

Bible Study - June 3, 2020

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Preacher: Pastor Tom Kraft

[0 : 0 0] Good evening, everybody. Welcome to our Bible study Wednesday night. It's good to have you all here. We are continuing our study in the book of Nehemiah, and we are in chapter 6 of the book of Nehemiah.

And what they've been talking about is Nehemiah, who was the cup holder for the emperor, came with a contingent of people from Persia to help rebuild the walls around Jerusalem.

And there are various different people that opposed it, and some that went along with it. And right now, they're getting really close to the end of the construction of the wall. And Nehemiah has been talking to people about their struggle because some of the people are saying they don't have enough money between taxes and not working and the oppression that they're feeling from the people around him who are taking advantage of him during this time when they've been trying to do the right thing by working on this wall.

They're right now feeling the stress and the strain. And so Nehemiah stepped in and told the people who were taking advantage of him, many of which were their fellow Jewish people, that they need to stop doing that, and they need to take care of the poor.

And he was taking care of the poor and help people to feel whole again. And I think we can identify with that, of course, and we talked about that last week, about the struggle that we're going through with this coronavirus and this feeling of not being able to necessarily be made whole.

[1 : 3 6] And now, obviously, we're all aware that we're also in the midst of another struggle as we're wrestling with how do we deal with these issues around this man who was killed, that's the only way to say it, by the police in Minneapolis.

And what does that mean for our culture, for us and our relationships with each other? What does it mean for us as Americans? What does it mean for us as just people?

We'll talk about that as we go through this passage from Nehemiah. But I would like to actually turn right to the scripture. Since we're here for Bible study, to just see what it says, and then we'll come across these issues as we're progressing through the scripture itself.

It says in chapter 6, verse 1, When the word came to Sambalet, Tobiah, Geshem, the Arab, and the rest of our enemies, that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it, though up to that time I had not yet set the doors in the gates, and the rest of the people that I had not yet set the doors sent me this message, Come let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.

So the wall is built, except the gates, they haven't been set yet, but the wall is built. And so the people who had opposed the construction of this are now calling Nehemiah and saying, Let's get together and talk.

[3 : 0 6] Let's just have a chat. You come out to our place and we'll have a conversation about our disagreements. Nehemiah says in the middle of verse 2, But they were scheming to harm me.

They were scheming to harm me, so I sent messengers to them with this reply, I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?

Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer. So Nehemiah discerned that what these people were about was not what they said.

There's a struggle in our culture that people take words and twist them. They take words and twist them to mean what they want them to mean.

And so one side says that this side is doing something false, and the other side says this one's doing something false. And trying to discern the truth can be very difficult when people won't even let the words or even numbers and statistics speak truth, but instead are trying to get things to work in the direction they want them to.

[4 : 23] Now these men intend evil, and Nehemiah knew that. He discerned that. He understood that they were scheming to harm him, as he says it. So he sent messengers.

Now note, they didn't harm the messengers. Because what most people understand is that it isn't the regular folk in the course of life that generally determine the long-term outcome.

It's the people who are leading, the people who are setting the example for good or for bad. And so they didn't really care about Nehemiah's messengers.

They wanted to get at Nehemiah. And unfortunately, sometimes we, if you will, the people of this world, this culture, this nation, our business, our lives, churches, we can sometimes feel like we're caught trying to figure out what voice are we supposed to follow?

What truth are we supposed to hear? Sometimes the truth is clear, and sometimes it's not quite so clear. Sometimes we're concerned that we don't stop the police from being able to protect us, and sometimes we're concerned that maybe they're exerting their protection in a way that's actually abusive.

[5 : 44] Sometimes we realize that certain people, because of the color of their skin, or because of their language, or because of their culture, or because of their religion, or because of their age, are not treated the same as others.

And we see that that's the truth. Sometimes it's obvious. It's obvious and it's clear that no one should be kneeling on someone else's neck until they die.

Certainly not for some small petty crime. We all know that. Everyone knows that. Even most of the police I've heard have said that. But there's an underlying concern.

There's an underlying issue that's difficult, that we're trying to discern the truth, and even more to the point, trying to discern our part in it. And as we go through Nehemiah, we're going to find that.

We're going to learn a little bit about that discernment. But discernment isn't easy, and prejudices are hard to struggle through.

[6 : 56] I have never been a person of color who had to walk down the street and be profiled. I've been profiled years ago when I was a teenager, walking while young.

A little different. I was arrested. I was thrown to the back of a paddy wagon with the vicious dogs, taken to the police station, worked over, because I was young and I was someplace where the police didn't feel I should be after midnight.

But that's not the same as growing up with an understanding that no matter how old you get, no matter how successful you get, no matter how you dress, no matter where you live or what you do, just because your skin color is different, some people are going to treat you with suspicion.

And how do we, as people who are not in that situation, come to appreciate that concern and try to change that message in our own mind so that we're not the ones having suspicions where there's not a place or a right or reason for suspicion?

In this case, Nehemiah had a reason. These people really were out to get him. And that's the trouble with our culture today is that we really actually have people that are using our feelings, our concerns, our legitimate issues to try to get at what they consider to be their adversaries.

[8 : 34] So they act as if they're there for peace. But they're really not. In verse 5, it says, Then the fifth time, Zimbala had sent his aid to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter in which was written, It is reported among the nations, and Geshem say it is true, that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall.

Moreover, according to those reports, you are about to become their king. And they've even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem. There is a king in Judah.

Now this report will get back to the king, so come, let us meet together. All right. Now maybe they really were concerned. Why are they building a wall if they have nothing to fear from the king?

Obviously, there had been many times that the Jewish people had built a wall around Jerusalem to declare a kingdom. And we could see how the people of that region and the people of that nationality might want to make a king.

And so, there's a little bit of truth in the story. It's easy to see why some people would have those suspicions. Now, if this was anyone else, it's very possible that even the Persian king would have these suspicions.

[9 : 58] But let's remember, Nehemiah was the man who tasted the food before the king ate it. The king trusted Nehemiah with his life, with all he was.

He cared deeply about Nehemiah, and Nehemiah apparently cared deeply about the king. There was no one who could have probably successfully built the wall around Jerusalem without getting in trouble with the Persian king, besides Nehemiah.

Sometimes it matters who you are. And when we are a person who has a particular ability or gifting or place, that we can make a difference, and God is calling us, like he called Nehemiah, to do something to make a difference, that's when we need to make sure we step into the gap.

When is God calling you, when is God calling me, to step up, to step into a place where we can be the people that do what maybe only we could do, what God created us for?

Do you remember a few weeks ago we were studying Queen Esther, and Mordecai said to her, maybe you were born for this very purpose. What purpose has God called you to?

[11 : 26] What is God calling you to today to step into, to change things? Your voice might be the one that makes all the difference, as Nehemiah did. Now, they're still working to try and kill Nehemiah.

He knows that. There's still people that are deceptive, but people who are promoting blasphemy or people who are promoting evil oftentimes use things that contain a lot of truth.

Most blasphemy only has about 5% of falsehood in it and 95% of the truth. It doesn't take a lot to change the truth.

We have one other religion that takes our Bible and changes one letter. One letter. In the book of John, it says, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

That Word is Jesus, so in other words, Jesus and God are one and the same, the Trinity, the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. All they did was change it to say, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a God.

[12 : 38] Added one letter, A, to the whole Bible. Changed everything. Jesus is no longer a part of the Godhead. He's a lesser God. He's a lesser deity.

Different religion. Different religion than Christianity because of one letter. And oftentimes, that's all that people do is they take one little piece and twist it a little bit.

Listen carefully. And you'll hear how people are taking and twisting what actually happens so that they can promote their agenda. What we want to be listening for is the truth that God is trying to reveal to us through a heart of discernment if we listen to Him.

In verse 8 of chapter 6, Nehemiah says, I sent him this reply, Nothing like what you are saying is happening. You are making it up out of your head.

People make stuff up. They make stuff up all the time. I hear it. I hear it even in sermons. people make stuff up.

[13 : 50] It isn't true. And the worst is since we have the internet where people can just literally make stuff up and nobody realizes it isn't true for the longest of time.

I've heard about people being fact-checked, truth-checked. But even then, we have to see whether the truth-checker have an agenda because oftentimes the people checking the truth have their own way of seeing how the truth should be played out.

And they're using 95% of the truth that agrees with everybody but they've got 5% that's not quite right. Oh, it's a difficult world. We need an understanding, a discernment of God more than we ever have.

In verse 9, it says, they were all trying to frighten us thinking their hands will get too weak for the work and it will not be completed. But I pray, Nehemiah says, strengthen my hands.

God, give me the strength to do what I need today to fulfill the work that you have called me to, to make an impact in this world that matters for you.

[15 : 05] In Jesus' name, Amen. Give me strong hands. Give me hands that can continue to work.

And this isn't about hands, of course. Give me the ability to reach deep down in me and when I don't feel like I want to do it when it's hard to do, when it might be at cost to do it, may God give me the strength to go ahead and do it anyways.

Because there's people that are trying to discourage us. There's always people trying to discourage us. One day, in verse 10, I went to the house of Shemiah, son of Deliah, the son of Mahadabel, who was shut in his home.

Okay? So he went to visit this guy. He said, Let us meet in the house of God inside the temple and let us close the temple doors because men are coming to kill you.

By night, they are coming to kill you. Okay, so what this guy is saying is, Nehemiah, we should go and hide inside the temple. We should go hide in the church.

[16 : 16] We should go and hide. We should just, we got to be careful because there's people trying to kill us. But I said, Should a man like me run away?

Or should someone like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go. And I realized that God had not sent him but that he prophesied against me because Tobiah and Zimballat had hired him.

He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me. Wow. So let's see what we have here.

First of all, we have a concern that they're asking Nehemiah to shut himself away and be afraid. Now, sometimes we have to be careful. I'm not suggesting we should step into the most dangerous of situations, especially today when we're facing situations where people literally can die or be seriously hurt by being in the wrong place at the wrong time, doing the wrong thing.

And I don't even mean a bad thing. I just simply mean not doing the smartest thing. It's probably not so wise to be out right now in our cities after midnight.

[17 : 46] Just not so wise. It's not so wise for us to gather with a large crowd of people and none of them are wearing masks and none of them are getting away from each other and just say, we're going to gather together anyways, even if it was someplace where we were worshipping God.

it's probably not so wise. But there are times when we need to step into the gap anyways. There are times when we need to calculate whether or not it's better to take the chances and to be seen as someone who has the conviction to trust in God that to do what they are called to do.

I've told you before, I've been to the hospitals during this coronavirus. I've been to the funeral home. I've been to hospice.

I've talked to people. I've spent time with people. I'm not stepping out to just do it for no reason. And when there's no need for me to do it, I don't go even though it hurts.

But when God calls you to do something, you need to step into the gap. There are times when our voice and what we have to say will matter.

[19 : 17] Make no mistake, I watch the same video as you. No time ever should a police officer kneel on someone's neck like that and kill them.

Ever. It's just not right. That's just the truth. However you feel about anything, that's obviously wrong.

I don't think it's ever right either though to go into a person's business and destroy their business and throw rocks through their windows and take all their merchandise and wipe out their livelihood for the rest of their lives because you're angry.

these are people you don't even know. How could it ever be good to take out our frustration on somebody who you don't even know?

I've read about some business people who have lost their entire livelihood. Some of them are people of color. Some of them are people who have finally struggled and made it out of the abyss and were finally just squeezing by and the coronavirus came and knocked them back and they were just getting ready to maybe get back on their feet and now someone comes and destroys it.

[20 : 49] I applaud those people that went down and cleaned things up. Put boards on the windows. Help the shopkeepers. This is hard stuff.

Sometimes we have to listen to the voice of God. Go hide in the temple he says because people are coming to kill you.

Now do I think people were coming to kill Nehemiah? They might have been. There were people that certainly opposed him. There were probably people that would have been happy if he was dead but he's not going to hide. He's going to step out front and be counted.

And there's times in life when people need to do that and there are times that people are doing that. Now second thing that happens here is we also found out that this man that he went to visit Shemaiah was hired by Tobiah and Zimbalat.

He was hired to say this is what God says. Oh this is this is one of the worst things when people who are supposed to be people of faith are tempted by power and money to say something that isn't what should be said.

[22 : 15] Now did he say something evil? No he said let's go hide in the temple. Did he say something that's against the Bible? Not really. But again 95% of truth with 5% of falsehood can get us in a lot of trouble.

And he wanted to call Nehemiah away. I want you to picture if Nehemiah the leader of the people the people the one who gives the people courage is now found to be hiding somewhere away when people are looking for someone to be a leader.

Verse 14 Remember Tobiah and Zimbalat my God because of what they have done. Remember also the prophet Nodiah and how she and the rest of the prophets have been trying to intimidate me.

God remember these people. Remember what they've done. Remember what they've done towards your people. In verse 15 it says the wall was completed on the 25th of Elul in 52 days.

So it took them 52 days to reconstruct this wall get rid of all the rubble put up all the stones the timbers whatever it took to build a wall 52 days. That's fast.

[23 : 32] That's fast around a whole city a wall finished in 52 days. It's amazing. It's beyond huge. 52 days. Basically two months work and they're done.

That's exciting. in verse 16 it says when all our enemies heard about this all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.

They understood that God was behind it. Sometimes it's true that we can measure whether God is behind an effort because God makes it happen.

especially if it happens in an unexpected truly miraculous way like a 52 day construction of a wall around a city which normally would take literally years.

Amazing. And the people lost their confidence about opposing Nehemiah because they saw the fruits of their faith in God.

[24 : 40] Verse 17 also in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Baiah and replies from to Baiah kept coming to them. For many in Judah were under oath to him since he was son-in-law to Shekaniah son of Erah and his son Johanan had married the daughter of Mesutzelem son of Barakiah.

Moreover they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said and to Baiah sent letters to intimidate me. So this little chapter ends with this to Baiah guy and what Nehemiah finds is that he's got people in his own camp that are telling to Baiah everything that Nehemiah says.

The fifth column is what they used to call it. People who are actually reporting to the enemy what they're saying what's being said and giving if you will aid to the person who's opposing him.

Why? Well because they had an oath to this guy or in other words they had agreed to ally with them. In fact some of them had done it through marriage because often times in the ancient world the way in which you created a strong foundation was you married your children off to other people of power and so they concentrated power in a couple of families.

so Nehemiah found that he had people within his own ranks within his own people who were trying to help the one who was trying to oppose him.

[26 : 18] It's a hard thing. Chapter 7 After the wall had been rebuilt I had set the doors in place the gatekeepers musicians and the Levites were appointed.

I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanai that's the one who had come to tell him about the condition of the wall along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most people do.

Even back then most people weren't afraid of God we're afraid of our boss we're afraid of the people who have weapons we're afraid of people who have money we're afraid to walk down the street in some neighborhoods but are we afraid of God?

In the book in the Gospels Jesus says don't be afraid of the one that can destroy the body be afraid of the one that can destroy the body and the soul in hell. God doesn't want us to be afraid but he wants us to respect who and what he is and what he can do.

Anyways in verse 3 he says I said to them the gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty have them shut the doors and bar them.

[27 : 32] Also appoint residents of Jerusalem as guards some at their post and some near their own houses. So don't open up the gates until it's clearly daylight because bad stuff happens at night.

That sounds familiar doesn't it? Bad stuff happens at night because it says in the Gospels that people who are evil love the darkness because they can hide their evil deeds in the darkness.

So the darkness is when bad people do bad things because they think people won't see them. I remember watching a guy on TV and they're showing him taking a lighted box and throwing it into City Hall to start a fire.

Everybody's watching it. The people that are showing this on TV are saying to the reporter does anybody see that guy? Do the police see him? Are the firemen coming? Hey guys somebody just threw fire inside City Hall.

It took them about five minutes or more for them to figure out oh this actually happened. We watched it. Would you have done it in broad daylight? No. A lot of this bad stuff is not happening in daylight.

[28 : 40] It happens when people think they're not watching. You know the worst difficulty with this situation with this poor man who died at the hands of the police was not just this one man dying but the fact that we are enraged because we saw it.

It was videoed. It was recorded. Somebody was taking pictures. How many people do these things happen to and nobody's got the camera on?

And why is there an attitude that some people think it's okay? I don't care who they are. It's not okay to kill somebody.

It's not okay even to abuse somebody. A man isn't resisting arrest. He's laying there handcuffed. Help me. I can't breathe. It's not okay.

But somehow if we didn't have the cameras we'd just forget about it. It's not okay. In the darkness is when the trouble comes.

[29 : 52] So Nehemiah says keep the gates closed and only open them up in the bright sunshine. And that happens in our culture too. In the darkness is when people do things that are wrong.

In the darkness is when we have a lot of the evil happen because people can hide their deeds. Jesus knew that. Everything you do should be something you're willing to have everyone you know and love and care about.

Everyone in the church all of your parents and grandparents and children things that you wouldn't care if they all knew. what you do in darkness should be the same as what you do in the light.

That's a person of integrity a person you can count on. Anyways he appoints guards some of them at the gates but some of them at their houses just to keep an eye because you never know. Even though nobody is really attacked yet they keep threatening to attack.

It's interesting how some people make a lot of threats but don't actually follow through with anything. But in this case we have people that are actually threatening and so they want to be careful.

[31 : 00] In verse 4 it says Now the city was large and spacious but there were few people in it and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. So there weren't very many people in this city and they didn't have a lot of houses.

So God put it in my heart to assemble the nobles the officials the common people for registration by family and I found the genealogical record of those who had been the first to return and this is what I found written there.

So God put it in my heart. God put it in my mind. God gave me what I needed to know. Do you know that in the New Testament it says that the Holy Spirit will give you the words you need when you're in a struggle?

I've had that happen so many times where God gives me the very words I need to say something in a circumstance. We need to be so in touch with God constant in prayer is what the Bible says.

Constant in prayer which doesn't mean obviously that we're physically and literally saying words of prayer but that our lives are constantly connected to God so we know that whatever we're planning to do is bathed in the Holy Spirit of God.

[32 : 19] God put it in their mind to do this. Okay so he checked on the genealogy of everybody and this is what I found written and so he goes through and he says there are people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive they returned to Jerusalem and Judah each to his own town and so these are people that were taken out from the first captivity and he listens all out okay and you go down a whole list of people that go on and some of them he says their jobs their duties the priest the temple servants the musicians various different people descendants of different folks descendants all the way down to the servants of Solomon he gets to verse 60 so I'm not going to read through all these names because I couldn't pronounce them if I tried but there's a whole lot of different people and he lists them all these are the people who can trace their genealogy back they have good bloodlines the temples servants and the descendants of the servants of Solomon 392 people in verse 61 the following came up from the towns of Telmalal

Telhasha Cherub Adan and Imar but they could not show that their families were descended from Israel they couldn't prove they had the right bloodlines so see they're already deciding who has more priority over someone else who are the people whose bloodlines are good in verse 64 it says these searched for their family records but they could not find them and so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean the governor therefore ordered them that's Nehemiah the governor therefore ordered them not to eat any of the most sacred food until there should be a priest ministering with the Urim and the Thummim so they're excluded because they can't prove that they're good enough they're not what we would in our culture call blue bloods they can't trace their lineage back my daughter got me that ancestry.com for Christmas

I'm finding out a little bit more about my heritage than I knew I know a lot of it and it kind of fits with the stories I've heard and in some places I can trace my lineage back to nobility but you know on my father's side I trace back to my grandfather being an illegal alien jumped ship came into the country illegally became a citizen I don't want you to misunderstand who I am now but that means I have illegitimacy in my lineage but I'm your pastor maybe you shouldn't listen to me maybe I'm not good enough now I do have nobility I could point to them would that make me okay what makes us okay what makes us acceptable at what point are we in the appropriate group and at what point aren't we isn't that what this whole conflict is about right now in our country that some people because of the color of their skin or maybe because of the way they talk when I talk like my dad

I talk like this that's my working class heritage I can talk like working class people they know what I mean you know what I'm talking about they know what I'm talking about but that language doesn't work in proper culture maybe they don't use the right speech pattern maybe the cut of their clothes is not good enough I generally wear a suit on Sunday morning some people have said why do I do that that's not what people wear anymore well I'll tell you what when I wear a suit everybody respects me I know that that's what happens in our culture clothing makes a difference it sets an image it sends a message what message do we send but some people can't afford decent clothing some people can't afford to buy quality food so their bodies are not as healthy the shape is not exactly what we'd want some people can't afford to go to get their hair professionally cared for so they do the best they can some people were never taught manners when I walk down the street with a woman

I always walk on the outside towards the street I was taught that some people find it strange it's just what I do I can't help it it's like opening a door there's certain things that you're supposed to know I know which fork to use even if there's ten of them I know I'm not supposed to pick up a fork until the hostess at the table picks up a fork I know these things but a lot of people were never taught these customs never taught these manners they don't know how to act so they'd be excluded like these people are or mistreated or treated as if they can be they can be misused maybe maybe not even considered quite human enough to deserve to live it's wrong it's wrong but they did it here because every culture does this they determine who's in who's out okay and it was the governor himself

[38 : 15] Nehemiah who's a good man and we're going to talk about that in just a minute a good man the whole company numbered 42,360 besides there 7,337 male and female slaves and they also had 245 male and female singers there were also 736 horses 245 mules 435 camels and 6,720 donkeys now did you just notice that they included people that they called slaves people that they called slaves in with the animals which was the justification for this country why they thought it was okay to enslave people because of the color of their skin because somehow they had come to feel that it was alright that these people were actually people made in the image of God were actually less than because their skin color was different so therefore they were more like animals and then they started accepting Jesus and they started believing in God and some in the church said wait a minute we can't treat them as less than if they have a soul if they worship the same

God as us they're our brothers and their sisters we can't treat them as less than but some people do anyways and they did even in this passage the good people the good people the followers of God the people who had committed their lives and done wonderful things are now carrying people who are slaves treating them as less than now I want you to remember these are people who are coming out of captivity they've been taken they've they feel like they've lost their freedom and they've been treated with disrespect and yet they feel it's okay for them to have thousands thousands of men and women serving them as their slaves or to take people simply because their bloodlines couldn't be proven and exclude them from the food and from the worship and talk about people in the same language as they talk about animals now why am I talking about this well because it's here but also because it's important thing for us to understand there are many good people in this world who unintentionally do bad things we're going to find this out in the next chapter we'll see if we get to it but there's many good people who unintentionally do bad things

I have I was raised with ideas and attitudes and things that I didn't even realize were wrong until somebody taught me educated me and brought me to understand oh my gosh that's wrong the way in which people treat other races the way in which people treat other genders the way men treat women the way women sometimes treat men the way older people are treated the way poor people are treated the way people who are not as attractive are treated compared to people who are attractive the way people who have some sort of handicapping condition the way people who are smart is compared to people who are not so smart the way people are treated who are doing professional positions like mine as compared to working class people. And by the way, there's even things that working class people aren't allowed to join. And I've been invited to join those organizations, but I won't join them because I used to be in a working class profession and I wouldn't have been allowed to join. But now I'm a pastor, so it's okay. I haven't changed. I'm still me. I know what it's like to work for a living. I know what it's like to drive a truck. I know what it's like to lift that bundle and tote that bale. I know what it's like to work from six in the morning till 10 at night at hard, hard labor. Work I couldn't even do today because I'm too old. I'm not so happy about thinking that the time is coming where people are going to treat me like I'm irrelevant because I'm old. I already feel some of that. I didn't like it when I was young and people treated me with disrespect because I was young. People are treated with disrespect for so many reasons and we're raised with these things. They come down to us like the sins of the father visited the second and third generation. They're taught to us as children and we carry these attitudes and these ideas not even realizing what we're doing wrong. Not even realizing that when we have a different attitude about two people walking down the street at us because one is a different color or one is a different age or one is dressed different than the other. These are prejudices we've built up.

good people. Good people doing stuff that's really not good. Now it doesn't mean that they're terrible. It doesn't mean that they're unredeemable. It just means that sometimes God takes a little time to reveal to us our sin and God is revealing some of our sins as a culture, as a people so that we can understand how we can grow. I am not the same today as I was seven years ago. I am not the same as I was 20 years ago or 15 years ago or 30 years ago or even five months ago. If we are not growing, if we can't look back at our lives, especially over years and see how we are getting better, then we are not being truly redeemed in this life. We are not being, as they use in the Wesleyan term, sanctified, made more sacred, more like Jesus. That's what we should be doing, especially you people who have dedicated yourself to understand the word of God. We need, we need to be growing closer to God.

Anyways, I'm going to finish this chapter. It says, some of the heads of the families contributed to the work. The governors gave to the treasury 1,000 derricks of gold, 50 bowls and 530 garments for priests. Some of the heads of the families gave to the treasury for the work, 20,000 derricks of gold, 2,200 miners of silver. The total given by the rest of the people, it was 20,000 derricks of gold, 2,000 miners of silver and 67 garments for the priests. So the wealthy people gave more and the poor people gave less, but everybody gave because everybody has to be able to give. Even in a church, we have people who give a lot and we have people that give less. It's something that's a secret about the strength of a church financially. It's not based on the capacity of the people to give.

[45 : 15] It's based on their desire to give because people who have a lot of capacity with no desire, no faith and commitment will give nothing. People who have a lot of faith and desire and commitment will give more than those people. Now, the greatest thing is we've got people of great capacity and great commitment and faith. That's what these people are. They can be game changers.

You can be game changers if you have that ability. It's not just about money. Maybe you have the time, maybe you have the influence, maybe you have the ability. Let's continue on. The priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the musicians, and the temple servants, along with certain of the people and the rest of the Israelites settled in their own town. So they all gathered in their own towns, but there still was the city of Israel. Now, I'm going to take a little bit and we're going to try and get into chapter eight because it's important to what we were just talking about. So let's see how far we can get with this. When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people came together as one and the square before the water gate. That's interesting.

Water gate meant something different than it means today. That's from Nixon. Remember, remember Tricky Dick? Anyways, they told Ezra, the teacher of the law, to bring out the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel. Okay. This is verse one of chapter eight.

Now, Ezra, if you'll recall, was the book before. He's the prophet. He's the priest. He's the priestly leader. He's the religious leader. Nehemiah is the governor. He's not the religious leader.

Now, his faith helps to inform him. And it is so important when our secular, or what would we call governmental officials care about our faith. The fact that we carry one story together as a people and we have common beliefs and principles and values is huge. But you'll notice that they have a priest and they have a governor because sometimes you need the priest to be able to talk to the governor and say, Hey, what I'm seeing isn't right. The governor needs somebody to be their conscience.

[47 : 22] If you see what I mean. Anyways, I want to read on because it's important. They said, bring out the law of Moses, bring out. This is really the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, the Torah. In verse two, on the first day of the seventh month, Ezra, the priest brought the law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. So in other words, everybody that was of an age to understand. They're not reading this law to the children who are too young to understand it. He read it aloud from daybreak until noon, as he faced the square before the water gate and the presence of the men and the women and others who could understand.

And all the people listened attentively to the book of the law. So they, they basically just read the Bible from, from the break of day until noon. That's like five hours, maybe more, maybe six.

That's a lot of just straight reading. Imagine just reading through the Bible for six hours straight. Ezra and the teacher of the law stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. This is where pulpits come from. Beside him on his right stood Meritiah, Shema, Ananiah, Uriah, Hekiah, and Messiah.

And on his left were Padilla, Mishaël, Melchajah, Hashem, Hashbadanah, Zechariah, and Mesusalem.

Now, Zechariah was a prophet during this time and he wrote a book too. And we may get to the book of Zechariah, possibly in the middle of this study, possibly we'll go thereafter. But Zechariah was a prophet during the return. Anyways, Ezra opened the book.

[49 : 05] All the people could see him because he was standing above them. And as he opened it, the people all stood up. They stood up to show honor for the word of the Lord. Some churches do that when the gospel is read. Verse six, Ezra praised the Lord, the great God, and all the people lifted their hands and responded, Amen. Amen. Praise the Lord. Amen. It's good to start out by praising God. Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

So they were giving their worship. They were giving themselves to God. They came to remember that God is God. That's what worship is for. Worship is to say, God is God to me. I am not God. I'm not the center of all this. Everything that goes on, it's not revolve around me. It revolves around God, his purpose, his idea. Okay.

In verse seven, it says, the Levites, Yeshua, Benai, Sherebiah, Je'am, Echab, Shepiah, Odiah, Messiah, Kelitite, Azariah, Josabed, Hanan, and Peleah, instructed the people in the law while the people were standing there. So Ezra's reading it, but then these people are explaining it because sometimes the scripture can be a little hard to understand. Even at this time, the first five books of the Bible are thousands of years old. Now to us, there's not a passage written in the Bible that's not a couple thousand years old. Things have changed. And sometimes we need people to explain it to us. That's what I'm doing right now, right? They read from the book of the law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.

It's just not reading for reading sake. It's reading with an intention that they understand. They understand what's being read. It's explained to them. Sometimes we need to explain it. It's not so simple, not so clear. With my confirmation class, I spent an entire class talking about the Ten Commandments and explaining them. And you'd say, oh, well, they're pretty obvious. No, they're not.

They take a little more explanation if you really look at them, but we're not on the Ten Commandments right now. In verse nine, then Nehemiah, the governor, Ezra, the priest, the teacher of the law and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, this day is holy to the Lord, your God. Do not mourn or weep for all the people had been weeping as they listened to the word of the law. Now, why are they weeping? Why are they weeping? This goes back to what we were talking about.

[51 : 46] They're weeping because as they're listening to what God said are the rules, they're realizing all the rules they've broken. One of the reasons why we have the law of God, one of the reasons why we have the scripture is so that we can be clearly aware of what's right and what's wrong.

There are times where we're just not aware of it. Maybe it's because we've never fully understood it or it's never been explained to us clearly, or maybe because we just were too busy working on other sins that had to be fixed. But good people can do wrong things without realizing it.

These are the people of God who've committed their lives so much to God that they left their houses and their homes in the Persian capital, came all the way back to Jerusalem and went into hard labor, rebuilding the walls, work they're not used to doing, risked their lives, lost a lot of their fortune so that they can rebuild a wall to honor God. And now they're realizing, oh my gosh, as Ezra is reading the law, oh my gosh, we've broken a lot of laws.

We're not doing right. One of the purposes of the law is to convict us. Conviction is good. Conviction is when we come to realize that some of the things we do are just wrong. I've been under conviction before by God. And not just when, before I was a pastor, back in my sinner days. I did a lot of bad things years ago. But now, right now, I find constantly God is pointing out where I fail.

Now, don't misunderstand. I haven't done something that if you find out about it, I'm going to be tossed in jail or you're going to be embarrassed that I was your pastor. I don't do those things.

[53 : 58] But there are things that break my heart because I realize how hurtful I've been without even realizing it. And oftentimes to people without even knowing it. And that's what this issue is about where people are saying black lives matter or white lives matter or gay lives matter or women's lives matter. And I'm not trying to diminish the issue around race because there are unique situations to the history of people who are African American in our country. And I know that. I've studied that history. But when we diminish other people, when we treat them with disrespect, when we treat them like slaves, when we treat them like they don't have good enough bloodlines, when we treat them like they're not wealthy enough or proper enough or speak right, we've been down this road tonight already.

We're breaking God's heart. I've done that myself. So we all have to repent and we all have to turn away from that. And we all have to say, God, forgive me. I have sinned because all these people are created in the image of God. And as we treat God, we'll be determined by how we treat our brothers and sisters made in his image.

I'll try a little bit more and we'll see how far we get. We only got a few minutes left. All right. Um, they said, don't weep. This is a day holy to the Lord, your God. When we're worshiping God, even when we feel conviction, we should still be celebrating God. He says, go enjoy this first and go enjoy choice food and sweet drinks and send some to those who have nothing prepared.

Take care of the people who are hungry. Why is it always something that has to be said? This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve for the joy of the Lord is your strength. The joy of the Lord is your strength. The joy of the Lord is your strength, not the joy of people, not the happy, happy of our culture, not the, the, the thrill we get from some of the things that make us feel better physically.

The joy, the deep down blessing of God, God's joy. That's what gives us the strength to go through the struggles, go through the wrestling, the problems, the hurts, the pains.

[56 : 35] There's reason why so many of these, these civil causes have started in the church because we have a strength within us to face oppression.

Even when it's not easy, the Levites calmed all the people saying, be still for this is a holy day. Don't grieve. Sunday is not a day for weeping. It's a day for celebrating. It's hard. It's hard because sometimes we just feel broken.

And these people felt broken. They felt the conviction of sin. Lord, I have sinned. I've broken your loss. Forgive me. Help me to repent. In the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven.

What a release it comes to know that the brokenness, even the brokenness we didn't realize was there before is forgiven. All the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that have been made known to them.

God's good news is not all about conviction. It's not all about judgment. It's not all about brokenness. It's not about tearing people down and telling them how bad they are. It's about ultimately saying you are forgiven.

[58 : 05] God has made you whole and perfect again. It doesn't matter where you come from. It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't even matter what you've done wrong. It doesn't matter how you've sinned. It doesn't matter what your bloodlines are.

It doesn't matter what your economic situation is. It doesn't matter the color of your skin. It doesn't matter the clothes you wear. It doesn't matter who you are. God wants to be connected and in love with you, to be made in the atonement, to be made at one with God.

That's what Christianity, that's what our faith is all about. And that is joy. Not that we're good enough. That God is good enough for us. Not what we do. What God does through us and for us.

God is good enough for us.

So there is a custom, and this is really the fall festival, the fall harvest, to build these temporary little houses because we need to remember that we're only in this world for a short sojourn.

[59 : 41] God intends us to be in glory forever the new creation and so they build these temporary shelters to show how temporary life is we're just like a dust in the wind the grass that's here today and gone tomorrow I am a flower quickly fading a wave cast in the ocean a vapor in the wind so the people went out and brought back branches built themselves temporary shelters on their own roofs in their courtyards in the courts of the house of God and in the square of the water gate and the one in the gate of Ephraim the whole company that had returned from exile built temporary shelters and lived in them from the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day the Israelites had not celebrated it like this and their joy was very great what a great thing to celebrate with God let's remember that it's the joy of the Lord that is our strength we are not to be people simply of conviction yes we feel the conviction so we can change and grow and then we feel the joy that God has transformed our lives so be it amen day after day verse 18 from the first day to the last

Ezra read from the book of the law of God you're asking the first day to the last what they mean well it says they celebrated the festival for seven days so that's how often they read the book for seven days and on the eighth day in accordance with the regulation there was an assembly and we'll get to the assembly in a minute okay because it's very important not in a minute in the next week actually chapter 9 which is also important it's going to pick up the story where we are so they've been having a festival now for seven days reading the word of God spending their time with God taking a break from all of life to just live in the joy of celebrating and worshiping God we used to do that years ago go away for a week they call them camp meetings go away for a week and spend a week just living, studying, breathing hearing about, praising, worshiping God doesn't it sound great?

we used to do that we can still do that maybe we'll do that again and so God created a festival for them to do that to take that break we got through chapter 8 of the book of Nehemiah we're going to come up on chapter 9 we have a lot of lessons in this evening's study we learned that they had a struggle with brokenness and institutional sin sins that they carried and didn't even realize it much like we're struggling with that they treated Peter with disrespect that they shouldn't have they didn't learn as much as we have although they did feel the conviction when they studied the word of God like we feel that conviction and that God forgives their sins and that that joy of celebrating God becomes their strength and discernment is what we pray for that God will show us a heart to understand what we should be what we should do for this very day God has created us what has he created us to do

God is calling you let's give ourselves in prayer to God dear God in heaven you have poured out your blessing upon us you have reached into our heart given us your spirit your hope your wonder your strength and we pray now Lord that you will pour into our hearts your presence and your wonder forgive us Lord for we have sinned show us where we break other people even when we don't know it help us to be a better people a stronger people a people who follow you help us Lord to live our lives more close to you teach us Lord how to treat everyone with your deep respect and how we might please you and be blessed by you share with us your spirit forgiving our sins and giving us grace to live in the days to come bless those who are hurting Lord bless all those who are struggling from either the coronavirus from pains or struggles from struggles with work or even because of this rioting bring peace Lord that peace and joy break out on your people in this country and help the people of this nation to feel your presence and your strength and your joy bring us back to you that we might share in the joy of the Lord be our strength and our power and our grace as we offer our prayers in the name of our Lord Jesus who said to pray our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever amen we'll see you all next week go in peace and may God bless you perhaps we'll see you all soon bye congregation■

Thank you.