blood spilled on your behalf if through faith the once for all sacrifice of Jesus has been applied to you through the power of the Holy Spirit and your longing to be right before God through Him.

And so there's no Levites. because there's no need for ongoing sacrifices. There's no amount of penance you can bring that will make you closer to God than faith in Christ.

There are no more sacrifices you can perform that will make you more intimately in union with God but that through faith in Christ.

And so it's over. So what do we appoint? Paul comes along in the New Testament and in Ephesians 3.9 lets us know that Jesus has given to him the household administration of a church.

[10 : 46] and so that Levites move off the stage but in the epistles we do see the appointment of representative people within the church to serve in two ways elders and deacons.

Men were appointed to an office of elder men and women to an office of deacon and these household servants don't re-offer sacrifices that make us worthy rather they administrate the household under the rule of Christ who has done all things well.

what are we going to do? Let me just be simply clear on this.

We are going to appoint elders and deacons to serve this household from among her members that Christ might rule with wonder grace strength order and beauty and just a few weeks ago there were dozens and dozens of godly men and women members of this congregation who were nominated and over the last couple of weeks that list has been narrowed a bit by their own self-selection of am I ready to explore this but beginning next Sunday 930 I hope in the cafeteria there will be over a hundred of us learning what do these household servants need to be like how are they going to function because our very church future depends on their appointment

Nehemiah's first concern the appointment of godly leadership the church will not rise above we will not rise above our ability to have leadership that is godly and orchestrates our life in god glorifying ways i'm looking so forward to the next few months as we give ourselves to an expanded leadership that's not all he does he's also appointing guards verse three interesting his concern was for the

safety and security not of the wall but of the people the few people who were living behind it in other words the appointment of individuals for the security and safety of the people of God was critical to his plan in the present that no one within this family would be mistreated that justice within this family would be equitable that a child could be raised in this family in complete safety oh that we oh oh that we would so live as to secure the safety and security of those who come into our midst we're even thinking now about a building for the first time and how to make it materially secure so that when people enter we can do the business that the

[15 : 05] Lord has given us to do and they can do so in a happy holy and safe way on Wednesday morning the session will appoint at least two other people to assist one of our deacons to begin making recommendations by November for how will we actually secure the safety and security of the work God has given us to do so just as Nehemiah first concern is for the appointment of leadership so too is ours but look what he does next he moves from appointments in the present to what I call plans for the future let me read chapter five seven verse five a then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy now you might hear that reading and rightly ask what does that sentence have to do with

Nehemiah's plans for the future let alone how it might apply to our people going forward it does require some explanation and I know that on Sunday morning there's an element where you're like I come to church for encouragement and exhortation I don't need much explanation but how can we be encouraged if we don't understand what is here and so there's a moment in the message where I'm going to explain to you how that sentence what God put into his heart in assembling the people actually reveals to you and me his concern for the welfare of the people I want to do there in two links notice the way the chapter ends the way chapter 7 ends is all of Israel is really living in their own towns they came together for a building project but most of them were still living outside the city itself he reiterates it twice they lived in their own towns they were in their own towns this plan that God put in

Nehemiah's mind doesn't come clear to the reader until you arrive at chapter 11 and verse 1 turn there and take a look I love hearing the rustling of the pages to let me know that you're convinced of the scriptures rather than the hearing of my own voice or the scrolling of your thumb as the case may be this 11 1 begins to reveal to us what it was that God had put into his heart when he first decided to assemble everyone together let me read it now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem that is the leaders of the people and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to live in Jerusalem the holy city while nine out of ten remained in other towns and the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem he began to assemble everyone for a census the purpose of the census was conscription he was going to bring one in every ten of the people into the city itself what was his plan for the future he was actually thinking about what's the long term viability of what we have just done in city terms this is called urban planning

I mean the city does this all the time the church doesn't think about this too often but the city does this Chicago itself has a department of planning and sustainability you can look online and find January 20th of this year the city's planning and sustainability ideas set forth for the neighborhood of Woodlawn I mean they capture 15 years I've read it in full you ought to as well because the city itself is trying to think through long term viability it's going to be a complicated thing for Chicago there will be no unified voice within the citizenry on repopulating neighborhoods that have long lay destitute but I want to say something about this it's a it is a good and healthy and right thing to plan for equitable justice as cities repair themselves in areas long known for neglect think about what goes on in cities today why do you think all the new apartment high rises are right around the metro track because somebody knows that we need higher density levels for long term sustainability and they know that the higher density levels will require simple transportation to and from work and so all up and down

Chicago there are people thinking their way clear on how do we increase population in ways that make our work in the city more viable but it brings challenges think of gentrification the movement toward repopulating a place is often filled in a vacuum through American entrepreneurial at times greed rather than justice or it can be opportunistic for one who has resources and yet deplete the very life source for those without resources and this is why it is so difficult so what do we do well people ought to be concerned with bringing equitable justice into

[22 : 03] Chicago's south side people ought to be involved Christians ought to be engaged don't live under the illusion that all the citizenry or all the Christians or all the peoples of a particular ethnic

persuasion or racial background are going to agree they're not they already don't just read the papers I think of John Perkins as he wrestled those decades ago with how to help in the midst of conflicting and competing purposes and he wanted the Christian church to be distinct he had three R's and one of them was relocation but it was rooted in motivation where the gospel was a reason you would relocate somewhere not greed where it was the Christian himself or herself not his or her mere need to be a contractor this is one of the wonderful things

I think we are capable of doing as we plan for the people of Chicago and at South Side is to restore a building that has been significantly there for 100 years rather than the destruction of something and just the proliferation of something economic in its wake we are going to give the neighborhood something of historic beauty back to itself preserving itself and we are going to bring to this area of Chicago more and more people willing to relocate for the gospel Perkins put it this way he said relocation transforms you them and theirs to we us and ours he basically argued that only by joining a community do a community's needs become your own and yet if you join a community and the community's needs do not become your own then you are living off the community in a parasitic way and so the motivation of the heart is everything

Perkins writes in his book with justice for all effective ministries plant and build communities of believers that have a personal stake in the development of their neighbors one of the things I've tried to say is this gentrification thing is going to go on and the city is going to do what the city is going to do because that's what happens in America but this church you come inside these walls you attend Christ Church Chicago within this community there ought to be equitable justice there ought to be no lifting of one up or above another this is again why this office of deacon is so important think about it the seeds of the diaconate in the New Testament were in Acts 6 where they had a socioeconomic and racial problem within the church that wasn't being addressed properly through Hellenistic or Hebrew widows and so the precursor the seed that later will become an office has within its very nature to bring equitable justice to this place let me get this as clear as I can I know you want more justice from me in the pulpit but justice will be carried out through appointment and protection in the pew and if we don't have it how tragic how tragic to be to be thinking about walking in to a privileged responsibility of an office of a deacon and yet think you're there for your privilege or how tragic to not consider that calling when rooted within it is a hotbed of what the world needs the world will never see or execute what we can do in this family so that when we are

Christ Church Chicago and people enter into behind our wall they will see what they cannot do or or may the judgment fall on us one of the greatest things we can do for the community is to be the church to be the church rich poor black white Asian Latino white collar blue collar no collar if we can't do that within our own family we will have nothing to show the world this point and I belabored it this was his plan for the future to repopulate the church that the most vulnerable would be protected in ways that the world would stand in awe let me move because I know you're worried you're thinking maybe I'm going to do the same amount of time on this long list and I'm not but he had his first concerns were for the people he had appointments in the present he had plans for the future thus the great assembling of them and here's really the reason for this long genealogy let me put it to you this way verses 5b through 73 show you the foundation of the past which he brings in here and upon that foundation he continues to build this list is not those who he gathers in 5a this list is a complete reconstruction of the

[29 : 07] Ezra 2 list when the work first began in other words this list are the names of those who returned to first start an effort that Nehemiah knows is unfinished undone and needs new life to emerge from and up out of it but notice he actually generates this respectful list right here because this is the foundation of the past upon which he builds if you lose your history your future will be a disaster there are things that we need to change there are things that we will change but let me tell you there are some things that the very first genealogy of Holy Trinity Church actually situated in the ground deep anchors that are things upon which we can build and people will come from

I actually brought it today you know me I I'm so committed to the foolishness of my words being able to carry the weight of what I want to say that you never see videos going on behind me while I'm preaching or show and tell but today I got me a show and tell so if that's the church you wanted to join there we are this list is a and there are 37 names it is the equivalent of Nehemiah 7 5b through 73 this is the foundation upon which we build that said I want you to know what happens in church life over time think what happens if everyone thought that oh you had to be a founding

member here to really have the authority of what's going to go on here that actually started to happen in the

New Testament church I went back this week and read 1 Timothy 1 and what happens is Paul is trying to encourage Timothy in his ministerial ability and he tells him tell these people to stop paying attention to endless genealogies what is he doing there what happened in New Testament church was people were appealing to these kinds of genealogies to demonstrate that they have the authority in the church whereas Timothy himself had no real genealogical weight to him he came along late and so what Paul is saying is if you want to know what the church really does in the future it needs a family of faith you build on a foundation of faith it is your faith line not your blood line and your blood line doesn't matter and your history doesn't matter whether you are new to the faith or three years in this place if you are vibrantly committed to the faith of our founders don't go American on me the 37 if you hold the apostolic gospel that they have tried to hold then those are the ones that Nehemiah says from those who are after we have a new work that's needed that's where we are today folks we've got 12 people sitting here today who are on that list and in 20 years maybe there be one or two of them praise God they will have entered their rest this church requires now men and women who are ready in faith to embrace!

to embrace a work at which the world would wonder and I want to say to you today I don't care where you came from or how long you've been here you love the Lord you're committed to the apostolic gospel you hold God's word as revealed for us to do our best at living under then let's go let's go just as Timothy's background would not hinder him from leading so too your lack of being here at the beginning will be of no hindrance whatsoever!

[34 : 42] But know this we're building on that foundation Nehemiah 7 what is his concern when his mind moves off the building project and to life after this was his concern appointments in the present that would enable the family to worship well plans for the future that were concerned with the safety and security of all of God's family and that there would be equitable justice within the household of God lest the world would continue to think it can provide the answer and it will be built on a foundation of the past what a book this this

Nehemiah like memoir that says you know what I came along when the work was half done incomplete and original goals were unmet and the good hand of the Lord was upon me as it was for him may it be for us let me pray our heavenly father as we we continue to wonder at the simplicity of this book and the practicality of its call Lord I pray most of all that you would instill within our hearts through the power of your Holy Spirit a willingness an eagerness a readiness to be the people you would have us be long before we enter the new space in Christ's name amen