

Bible Study - May 27, 2020

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- [0 : 0 0] Good evening, everybody. Welcome to the Wednesday Night Bible Study. Tonight, we're looking at our continued study of passages in the Bible from the exile.
- We've been studying now the book of Nehemiah, which came after Ezra, which is what we were doing before. Nehemiah is a book about rebuilding the city wall around Jerusalem.
- So if you go to Nehemiah, we're going to start in chapter 4, but I'm going to give you a real quick recap in case you weren't here or just so that you can remember. Nehemiah started out in the beginning of the book, and he was a cup holder for the king.
- Or in other words, it was his job to taste the food, to make sure if somebody was going to poison the king, they would kill Nehemiah, not the king. Needless to say, this is a very trusted position.
- It's an important position, and the king knew Nehemiah and cared about him well. Now, Nehemiah's brother came home from the region of Palestine. He said, so how's things going with people going back?
- [1 : 0 2] And his brother told him, you know, Nehemiah, it's sad. I mean, the city's all torn apart. There's no wall around the city. It's kind of desperate. Now, we wouldn't think much about a wall around a city, but to understand that in that culture, the wall around the city had a couple of very important functions.
- First of all, it actually protected people from just people who were dangerous. Rather than locking up the dangerous people, they locked them out, so to speak.
- So the wall meant that you were safe from people just randomly attacking you. And I'm not talking about an individual necessarily. We're talking about bands of thieves or of even marauding armies or whatever.
- The second thing it did was it established a group of people or a town or city as being a place that was important. If you had a wall, then that meant that you were an important city.
- If you didn't have a wall, you obviously weren't important. The only city that was the exception to that rule, by the way, was a city named Sparta in Greece, where they said, our wall is our army.
- [2 : 1 5] And so their view was no one should ever get close enough to the city to threaten it. The army should keep people far enough away, which is kind of the philosophy in our country. So anyways, Nehemiah at one time is bringing the cup, and the king notices that he looks kind of sad, and he tells him about the report his brother sent.
- And Nehemiah had prayed about this and thought about this, and so the king said, well, what can we do for you, Nehemiah? And he said, what I'd like to do is I'd like to go back and rebuild the wall around the city I grew up in.
- I'd like you to actually provide the lumber and some soldiers to guard me on the way for the trip and some money to pay the bills. So Nehemiah was bold.
- You've got to give him credit. He was bold. And sometimes we only get because we ask. We only receive because we have the audacity to actually go out and ask for it.

Well, Nehemiah asked for support and help from the king, and the king said, sure, just don't be too long. I want you to come back so that you can serve me again. So Nehemiah went off, and they started rebuilding the wall.

[3 : 26] Long story short, he did a few things. There were people that were against it, that were in the neighboring community, for various different reasons. They just didn't like the idea of Jerusalem looking like a strong city anymore.

And they really didn't care for the people in Jerusalem who, they had their own issues because they thought they were the proper good Jewish people as compared to the Samaritans who had gathered around there.

So there was some opposition, but the people gathered together and started building the wall. And we left off in chapter 3 where they were telling about each group that was working on different sections of the wall.

So tonight we're going to pick up in chapter 4 of the book of Nehemiah in verse 1. And it says, When Simbalat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed.

Simbalat was one of the leaders of the people that were in the region around Jerusalem, but wasn't a part of that effort. So he became angry.

[4 : 28] He ridiculed the Jews. And in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, What are those feeble Jews doing?

Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble, burned as they are?

Have you ever been mocked? Have you ever felt less than? Has somebody ever treated you like you were incapable? Feeble Jews going about a fool's errand, working on something they're just not capable of finishing.

What do you do when that happens to you? What do you do when people start putting doubt in your mind? Doubt is the opposite of faith.

Discouragement is the opposite of belief. We believe we have faith that we can follow through with something. God, in their hearts, they absolutely believe God had called them to this effort.

[5 : 42] That they were doing this and this was essential. And so now they have these people who are working against them. And they're mocking them.

Feeble Jews. Well, I said last week, there weren't like professional builders amongst them. This wasn't a group of people that really honestly knew what they were doing. And this was a huge, huge task.

To rebuild a wall, an entire wall around the city. Would they be able to finish it? Do they think they could do it in one day?

Do they think it'll just be that easy? Can they rebuild this wall from a pile of burned rubble? Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side in verse 3, he said, What they are building, even a fox climbing up on it, would break down their wall of stones.

So even if they're successful, what they're building won't be of the quality to stand. They don't even know what they're doing.

[6 : 55] Nehemiah responded, Hear us, our God. For we are despised.

Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight.

For they have thrown insults in the face of the builders. Nehemiah faces the people who are opposing him with confidence and with a prayer to God.

That's an interesting prayer. He's praying that his enemies will have something bad happen to him. Let the insults fall back on them. Let them become captive in a land of captivity.

Don't even forgive their sins, God. In the book of Matthew, Jesus says, You have heard it said, An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. But I tell you, pray for those who persecute you.

[8 : 06] Love your enemies. That's not what Nehemiah is doing here, is it? There is a little difference between the New Testament and the Old Testament. And we want God to forgive us, but sometimes we want the people who oppose us to be smited.

Now the truth is, is that in some ways, maybe it would be right for them to be punished. But when you have two people who are opposing each other, we have to work on discernment to try and determine, are they people we can bring over to our side or are there people that we need to protect ourselves from?

Now, in the book of Ezra, we had that problem where the people in the surrounding area, the people called the Samaritans, notice there was a Samaritan army here. The people who are called Samaritans, the people in the surrounding area, had offered to help the Jewish people to rebuild the temple.

And the Jewish people said, No, you're not good enough. They pushed them away. Now, when the Jewish people are trying to do this, the Samaritans are pushing back.

So what are the Jewish people doing? They're pushing them away. They're pushing them back again. There's a man by the name of Father Shakur. He was a priest in the village of Babylon, Palestinian.

[9 : 29] And he said, You know, the problem is that we face persecution by the Jewish people. But the reason why they're persecuting us is not because they're just mean and spiteful.

It's because they were persecuted by Nazi Germany. And actually, the Christian faith was originally persecuted by the Jewish people. So one oppresses the other, who oppresses someone else, who hurts someone else.

And a chain of violence and pain continues on and on and on. So much of this could have ended if they would have just found a way to share love and hope and peace.

It's hard. And sometimes we do have people who are enemies, and they're not looking for love and peace and reconciliation. But in this case, they had created a problem, and now they're dealing with the problem.

And so they turned it over to God, which we should. But I don't know about praying for our enemies' destruction. They'd have to be pretty bad enemies. Anyways, it says, So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.

[10 : 41] They got the wall up halfway. They worked harder. The people actually, at this point, are motivated. The insults didn't discourage them, but actually it caused them to feel encouraged, to feel motivated.

We'll show them. And they went to work. And they worked with all their heart. They were of one heart. If a people are of one heart and one mind, they can accomplish absolutely amazing, astounding things, especially if their heart is with God.

All too often were people divided. All too often were people who seemed to feel that we're on one side or another. We see this in our culture today.

This side says this, so this side has to say the opposite. This side says another thing. This side has to say the opposite. We find a way to tear each other down. Instead of recognizing we live in the same world, in the same country, and we need to find a way to build each other.

Up. It's a hard thing. Circle of hate going around and around and around. One attacks another who attacks another who attacks another.

[11 : 59] And back to the beginning. God calls us to be the people who break the chain of pain and instead bring love and grace and hope and possibilities and dreams of a people working together.

In the book of Acts, that wonderful verse in chapter 2 where it says, they were all together in one place. They were of one mind in the same place and did amazing things.

I pray for our people as a country that we will become a people of one mind, one heart, because we can accomplish amazing things. I pray for this church.

This church that, even though we struggle with very difficult decisions, we'll support what we decide to do and we'll be of one mind and we will rebuild everything we've ever been in an amazing way, maybe better than ever.

Because we're of one heart. Because we're of one heart, just as these people were. In verse 7 it says, Now some of these people, like the Ammonites, these are historical enemies of the Jews.

[13 : 17] They've been around for a long time. They're not Jewish people. They've been in a struggle for years with Israel. Now they're angry. They're upset. They feel threatened.

They feel that the walls that were made for protection are actually going to be a tool now to threaten them with. So they're angry. It's what happens.

People get angry. So it says in verse 8, They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.

They all plotted together. You notice? They were together. They're going to fight against them. They're going to fight against them. They're going to fight against them. They said that they're going to fight against these people. They're literally going to fight.

They're going to stir up trouble against them. Now I do want you to note that these are people that have letters of protection from the emperor. So they're not to be truly attacked.

[14 : 16] In fact, if you recall, when Nehemiah came, he came with a cavalry. He had soldiers with him. So this would take a bit for even the Samaritan army to attack Jerusalem and be successful.

But they're still threatening it. And when people make a threat, we get worried. When people make a threat, we have to decide, are they being serious or are they bluffing?

So they set a watch. It says, Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, Wait a minute. Let me just see what it says.

In verse 9. I knew I missed a verse. It says in verse 9, We posted a guard.

We set a watch. They really didn't even have to fight. All they had to do was show that they were watching, show that they were willing to defend themselves.

[15 : 19] That's a funny thing because that's what happens with bullies. Bullies actually back down usually in the face of a threat. I found most people are afraid of people who are confident and willing to stand up for themselves.

In this case, they set a watch and they watch day and night. All right. And in setting that watch, they were being careful and they were being prepared.

Okay. Well, in verse 10, it says, Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, The strength of the labors is giving out. There's so much rubble.

We can't rebuild the wall. Also, our enemies said, Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and we'll kill them and put an end to the work.

Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us, Ten times over, wherever you turn, they will attack us. So they're getting tired.

[16 : 29] You know, when a job is half done, that's when it gets discouraging. When you're planning, it's not hard work. It's fun work. When you're starting, you have all that enthusiasm and energy to get going on it.

And it gets you about halfway. But somewhere around halfway, you start to see all the work that's still left and you're tired.

That's why the cleanup crew on all the things we do at church is the crew we need the most. Because there's always somebody that's there to set things up and somebody there that's even to run events and activities.

But when we get to the end and we've got to clean things up, that's when the real tough ones show up. Because we don't always want to stay and do that hard work.

It's a bunch of rubble. There's junk everywhere. Nehemiah, if all we had to do is build the wall, we'd be glad to do it. But we've got all this junk we've got to clear out before we can even build the wall.

[17 : 28] So we've got it half up and it's covered in junk. It's twice the work we thought it would be. And not only that, there's people around us saying that there's people out to get us.

Even some of the Jewish people are discouraging us and saying, oh yeah, they're out there. They're going to get you. They're going to get you. In verse 13 it says, Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families with their swords and spears and bows.

Okay? Keep in mind, the lowest parts of the wall are probably the place where the rubble's the highest and you just go right over the top. A wall's not very good if it's just a little short wall and there's a pile of junk on both sides.

You just go right over the top. So he stationed some people behind those places. And they actually took up positions with swords and spears and bows.

They came armed. In verse 14 it says, After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, Don't be afraid of them.

[18 : 43] Remember the Lord who is great and awesome and fight for your families, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your home. Don't be afraid. God is with you.

And remember you're doing this for the people you love. Hmm. Those are words for us, aren't they? I know that the coronavirus frightens many people and for some people for good reason.

I was just talking with someone today and read an article. Somewhere they say around two-thirds of the deaths are people in nursing homes. Now in New York, it won't show up that way because when the people leave the nursing home and go to the hospital, they count them as hospital deaths instead of nursing home deaths.

But still, about two-thirds of those people are from nursing homes. And then you have the people who are just elderly or sick. Much of the problem with this whole situation, this pandemic we're dealing with, is that we have vulnerable populations that need us to protect them.

They need us to make the decision and to make the sacrifices to say we're willing to take care of them. In this case, they're the families, the sons and the daughters, your wives and your homes.

[19 : 58] They're the people who are vulnerable to an attack. And they need these people to protect them. Right? So, when our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to our own work.

Each to our own work. So, everybody had the job and they went about doing it. In verse 16, it says, from that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows, and armor.

The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked.

But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me. Okay, so, he's telling the people of Jerusalem that they've got to be prepared to protect themselves.

And because the people on the outside, see all these armed folk, their courage melted away. Because their courage was based on the idea that at first, they're going to demoralize all the people on the inside of the wall.

[21 : 21] Now, they're only facing a few professional soldiers who might say, it's not our job to do this. We were sent to protect Nehemiah. But instead, they're facing a whole city that's armed and ready and prepared.

And so, they show themselves ready. And when you show yourself to have that readiness, that confidence, other people melt away. All right? the trumpeter stays with Nehemiah.

Now, the trumpeter's job is going to show up a little later here. The trumpeter is the one who sends the alarm. So, let's look at that. In verse 19, it said, I said to the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people.

In other words, to everybody, high and low. The work is extensive and spread out. And we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Whenever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there.

Our God will fight for us. So, in other words, what they're saying is, you know, in some parts of the walls, there's only like a family, a handful of people. So, if they attack with a force from outside the wall, especially at a place where the wall's short and the rubble's high, they won't be able to defend themselves.

[22 : 33] But they have the trumpeter. So, as soon as they call out and the word gets to Nehemiah that there's an attack, the trumpeter will blow the trumpet and they'll all come to that spot and defend the wall.

It's just, that's what the trumpeter's for. They watch. They watch. Day and night they watch. In verse 21, so we continue the work with half the men holding spears from the first light of dawn till the stars came out.

Now, that's really hard because that means that half the people that could be doing the work aren't working because they've been distracted by this other thing. So, let's recap a little bit.

We have a group of people that are feeling discouraged, demoralized, and mocked. And then they're feeling tired because they're halfway and things seem like the job ahead of them is just huge and overwhelming.

And in the meantime, they have folks around them that are threatening to attack them. And now, they've had to take the people working on the project and cut them down because now people have to deal with other stuff that they don't really feel they have time for.

[23 : 41] And I understand that. There's a lot of things that I'm doing now. You probably have this too. That have become part of my daily work, my daily routine, my daily job, which is distracting me from the work that I want to do.

So, it's hard to be as productive as I used to be. It's just hard. Because there's so many things. And I'm not talking about things about like I'm moving or something.

I mean things like I've got to wash my hands 15 times. I've got to make sure I have the mask with me. I have to make sure that this door is locked. I have to make sure we have that hand sanitizer.

When we plan an activity, we've got to think about social distancing. All this stuff. It wears. We pulled up to a chicken barbecue yesterday. We wanted to support the veterans group in town.

And they were having a chicken barbecue. We pulled up and there had to be about 15 of them out back. And they were all chatting and having a good time. Just hanging out in the back. Not a single person had a mask on and they weren't very far apart.

[24 : 45] So my wife and I thought, hmm, do we do this? See, now in the past we would have thought that we're just pulled up. But that hesitation takes time away. This is what our life is like.

We're going through all these hesitations. We did end up buying it. There was just one person we had to take money from or give our money to and it was like handed out the window. And then we pulled up to another guy.

He had a mask on handed us the chicken and the dinner and we went home and had a very delightful dinner. It felt like we did something good supporting this organization. But it's frustrating when you have this extra work.

It's frustrating when you have to go through multiple steps. When we have a Zoom meeting and it's supposed to start at 7 o'clock but it takes time for everybody to get into the Zoom and then you have people that still wants to try to get into the Zoom and they can't make it work.

Well, they have distractions. They have people who are trying to demoralize them and disenchant them. They have threats and it feels like the work is way too much.

[25 : 54] But they went on nonetheless. In verse 22 it says, So, now they're working day and night. So, they're prepared and they're watching and they made a show of force. And so, because of that they've discouraged the opposition.

Some people worry that China's going to conquer the United States. China has more worries about us than we have about them.

Now, I can't tell you what will happen if things go the wrong way over the next century. But I want you to understand we have enough military power to destroy the whole world, nonetheless the nation of China.

And we have the biggest Navy fleet in the world located in the Pacific, the 6th Fleet. Now, you might not understand how big our Navy is.

[27 : 16] There are almost twice as many aircraft carriers in the United States Navy than in all the navies of the world. the United States has 12 times as many aircraft carriers as China.

Now, why does that matter? Because they're over there and the Pacific Ocean is between them. They can't take their army and march to the United States. They'd have to get across the ocean. And between the Air Force in the skies and the Navy in the seas, that isn't something that's going to happen very easily.

Now, you'd say, well, but they're threatening us economically. They hold our debt. Well, that's true. So I want you to think about it. Who's the most vulnerable if someone owes a debt?

Now, I know we think that the people who hold the debt are wealthy and the people who don't have the debt are poor. But you need to understand that when it comes to geopolitical realities, it's a little different.

Back in the 1800s, England owned all the debt on the United States. All the bankers in England owned the debt. They paid, in many ways, for the building of the railroads.

[28 : 27] You know what happened at one point? The British started to threaten this country. They were going to foreclose on us. And so at one point in time, they just nationalized the debt.

And they said, well, we don't owe you anything more. Good luck with that. What would happen to China if we just don't pay them back? Who do you think would lose more?

We have all the stuff. We bought with that. We don't really need to have China. They would end up bankrupt. Now, I do understand it would disrupt the whole political balance.

It would make the United States not a dependable debtor. People wouldn't want to loan us money anymore. But, well, we just get by without debt. That's what the Chinese are afraid of.

And so we make sure that they always know that we have the ability. I don't know if you're aware of it, but this has been going on for now about three different presidents, including our present one, that the Chinese built these little islands in the China Sea because they want to claim all the land around.

[29 : 32] It'd be like us building islands out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and saying, now we own that part of the Pacific Ocean. Well, okay. We don't recognize that. Neither do all the other countries that border on the Sea of China, like Japan and Taiwan and Vietnam and all these folks, right?

So, basically, what we do, what we do, the United States does, to show that we are not going to respect that is we send our battleships cruising within what they claim to be their territorial waters because we don't recognize them as territorial waters.

So, our ships literally sail right next to their islands. Now, they could attack us. They could. They might even do some damage. Why do we do that?

It's what they call a show of force. And that show of force oftentimes is all that's needed. If you're not willing to use the force, then the show of force doesn't mean anything.

But once people realize you're willing to use the force and you have the force, usually they back off. And that's what happened here. They backed off. There never was an attack.

[30 : 41] Never happened. Never happened. But it did take away from the effort. It did cause them to have to spend their time watching, spend their time dressed for battle instead of working on the wall.

Now, as Christians we're told to watch, in fact, in the fifth chapter of 1 Thessalonians, let's see if we can find it quick here, it talks about us being prepared and being watchful.

Brothers and sisters, this fifth chapter of 1 Thessalonians, about the times and dates we do not need to write you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

In other words, God's going to come to reclaim this world not at a time we expect, but at a time we don't expect. If we knew when a thief was coming, we'd be ready for him, right? But we don't know when they're coming.

Right? While people are saying peace and safety, destruction will come on them suddenly as labor pains on a pregnant woman and they will not escape.

[31 : 45] Alright? It's a fascinating thing because sometimes people are looking for signs of the end time and so they're looking for destructive things and he actually says it's going to come when people are saying peace and safety.

It's an interesting thought, isn't it? It's going to come when people don't expect it. In fact, I'll read a little further back. Look at chapter 4 of Thessalonians on being watchful.

Brothers and sisters, we don't want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive who are left until the coming of the Lord will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. So what they're saying is God is going to return and he's going to return and bring all the people who have died in the Lord with him.

They'll be resurrected before we can meet God in glory. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God.

[32 : 56] See, you got that trumpet again, right? And the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and so we will be with the Lord forever.

All right? So we need to be watchful because we don't know when it's going to happen and when the trumpet call goes out, we want to be prepared and ready to respond.

God is returning. For you, he's returning for me and reclaim all of creation. And when that happens, we want to be ready, we want to be watching, we want to be prepared, we don't want to be caught without being ready for God.

Let's go back to Nehemiah, Sarah, about that. We're going to go to chapter 5, another interesting one. The men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. Now it's interesting.

They were specific about including the women. It's just a complaint of the men. It's a complaint of the women. You'll find out why. Some were saying, we and our sons and daughters are numerous.

[34 : 04] In order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain. There's a lot of us. You might not have noticed, Nehemiah, but there's tens of thousands of people here.

We need to feed them. Feeding a large crowd is not an easy thing to do. Jesus could just make the bread and the fish turn into a miraculous amount of food.

But regular folk, we just got to find food. That's not easy today, is it? In the pandemic crisis, I find it fascinating because we actually now live in farm countries.

So when we go to the grocery store, there's meat everywhere. In fact, there's advertisements in the newspapers for butchers that will butcher cows and chickens and pigs and things because they want to make sure that the farmers know that they'll take care of it.

There's plenty of food out there. It's a little higher price, just like it is here, but there's plenty of food around. What if there's not enough food? How would you feel?

[35 : 11] People freaked out when there wasn't enough toilet paper. Imagine what it would be like if you're not going to have any food for dinner tonight and breakfast tomorrow is questionable. You might get a little lunch.

So they're just saying, we've got a problem here. We have a problem because we need to feed these people. And I think that's, back in that day, a lot of the women were generally working at the domestic side of things.

They were taking care of the children, they were taking care of the meals, they were taking care of the home. That just was the division of duties that they had back then. And so you can see why they were crying out, hello, hello.

In verse 3, others were saying, we are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our homes to get grain during the famine. So we've got other things going on.

So let's try to step back for a moment, set the setting. Nehemiah comes in with this great idea, let's rebuild the wall. And everybody gets excited and says, yeah, let's do that, that sounds great.

[36 : 17] And they stop working. They're not taking care of their fields, they're not out there bringing in the crop, they're not doing their regular jobs, everybody's working on this wall. Now, it isn't going to take a long time for this wall to be built, actually a couple of months, months, all right.

However, shutting down an economy for a couple of months can be very hard, right? We know what that's like. And we haven't shut the whole economy down, we've only shut down a portion of it, maybe 25, 30%.

They're talking about shutting everything down. Nobody is doing their regular job because everybody's building this wall. So now they've got a problem.

because not only has everybody stopped working for a couple of months to build this wall, which takes away the income they need to live, they live right on the edge.

But second of all, there's a famine. There's a famine. Famine isn't like a pandemic.

[37 : 21] A famine means there's not enough food. We put the crops in the ground and they didn't grow. So the people with food are the ones that have everything but the people without food have nothing.

And not only that, they haven't been working. So they borrowed money to pay their bills. The rich are taking advantage of the poor and charging them interest and hurting them.

So they're worried. We're mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, our homes to get grain during the famine. We've been very fortunate as a church. You should be aware of that.

And it's because of your generosity. We're doing okay. Thank you. The people in our congregation that are doing okay are sharing with what they have with us.

And I appreciate that. It does help us to help others and we have been helping people. It also helps us to be able to provide a Bible study for Wednesday night worship services on the weekend and just to keep this ministry functioning and capable during this time.

[38 : 26] I've read about churches and businesses that are such on the edge that when this pandemic crisis came along, they didn't have the resources, they didn't have the abilities to continue like we have, and their income dropped off and they were in debt already and so they're losing everything.

Everything. They say that at least one in five restaurants when you go back they won't be open after the crisis. It's hard. Because people need a livelihood.

We've heard this argument, haven't we? Yes, we want to keep our vulnerable population safe. That's essential. We want to do that. We want to even, if we have to, go out of our way to make that happen.

But at the same point in time, we can't just go on with nothing. We can't live on air. And believe it or not, the government can only print so much money. The macroeconomics of this are very simple.

What the government believes is that this is a temporary halt to the economy and it's better to infuse the money now and be two or three or four trillion dollars more in debt so that our national debt is say \$28 trillion instead of \$23 or \$24.

[39 : 47] But in the meantime, we have an economy that has a \$30, \$40 trillion a year ability. Our other choice is that the economy takes a much more serious hit.

And while we only owe \$23 or \$24 trillion, our actual economy is only producing at \$20. So we're actually in worse shape. It's kind of a confusing thing, but that's what they're doing.

But you can't do that forever. You can't just stop. At some point in time, if we're not producing anything, if we're not doing anything, we don't have any money coming in. We become like these people.

And we're facing a pandemic. Imagine if we were facing a famine as well. In verse 3, it says, they mortgaged their fields and their vineyards and their homes.

They had put themselves in a position of risk for this effort. That shows their faithfulness. It's an excellent, amazing story of faith, but now they're hurting.

[40 : 47] In verse 4, it says, still others were saying, we have had to borrow money to pay the king's taxes on our fields and vineyards. Nehemiah works for the king.

Nehemiah, those taxes that you're giving to us, on top of the fact that we have no income, are killing us. You can't be charging us taxes when we don't even have any money. And the problem with the taxes is typically the taxes, there were different people taking a cut from the officials to the army to the tax collectors, to their assistants, right on down the line.

So how do we collect taxes when people aren't making any money? We have that question in our culture too, don't we? How do we collect taxes when nobody's making any money?

So our government is struggling now as well. But in this case, they were actually still paying those taxes. taxes, and that hurts to pay taxes when you have no money. Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews, and though our children are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery.

Slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved. But we are powerless because our fields and our vineyards belong to others. Do you hear this?

[42 : 15] Some of the wealthy Jewish people have been taking advantage of those who are working on the wall. Taking advantage of this difficult situation.

Taking advantage of the family. The famine that has hurt them. So, unfortunately, at this point in time, you have people who see an opportunity, and so they seize it.

Now, we all are Americans, so we have this idea that, you know, if somebody can be clever enough to make a couple dollars, good for them. But what if they're taking advantage?

The masks that they use in the hospitals, N95s, they sell them in hardware stores. And we went to the local hardware store the other day, and my wife saw the masks, and they were approximately 10 times what they used to cost.

You think they cost 10 times as much to make? Of course not. The price of meat has gone up because the slaughterhouses are having trouble preparing the meat for us as quickly, and even more so, the national media went on a scare campaign telling everybody there's no meat.

[43 : 36] So everybody went out and bought more meat than they need, and now there's a shortage, and so the price has gone up. They said a pound of ground beef has gone from \$3.99 to \$5.99.

50 percent. Well, not quite. 40 percent. It's a huge, huge increase. Why? Because they can. You know, I think some of it is obviously the increased cost, but some of it is because they can.

And a guy who sells gasoline to gas stations, and he said, you know, the price of the gasoline is about 60 cents. He says, why are they charging \$2.19 at the pump?

Now, we know that a good amount of that is taxes, but right now there's also people taking advantage of the time when they have an opportunity to charge more. They don't have to make the prices drop quite so quickly for people to go, oh, it's \$2.19.

It used to be \$2.30. But it could be \$2.20. So it's hard. People take advantage. Sometimes we almost applaud it or admire it because people are having such ingenuity and such acuity to see that and discernment to see what's coming.

[44 : 53] But sometimes, sometimes, we just see pure greed. I remember reading in the beginning of the corona pandemic that a fellow went out, I don't know where he was, Tennessee or something like that, and he saw this coming in his mind.

So he went out and he bought all the hand sanitizer he could find and all the masks he could find, and he bought everything in the whole region. And they put them for sale on eBay. Now, the problem for him is that eBay decided they wouldn't sell it anymore.

Amazon decided they wouldn't sell it anymore. So now he's got a shed full of this stuff. And he said, the problem is, if I bought the hand sanitizer for \$0.60 and I sell it for \$2, he said, that's not enough because I've got to ship it to people.

So it actually cost me \$7 to sell them this \$0.50 or \$0.60 hand sanitizer. What a crazy thing, right? So that's now. But back then, they're saying that this has gotten so bad that they had to sell their children.

And you note, it said their daughters into slavery. Human trafficking is one of the worst things in this culture that I've ever seen.

[46 : 09] It shouldn't exist anymore, but it still does. It's evil. Pure, absolutely unadulterated evil. But in this case, let's not even say that it was that sinister.

They're just making these young children, these daughters and even some of their sons, work for these wealthy people because they have no money.

And that's the only way that they can survive is by selling their children. And they have nothing else they can do. They don't own their fields and their vineyards anymore because they put them up as collateral for debt.

And the people with the money foreclosed on them. So Nehemiah heard this. He heard their outcry and these charges, and he was very angry.

I pondered them in my mind. Then I accused the nobles and officials. I told them, now I want you to know, before we go any further, it isn't pagans that they're selling their kids to.

[47 : 20] It's their brothers and sisters. I want you to picture that in our congregation, we had some people that were so poor that you started buying their children to be your servants.

Wow. You go to church with them on Sunday. You worship the same God, belong to the same community. They happen to fall on hard times. So what you do, even though you have more wealth than you need, I'm not saying that's you, but say that it were.

So you make them sell their children to you. Unimaginable. That's the nobles, the wealthy people, the officials that Nehemiah is talking about.

And by the way, the officials, where they get their money, they got their money from charging the taxes that they didn't need anymore. Right. Because remember, the king was paying for the building of the wall.

So it wasn't for that. So he accused the officials and the nobles in verse seven. He said, I told them, you're charging your own people interest. Not charging a modest interest is one thing.

[48 : 30] But this is an interest called usury. And that day it was 12% a year. Now, we actually wouldn't think that's so large because we got credit cards that are 25%.

Interest is what will kill you or could save you. If you earn the interest, you will compound quickly. If you owe the interest, even what you have will be destroyed and taken from you.

Let me explain real quick the secret to having wealth. For those of you who haven't heard this, it's very simple. Spend less than you make.

So the first obligation you have is to pay your bills. So don't make bills that you can't afford, but pay your bills. Because if you don't pay your bills, they'll take your stuff.

So you take a certain amount of money and you use that to pay your bills. But don't establish bills you don't need to have bills for. Or maybe you don't need as nice of a car. Maybe you don't need as big of a house. Maybe you don't need as fancy of food or clothing.

[49 : 31] My wife and I lived on Kraft Macaroni and Cheese six nights a week. We didn't have any money. It's the way it was. We wore old clothes. I remember one time she made curtains out of sheets.

Because that's what we could do. We were not going to establish bills that we couldn't afford to pay. Pay your bills. Don't pay your bills. Then people will take your stuff. So number two.

All right. And that would be stealing from your bills. Don't steal. It's all based on thou shalt not steal. Number two. Don't steal from your future. So if you put away at the age of about 20, if you start putting away 10% of your income in investments, over the course of time, you'll have more money than you need.

That may not sound like much, but it really is. Because what happens is, if you put money away when you're 20, let's just say you put away, let's say \$5,000 when you're 20 years old.

It's going to double about every seven or eight years. Okay. So 28. We're going to use the longer term. 28, 36, 44, 52, 60.

[50 : 37] Okay. Say five times. You put away \$5,000. \$5,000 becomes 10, becomes 20, becomes 40, becomes 80, becomes \$160,000.

\$5,000 became \$160,000. Inflation won't change that. Maybe that \$160,000 isn't worth \$160,000, but I guarantee it's worth more than \$5,000.

Now, so don't steal from your future. And by the way, when you borrow to pay for bills you shouldn't have, you're destroying your future. Because now you will never have any money to put away.

Because you borrow that \$5,000, and if you're paying 15% interest on it, you're going to find yourself paying \$750 a year just to have the privilege of paying for stuff you shouldn't have bought.

Don't borrow the money. People who borrow money should be people who have money, not people who don't have money, okay, because it destroys you. Eventually, they take everything you own, and you never catch up.

[51 : 43] Because the interest rates are designed so that the interest will always be higher than the cost than inflation. So the intention is you will always lose. You will always fall slowly behind.

Whereas investment is designed the other way, that the interest rates are always a little more than what inflation is. So you always get a little ahead, you see? So don't borrow and invest. Number three, don't steal from God.

God calls us to give a gift to him. When we bless God by giving a gift to him, like many of you have done, what happens is God pours out blessings beyond our imagination.

In Malachi, he says, test me in this and see if I don't open up the floodgates of heaven to bless you. Why am I talking about money? Because they're talking about money.

All right? I'll talk about it in every Bible study. They're talking about money. And they're saying, we got ourselves in a problem. And the problem is not just that they probably should have been a little smarter.

[52 : 38] They should have seen the famine coming, like we should have seen something about this pandemic coming. They should have been more prepared. They shouldn't have borrowed against their fields. But they also have people, people who call themselves the people of God, who are taking advantage of them.

Nehemiah says, so I called together a large meeting to deal with them and said, as far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. You know, they were sold off to the Persians.

They were sold off to the people around them. We've gotten the people out of slavery. That's what this whole thing is about, is to return from captivity, return from exile. We bought them back wherever we could.

Now, you're selling your own people only for them to be sold back to us. That's crazy. They have kept quiet because they could find nothing to say.

They kept quiet because they could find nothing to say. It was actually getting to the point where Nehemiah was trying to rescue people from slavery. And he's finding himself having to buy them back from the Jewish leaders.

[53 : 49] So now they're feeling pretty small. The wealthy taking care of, taking advantage of the poor. And Nehemiah just speaks the truth, the truth to power.

Sometimes we need to say what's true. Sometimes we need to say what is really happening, even when people don't want to hear it. Sometimes we have to tell our government officials they're wrong.

Sometimes we have to tell our church leaders they're wrong. Sometimes you have to tell me I'm wrong. Sometimes we have to tell our bosses when they're wrong. It's not easy. And you should do it right and you should do it carefully.

Now, I want you to recognize Nehemiah is a man of power. It's a lot harder for the people who are weak and poor to speak up for the people who are weak and poor. Because people just see that they're just doing it for their own advantage.

But Nehemiah is saying, look it, I'm one of you. What you're doing is wrong. Knock it off. Verse 9 says, so I continued.

[54 : 52] Because it wouldn't say anything. What are you doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in fear of our God to avoid the reproach of the Gentile enemies? Shouldn't you be afraid of God for what you're doing to his people?

In verse 10, I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. I'm lending them money and grain. I'm trying to take care of them.

But I'm doing it without charging interest, he says. I'm loaning my money to help those who are hurting. I've had people in our congregation say to me, Tom, if you know somebody who really needs help, let me know.

Just let me know. God has blessed me. I'll help them out. Others who just say, I just trust Pastor Tom to do it. And they give money to the church for that. Some people give to the Good Samaritan Fund, which is for the people in our church who are in need.

Some people give to the Matthew 25 fund, which is to help the people outside of our church. Some people just go and feed the hungry and those who are in need.

[56 : 00] God calls us to give from the abundance we've been given. He's not even asking us to give in a way that it really will hurt us.

Just out of the abundance. And don't take advantage of your brothers and sisters in this world. Remember, every person in this world was created in the image of God.

And how you treat them is how you treat God. So, he says, don't be doing that. We give out food. We give out money. We don't charge interest.

And why is it a loan? Because people feel pride in being able to pay it back. They're happy to do that. Give back, in verse 11, give back to them immediately.

Their fields, vineyards, olive groves, and houses. Give them back. In Leviticus, in chapter 25, it talks about the year of jubilee, restoration.

[56 : 59] Once every 50 years, everybody gets their fields back. Everybody gets everything back to start with. Sounds amazing, isn't it? Sometimes I've wondered.

What he's simply saying is, these people are willing to work. Give them the ability to make a living. Right now, we have quite an outcry in our country.

Because there's a lot of people that just want to go to work. Now, we've had people say, oh, well, there's people that don't mind being unemployed. Because they can sit at home. And make more money off of unemployment than they can by working.

First of all, that runs out in July. So it's only another couple months of that. But even so, anybody who's making more money from the unemployment are not very wealthy to begin with.

But the reality is, most of the people in this country would rather be working. All they want is an opportunity. All they want is a place to do it.

[57 : 58] And if you have the ability to make that happen, even if it costs you a little something, think about the treasures you're storing up in heaven with God. People just want to be able to say they contributed to the whole effort.

That they weren't the recipients of simply charity, but that they actually earned it. They feel better when they've earned it. They feel more whole.

More in control. More somebody who can hold their heads up. Okay. So somewhere along the line, we have to give these people the ability.

He says, give them back their vineyards. All right? And then he says, and also the interest. You are charging them 1% of the money.

Grain, new wine, and olive oil. And also give them the interest back. Give them the interest back.

[59 : 00] 1% is 1% a month. That's where we got the 12% from. Give them the interest back. Help your friends without having to make a profit off of them.

Verse 12, it says, we will give it back. We will give it back, they said. And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.

We will give it back. Sometimes, I'm going to talk the upside of this now. Sometimes we blame the rich for all our problems, even when we got ourselves into that problem.

Sometimes the wealthy and powerful people are actually good people. And sometimes if we give them half a chance, they'll step up to the plate and do good things. We always want to criticize people who've done well for themselves.

I don't think these people set out to do something evil. I don't think they considered what was going on. They had a friend come to them and said, you know, I have no money to feed my family.

[60 : 07] Could you loan me some money? You can have my farm as collateral. I just need to feed my family. They probably thought that they were doing them a favor. But they said, but if you were a Gentile, I'd need to make some profits.

So I'm not actually looking to make extra. I just want to make what I would have made investing my money elsewhere. Well, sometimes maybe we should make a little less. When it means helping our family, our friends, our church people.

There's good people out there. When you challenge them, they step up to the plate. And in this case, they stepped up to the plate. All right?

They made a vow. And they said that they would give it back. And so Nehemiah, it says, he summoned the priest and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised.

They took an oath. All right? In verse 13, it says, I also shook out the folds of my robes and said, in this way, may God shake out of their house and possessions anyone who does not keep this promise.

[61 : 13] So may such a person be shaken out and emptied. Okay? A vow means that if we don't keep the vow, we are asking God to punish us. That's how a vow works. That's why Jesus said, let your yes be yes and your no be no.

Don't make vows because vows are actually asking God to punish us. Now, sometimes we make those vows. If I break my vow with my wife, I want God to punish me severely.

I never have. If I break my vow to my child and baptism, I want God to punish me. If I make a vow to God, same thing.

At this point, and this is actually in the middle of verse 13. It's a long verse. At this, the whole assembly said, amen, or in other words, so be it, and praised the Lord.

And the people did as they had promised. Not only did they make a vow, they followed through. And they did what they were supposed to do. Verse 14. Moreover, from the 20th year of King Adorazixis, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until the 32nd year, 12 years, neither I nor my brother ate the food allotted to the governor.

[62 : 32] Okay? We didn't live on what we could have. But the earlier governors, those preceding me, placed a heavy burden on the people and took 40 shekels of silver from them, in addition to the food and wine.

Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God, I didn't act like that. Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall, and my men were assembled, and all the men, my men, were assembled there for the work.

We did not acquire any land. All right. So let me just try to step back a minute. The nobles and the leaders restored the people. This is kind of like in the South when they said 40 acres and a mule.

You know, they were restored to the ability to do what they were supposed to do. But Nehemiah had the ability to tax the people, to acquire lands, and to have all the people working for him take taxes from the people.

And they could have said, we're doing this because we deserve it. And maybe they did deserve it. Because they were working hard. But instead, they were wealthy.

[63 : 46] Nehemiah wasn't poor. He came from the king's court. He had money that the Persian king was sending to take care of their needs. He didn't need more. So instead of spending his time trying to figure out a way to raise money so he could have more money, he worked and lived off what he had.

And not everybody can do that. Sometimes we have to work and then do what we feel called by God to do on the side. Sometimes our vocation is not our occupation.

I happen to be in an occupation that's a vocation. The people of the church pay me so I don't have to go out and get another job. And I appreciate that. But the time is coming when I will have the resources that I don't need to get anything from someone.

If I preach the gospel, I'll preach the gospel because I want to. If I share about Jesus, it's because I can. If I help people, it's because I have that opportunity. And I'd love to do that.

I'd love to do that here. Not everybody's like Nehemiah. Some of us have to earn an income too, but I won't have to in a few years. Jackie was talking to the people at Camp Asbury.

[64 : 56] We were down there getting a meal and she was telling them, I like to cook. She was offering me to volunteer as a cook at Camp Asbury. I thought it was kind of interesting. I do like to cook.

I do like to do these things. And we all like to do something for God and feel good about it. Nehemiah was taken care of by the king. He didn't feel a reason to take advantage of others, even though other governors had done it for years.

And in doing so, therefore, they didn't have to collect the taxes anymore. You follow? Remember they mentioned, not only did we have a famine, we have these oppressive taxes.

And on top of it, you've taken away our way to earn an income. So the nobility gave them back their way to earn an income. Nehemiah said, I won't have to charge you taxes.

I'll live on what I get from the king. And now that the famine has ended, they can get their lives back in order. Okay? All right. I'm going to finish this chapter.

[65 : 53] It's not that much left. Verse 17 of chapter 5, it says, Furthermore, 150 Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations.

Really? He's feeding everybody. Each day, one ox, six choice sheep, some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days, an abundant supply of wine of all kinds.

In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people. So he has the ability to do well and take care of others.

Why did God give us wealth? Why did God give us capability if not to take care of the least among us? What you've done for the least of these, my brothers and sisters, Jesus said, you've done for me.

So I don't want you to give away everything you have. If you do, then you'll be poor, and we'll have to take care of you. But if God has given you an abundance, God is asking you to give out of that abundance to help others, to bless others, to care for others, like Nehemiah did.

[67 : 02] So Nehemiah didn't just tell the nobility to walk the walk, and he did the talking. He said that he was going to do it too. If they were willing to make this sacrifice, notice they stepped up, and when they were willing to make this sacrifice and stepped up, then Nehemiah said, I'm going to do it too, which is great.

Remember me with favor, my God, for all I have done for these people. Where are we building up our treasure? Where is it that we are putting our future?

What is it that we want from God? I want eternity. I want to be in God's company when that trumpet blows on the last day.

I want to come into the new creation and live in a new world, blessed by God. I want my treasure stored up in heaven. Now, I told you how to store them up on earth, and that's good if you can do that.

But God gives you treasure. God gives you abundance so you can care for those who for one reason or another don't have as much. Maybe they're not as smart as you. Maybe they're not as strong as you. Maybe they've got some deficiency that they have to overcome.

[68 : 13] Maybe they have more that they're taking care of. Maybe they've had some tragedies occur in their life. Maybe you've been fortunate. Maybe you've been blessed. I'm speaking to you right now. Find a place where you can bless those who are struggling, and God will bless you because you've stored up treasures in heaven.

May God be with you. Let's take a moment and turn our hearts to prayer. Dear God in heaven, we are in the midst of a struggle. We're in the midst of trying to discern how do we come out of this in a safe way.

We know some people are struggling deeply, Lord. Help us to find them and help us to be there for them. We know, Lord, that some people are working to discourage us, that some people are trying to stop us from the work we do for you.

We pray, Lord, that you change their hearts and change their minds and their lives. Bring them closer to love of you.

And if not, Lord, put a wall between them and us that we might be safe to do the work of God. We pray, Lord, that you'll be with those who are hurting in their health, those who have lost someone they love, people that are just facing a wall that seems insurmountable.

[69 : 34] Be with them, Lord, and bless them. And Lord, we pray for the people who are earnestly trying to do your work and need someone to help them do it.

Provide the support, provide the care, provide the love, provide the resources. We thank you for this church, Lord, and all you've done to make this church healthy and well.

Bless this church and continue it into your future and into your life. In all that we do, Lord, in all that we are, help us turn to you, Lord, as we remember you in all our lives, in all our struggles.

And we offer the prayer that Jesus gave us, saying, 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.

[70 : 36] For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen. And now go in peace, and may God be with you, and keep you and those you love safe.

We'll see you next week. Good night. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning.

Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning. Good morning.

Good morning. Good morning.