

Hearing God's Call

Jed Snyder

Zechariah 7:1-14

To teach the need to listen to what God has to say so that the Lord's people can direct their lives by what He says when He calls rather than by some other direction.

Introduction:

Evangelist and author of many Christian books, Dwight L. Moody was on his death bed. At his side was Will L. Thompson, religious music composer of a very favorite hymn of this devout preacher. Moody looked at Thompson and said, "Will, I would rather have written 'Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling', than anything I have been able to do in my whole life."

Will L. Thompson wrote this beautiful hymn in 1880. He also composed 'Jesus Is All the World to Me' & 'Lead Me Gently Home, Father.'

"Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling" was the theme song for the film Trip To Bountiful that won an academy award in 1984.

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,
Calling for you and for me;
See, on the portals
He's waiting and watching,
Watching for you and for me.

Come home, come home,
You who are weary, come home;
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling, O sinner, come home!

Why should we tarry when Jesus is pleading,
Pleading for you and for me?
Why should we linger
And heed not His mercies,
Mercies for you and for me?

Come home, come home,
You who are weary, come home;
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling, O sinner, come home!

O for the wonderful love He has promised,
Promised for you and for me!
Though we have sinned,
He has mercy and pardon,
Pardon for you and for me.

Come home, come home,
You who are weary, come home;
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling, O sinner, come home!

I. They questioned their own fast

Zechariah 7:1-7

A. This fast was a sorrowful commemoration (religion that was man-made)

Zechariah 7:1 - 3 (NIV) ¹In the fourth year of King Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Kislev. ²The people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-Melech, together with their men, to entreat the LORD ³by asking the priests of the house of the LORD Almighty and the prophets, "Should I mourn and fast in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?"

This seeking of the will of the Lord through the spiritual leaders of the nation was a good thing. God desires us to seek to know if what we practice pleases Him.

This delegation apparently came either from Beth-el or from Babylon by way of Bethel. The names seem to indicate that the two men (along with their attendants) were from Babylon. The Jews

had been observing three fast days as a sorrowful memorial to the destruction of the temple, the death of King Gedeliah and the siege of the city of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

While the Scripture does not tell why they came to seek these answers, we can imagine that with the rebuilding of the temple and the city walls the question arose as to the benefit of such a difficult commemoration.

Man-made religion nearly always is burdensome and not satisfying to the soul. This seems to have been the case here.

While we do not have any directly correlated religious tradition, we may ask ourselves questions about some things that we do practice. For example, has the manner with which we celebrate Christmas and even Easter become traditional and burdensome? We certainly encourage the reading of the Bible and reading it through once a year is a good thing. But even that good thing can become a burden or, worse even, a matter of pride. God wants a humble and contrite spirit, but He does not desire us to create required add-ons to our faith.

Psalms 51:17 (NIV) The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

B. The Lord questioned the motivation of their fasts and feasts (self-absorbed religion)

Zechariah 7:4 - 7 (NIV) ⁴Then the word of the LORD Almighty came to me: ⁵"Ask all the people of the land and the priests, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for the past seventy years, was it really for me that you fasted?' ⁶And when you were eating and drinking, were you not just feasting for yourselves?' ⁷Are these not the words the LORD proclaimed through the earlier prophets when Jerusalem and its surrounding towns were at rest and prosperous, and the Negev and the western foothills were settled?"

Isaiah 58:1 - 11 (NIV) ¹"Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins. ²For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. ³"Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. ⁴Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. ⁵ Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? ⁶ "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? ⁷Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? ⁸Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing

finger and malicious talk, ¹⁰ and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. ¹¹The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

II. The Lord challenged them to hear His call Zechariah 7:8-14

Hebrews 3:15 - 19 (NIV) ¹⁵As has just been said: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion." ¹⁶Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? ¹⁷And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? ¹⁸And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed? ¹⁹So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

A. The Lord gave holy guidance

Zechariah 7:8 - 10 (NIV) ⁸And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah: ⁹"This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. ¹⁰Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other.' (and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart." ESV)

Ezekiel 18:5 - 9 (NIV) ⁵"Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right. ⁶He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel. He does not defile his neighbor's wife or lie with a woman during her period. ⁷He does not oppress anyone, but returns what he took in pledge for a loan. He does not commit robbery but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked. ⁸ He does not lend at usury or take excessive interest. He withholds his hand from doing wrong and judges fairly between man and man. ⁹He follows my decrees and faithfully keeps my laws. That man is righteous; he will surely live, declares the Sovereign LORD.

B. The Lord reminded them of their ancestors' failures

Zechariah 7:11 - 12 (NIV) ¹¹"But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. ¹²They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the LORD Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the LORD Almighty was very angry.

John 6:61 - 69 (NIV) ⁶¹Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? ⁶²What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. ⁶⁴Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." ⁶⁶From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. ⁶⁷"You do not want to leave too, do

you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

C. The Lord stated the consequence of sin

Zechariah 7:13 - 14 (NIV) ¹³“When I called, they did not listen; so when they called, I would not listen,” says the LORD Almighty. ¹⁴“I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations, where they were strangers. The land was left so desolate behind them that no one could come or go. This is how they made the pleasant land desolate.”

To what is the Lord calling you today? Will you hear his call?

- **Revelation 2:4 - 5 (NIV)** ⁴Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. ⁵Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.
- **2 Corinthians 6:15 - 18 (NIV)** ¹⁵What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” ¹⁷“Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.” ¹⁸“I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”
- **Ephesians 4:1 - 3 (NIV)** ¹As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Conclusion:

Matthew 11:27 - 30 (NIV) ²⁷“All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

We should note:

- We must come to Christ. We all have been weary and burdened with sin. If we have come to receive His forgiveness and so become His child, then we are to come to place our burdens on Him.
- We not only come but we come and get “yoked” – that is we stay with Him allowing Him to pull us through the burdensome concerns.
- We not only come and stay with Him but we learn from Him.
- We then and only then, begin to realize His character (gentle and humble) and receive the rest that our souls need.

- An easy yoke and a light burden sound like contradictions but they are true because He is pulling with us and carrying our load for us.

Jesus is Tenderly Calling
Fanny J. Crosby

Jesus is tenderly calling you home
Calling today, calling today,
Why from the sunshine of love will you roam,
Farther and farther away?

Refrain
Calling today, calling today,
Jesus is calling, is tenderly calling today.

Jesus is calling the weary to rest,
Calling today, calling today,
Bring Him your burden and you shall be blest;
He will not turn you away.

Refrain
Calling today, calling today,
Jesus is calling, is tenderly calling today.

Jesus is waiting, O come to Him now,
Waiting today, waiting today,
Come with your sins, at His feet lowly bow;
Come, and no longer delay.

Refrain
Calling today, calling today,
Jesus is calling, is tenderly calling today.

Jesus is pleading, O list to His voice,
Hear Him today, hear Him today,
They who believe on His Name shall rejoice;
Quickly arise and away.

Refrain
Calling today, calling today,
Jesus is calling, is tenderly calling today.