

I. Christ Portrayed as King

David takes the kingdom away in 2 Chronicles 36 when they go into Babylonian captivity, and then in 2 Kings when the northern tribes go into Assyrian captivity. So what you have in those six books is a series. Christ is portrayed as the King of the Jews, the King. You have every aspect of your relationship and my relationship to God as becoming the point where we get a millennial inheritance. You have every picture that you need.

When you look at Christ in those six books, it is a series. It shows you every aspect that you and I should know about Christ being the King of your life. You will notice I asked in the question several times, "Who sits on the throne of your life?" Who sits on the throne of your life this morning? The answer to that should be the Lord Jesus Christ as King of your life.

We saw that in the book of Exodus Thursday night, didn't we? How the book of Exodus is a book unto itself, and it contains everything in one book that you need to see. I am going to point these out because in our next two books, which we are going to start today, Ezra and Nehemiah, you are going to see that these two books form their own two-set volume of a great New Testament principle.

This is how you learn the Bible. This is how you learn to run a ministry. You do not learn to pastor a church by going to a school and showing them how to do it. Most Bible colleges that a young man goes to, he is taught the ministry by men who have never done the ministry. To me, it is always like a one-legged man teaching an Olympic runner. It is impossible. The greatest teacher in ministry or pastoring is experience. It is getting with somebody who knows what he is doing, as I did in my early years, or God put me in my early years, and then bringing yourself through that, learning the things that you learn about the Bible, and letting the Bible itself dictate to you everything that you need to do as far as ministry is concerned.

I have told you before, the New Testament is revealed through the Old Testament. It contains the New Testament. What you have in the New Testament is the principle. What you have in the Old Testament is a story to illustrate that principle. If you will learn that one simple fact and then begin a process in your life that you actually learn those, you will be ready for anything that God wants you to do when it comes to ministering to people or being a pastor or whatever God calls you to do.

II. Christ Our Restorer

Now let us look at the book of Ezra. In the book of Ezra, Christ is portrayed as our Restorer. The New Testament passage for this is Galatians 6:1.

Galatians 6:1

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

Let us pray. But before we pray, let us stand up and do our thing to the Word of God here this morning. Take your Bible. Before we pray, let us read this back to God. This is God's holy Word, finally inspired by God, infallible and inerrant. It is my sword to fight the devil and his temptations. It is my comfort in times of trouble. It is my compass for my life journey. It is God's love letter to me personally and my companion every day of my life.

Let us pray. Dear Heavenly Father, truly the Word of God is our companion in everything and every place we go in life. Allow that Spirit to be in us today as we look at these two great books with all these other books. We see how the Lord Jesus Christ is portrayed as Christ, our Restorer. Lord, we will be careful to give You the honor and praise in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

III. The Nature of True Ministry

Ezra and Nehemiah will go together to show basically three of the most basic Bible principles in the New Testament that you and I need to understand in ministry, and they are illustrated in these two books. Whether you know it or not, whether you have figured it out or not, these very principles that we are going to talk about today are the six best factors for our church.

I taught the guys on Thursday night in church history. I told them, and I get asked this question many, many times, and you are asked this question, I am sure, many, many times. People want to know what church is true. People want to know because it is very confusing today. People ask me all the time, "With all the churches out there, how in the world do you know what church is the true church?" Someone says the Baptist church is the true church. Somebody else says this church is. Somebody else says that church. How do you ever figure out what church is the true church?

What makes a church the true church is never defined by a denomination. You are going to find in every denomination that you are going to go into, for somebody to get up and say the Baptist church today is the true church, that may be true in a sense, but there are a lot of whacked-out Baptists out there that are out of their minds. So you cannot make that statement. I am not sure you could ever have made that statement.

One of the things you learn from church history, and it is a tremendous principle, is you never find the true line by looking in denominations. You find the true line by finding out what New Testament Bible believers believed from the Bible. You want to find the true line in Christianity? Find out what they believed, line it up with the Bible, and there will be your true line. It does not matter what the denomination is. That is why you find in church history, as you do today, all kinds of churches with all kinds of names. Some of them are fundamentally right down the line with the Bible. Many of them are not.

You do not look at a denomination. You find a pastor in a church that teaches the Bible, that believes the Bible, that does everything they do from the Bible. That will be your true line. That is how it works. That is why you never find a successful church, or what makes a successful church. It is never the people in it, though they do the work. The success of a real New Testament church will not be in the pastor. It will not be in the people. The real success of this church or any

other church will be simply this: Do we follow the Bible principles, or do we not? It is just that simple.

You can have the greatest, most charismatic guy in the world as a pastor. Look at Joel Osteen. There are a thousand out there. You sit down there, the guy is picture perfect everywhere. I think his hair is molded in plastic; it is absolutely perfect. Every word he says out of his mouth is pristine and perfect. If you were to sit down there and look around that church and see a football-sized stadium filled with a hundred thousand people who all paid to get in, you would think that, but the bottom line is you never look at those things. You never look at those things. You look at the principles that are taught.

God blesses and makes a ministry successful, not on any one individual or any group of people. It is what you do with the principles in the Bible. That is why God's hand has been on this ministry since the day we started it. That is why people come and get saved. That is why we continue to grow when other churches fail. It is not about any leadership or any person in a fundamental form. It is about, "Does this church believe what the Bible says and teach it, or does it not?" That is the bottom line.

IV. Israel's Captivity and God's Restoration

In our book of Ezra, I want to bring up for you a timeline here so you can see how this thing kind of all works together. Israel in this book has returned from the 70 years captivity. You will remember that last time, last week, in 2 Chronicles 36, we showed you how God is finished with the nation of Israel, and God is so fed up with them that He sends Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, down in 2 Chronicles 36. They take Zedekiah, the last king, they put his eyes out, they kill his kids, and they put him in chains and carry the nation of Israel into captivity. If you would back up a couple of books, you would go back to the book of 2 Kings, and there you would find that God is fed up with the northern tribe, just like He was with the southern tribes in 2 Chronicles. So He takes them into captivity.

Now for 70 years they have been as far away from God as they could ever hope to be. As a nation, I guess, honest to goodness, we have come through it many, many times. As a nation, I guess they committed every sin against God that they could commit. I do not know of some concept, some commandment, some law that they did not violate. You talk about a screwed-up mess that has just gotten themselves in such an absolutely almost impossible circumstance; it was the nation of Israel. They have brought in Baal worship. They have taken all of the holy things that were dedicated in God's temple that He wanted for Himself. The picture here is picture perfect. There are things in your life that God wants you to dedicate to be holy unto Him that He wants for Himself. Of course, what did they do with that? They took them to Baal. They offered them to Baal. They offered them to Ashtoreth. They offered them to every false god that came along. They took the things that God wanted, much like you and I do, and displayed them before the world.

The Bible says that you will find a couple of interesting phrases in the Bible. One of them is called the fire of Molech. The other one is called the drum of Tophet. You will find the fire of

Molech in many places in the Bible, but Jeremiah 32:35 is as good as any. You will find the drum of Tophet in 2 Kings 23:10. Now, what has that got to do with it? You know what they have done? Not only did they give their lives over to Baal worship, not only did they take the holy things that God had given them and give them to the world, to Baal and all the things that go along with it, their children, their children, they have taken their children and now they are offering up their children in human sacrifice to the god of Baal.

The fire of Molech. Molech was the fire god, and it is a god that is connected with the Babylonians and the Assyrians and all the Baal worship. It was a gigantic brazen image of a god with an open belly that they built fire into. This Molech had hands that were mechanical, and they would take those little babies and offer them up to Baal, and they would put them in the hands of that great god. Then behind, they would crank those hands while they would praise Baal and worship him and go through all of their religious symbolism. Oh, by the way, they were putting God right in the middle of all of this. The drum of Tophet was the big round kettle drum that they had that they beat on, and they beat on them while they were worshiping and cranking those arms and those drums. It blended out the cries of those little babies who were put in those hot hands, and they were raising them up, and that fire of Molech, that molten god, would come up and deposit that baby into its fiery belly. That is the fire of Molech. That is the drum of Tophet. That is where they are at.

I guess that at this point in their life, they were as far from God as they could possibly get. God sends them into the very nations that they began to worship. There are some great lessons in that, but we do not have time to get into all of that today. We need to see how the Lord Jesus Christ is typified in this great book. We find here that not only has the temple of God been profaned and defiled, but it is a mess. After 70 years, God brings them back and restores them into Jerusalem. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah as a set set the standard for what the New Testament ministry is all about through the picture of Christ, our Restorer.

Let me say something to you, and I want to be very clear on this, and I want no misunderstanding on this. Keith preached on this a couple of weeks ago, our missionary from Argentina, when he preached on God's will. The job of God in your life and my life, the job of God, I do not care where you are at today in your relationship with God. You may be lost, you may be saved, and you may be out of fellowship with God. I do not know, but I do know this: I do know that the job of God is basically two phases of one single word, and it is the word restoration. Keith preached about this a couple of weeks ago when he talked about that God is not willing that any should perish.

The first thing God wants to restore in you is the fallen image that you lost in Adam. When God made Adam and Eve, we talked about this Thursday night, when God made Adam and Eve, with or without a belly button, we will be talking about Thursday night. When God made Adam and Eve, He made them in a perfect image, an image of Himself. When Adam and Eve sinned, they lost that image, and now they are in a fallen image. What God did immediately, what God did immediately, is what God always does. He made a provision that that fallen man who once had Bible study with God in the garden, who now has lost that fellowship, immediately God moves to restore that image. When you got saved, you can talk about all the theological, technical terms

that you want. We can talk about spiritual circumcision. We can talk about baptism of the Spirit. We can talk about Ephesians 4, "but one Spirit, all baptized in one body." We can talk about the whole theological ramification world on it. The bottom line, the day you got saved, God simply did this: He restored your fallen soul to Him because the first thing God does is restore unsaved people.

Then the second thing that God does, the second aspect of restoration, is after salvation, many of God's people fall. In 35 years of ministry, I have seen it all. Most of you that have been saved for quite a while have seen it all too. Nothing much surprises me anymore in the world with God's people. People fail, people fall. We find that God moved just as quickly. What God wants to do is restore not only people's souls in the image of God, but after salvation, when somebody falls, God wants to restore them back to His fellowship.

I think one of the greatest things this church does, and I marvel at it every time, I never say a word to anybody, but I marvel at it. It is the third Sunday of the month when we go to the City Union Mission. We are the only church down there. They marvel at us. It is no accident that we are their favorite, even though last time it was kind of crazy. You get that, but I mean, crazy, it is crazy. I do not want to tell you, but the bottom line is the workers down there have a respect for this church, probably more than any other church. You know why? Because every time we go down, there are 50 or 60 people of you dragging in, and they come down there, and that does, I am telling you, I have been in the ministry in the mission for as long as I have lived in Kansas City. That does not happen. Most churches who run 10 or, you know, run 600, 800, a thousand, 2,000, you will be lucky if you have five people go to the mission. You will have one guy who has a burden, maybe two, he will enlist two or three other guys who have a burden, and they will go down. Everybody else in those churches, they think they are too good to go to the mission.

Let me teach you something about that. Let me show you what the reality of this thing is. First of all, I encourage you to go. I think it is good for you to be there. I am going to tell you why in a minute. Another thing is I love to see your little kids down there because I think it is a good encouragement to them. I think it is an object lesson that you can use in their lives. I think as a parent today, God knows with all the issues we have got in this world, you need as many good object lessons to use in your child's life that you can get. That is a great one.

But I will tell you the greatest benefit of it, I think, from my own perspective. I watch every month that the people who go, and I think the value of this is incredible because we know the bottom line is that when you go down there, the mission's model when they started was simply, and you see it on their publications, is lifting up the fallen, lifting up the people who have fallen. That mission exists for one purpose. If you go out there in the lobby, they have got a big kind of a round thing, which you would buy cards off of in a Hallmark shop. But on that, they have pictures of the men who have come through that mission and who have been restored back to their relationship with God. You will find that that mission has one purpose, and that mission is to try to restore men who have fallen back to God.

We come to the point that just because we live in houses and they live on the street, just because we drive cars and they have to walk or take the bus, just because we have jobs and they do not

have one, just because we have kitchens and we go to the grocery store and we buy food and they have got to sit down at a table and eat whatever they give them, just because we have money and they have none, we have families and many of them have lost theirs, we think that we are different. The truth of the matter is our church is no different than what you have with the City Union Mission. This is a mission. This mission, this church, exists for two purposes: basically finding men and women who are without Christ and restoring that image and getting them saved, or finding the fallen and lifting them up. But you see, it is so easy to think we are different. The job of this church is the same as the job of this City Union Mission: lifting up the fallen, restoring man to God's image, and restoring man to God's fellowship.

Now there are two great stories that form the tip of the javelin here on this great study. I have never taught these two before to you. We have never talked about them in Thursday night Bible study to my recollection, not since we started this church, and I do not think I have ever laid it out in any way, shape, or form, even through going through some of our great studies that we have had. But it is something that goes in accordance with Ezra and Nehemiah.

I want you to turn to Luke 15. There is so much in this story. I tell you right now, I will not do it justice. My only goal here is to get the points out that show you the relevance between Ezra and Nehemiah and God being Christ, my Restorer.

Luke 15:11-32

And he said, A certain man had two sons:

And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing.

And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.

And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:

But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

This story is an incredible story, and there is so much in here I wish I had time to lay it out for you today, and we really do not, and that is not my purpose or my point today. I am trying to make the association from the Old Testament Ezra and Nehemiah, showing you how the New Testament principles are found there in the picture of Christ, our Restorer, and then again in the book of Nehemiah when we get to that one in just a few moments.

The first thing I want you to see is this, and you need to put this in your Bible by this story if you do not have this. Right here in this particular story, as I have told you many, many times, you have a picture of Israel's spiritual condition. This young man and this boy here that got restored is a picture of the nation of Israel coming back to God, and it is an incredible deal. God has sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, in the story here. He sent His Son in the New Testament to bring Israel back, and that is what this story represents.

Yet if we are honest this morning in our own life, inspirationally, we have all played the prodigal son at one point in our life or the other. We have all been in a far country. Some of you are in a far country right now. Some of you are about as far away from God as you can get. Some of God's people this morning around this city are saved and on their way to heaven, yet they have

wasted their substance on riotous living. This passage, in an inspirational sense, is a picture of where you and I are at, and where we should be at, and where our church should be at. There is so much in this passage.

V. Lessons from the Prodigal Son

To condense this for time's sake, I want to break this down to about five or six points, and I want to make a comment on each one of these six points for the purpose of illustrating how this thing fits in there.

1. Some people have to learn the hard way.

This was the first thing I thought about because it reminded me so much of me. There is no better place to learn the hard way than getting out into the far country. We just do not like to listen. The prodigal son did not want to listen to his father. Your children do not want to listen to their parents, and parents do not want to listen to the preacher. That is our bottom line problem. What happens is we have to get there, and sometimes we have to learn the hard way. We will not listen to anybody who has got a little more experience. We think we know it all. So what happens is what happened here: we wind up in the far country, and that is exactly what this kid did.

2. Life with the pigs is not pleasant.

When you come down here in Luke 15:14-16, there is something else here that this is my second heading. Sometimes you have to lose what you have before you find out how precious it was to you. That is a very true statement. Sometimes we have to lose what we have with God before we find out how real and really precious it really was. That is what happened to this kid. This kid fell into the concept that most young people fall into. He thought that he had it all figured out. He thought he knew more than his father did. When he wanted to go out there, he said, "Give me my inheritance. I am going out there. You are not telling me." When he got out there, he found out there was a reality in life that he never thought.

When you are home and your mom is cooking your meals, and she is washing your clothes, and they pay all the bills, and they provide a nice soft bed, and they put the heat on in the wintertime and the air conditioning on in the summertime, it is real easy in that kind of environment, if you are not thankful, that you forget who is really paying the bills. I tell parents all the time, your problem with your child is simply this: he thinks he is an adult, but he has yet to have to take the responsibility of being an adult. He thinks he is an adult, but he does not have to pay the light bill. He does not have to pay the car insurance. He did not have to pay the heat bill. He did not have to buy groceries. So what happens is they get the idea that the grass is greener on the other side. Let me tell you something, folks, the grass may be greener on the other side, but wait until you see the water bill. Sometimes you have to lose something to really learn the value of it.

3. When he came to himself.

Luke 15:17. I love this. This is the third thing, and I love this: "When he came to himself." The whole purpose of getting out into the far country was for that end right there, that he would come to himself. I have got to tell you, some people never come to themselves.

Some people are just doomed through life because of their attitude and the way they are, and whatever it is, they just go from the frying pan to the fire to the fire to the frying pan, and their whole life is just an absolute mess. But at some point in most people's lives who are saved and get out into the far country, at some point, living with the pigs, God uses those circumstances. He compares with what, and that is what happens here. The Bible said he came to himself, and what did he do when he came to himself? He recognized what he had back there and what he has got now. You see, what he had back there did not mean anything to him when he was there, did it? You know why? Because he had to lose it before he saw how precious it really was. I think that is a great thing. I think that is a great thing because I put that in my own personal life. I can go back to three or four or five or six or seven times in my own life since I was saved when I could put that thing in my own mind, when I came to myself.

Over in the New Testament, there is a story about a crazy man, a maniacal Gadarene, and he is doing all kinds of weird stuff, and then when he met Jesus and had an encounter with Jesus, the next time they find him, the Bible tells you, the Bible says when they found him sitting in his right mind. I have told you this many, many times: you cannot fix the problems in your life with the same thinking that got you into those problems. You have got to get in your right mind, and before you can get into your right mind, you have got to do what this young kid did here: you have got to come to yourself.

4. The father never gave up on him.

Luke 15:20. I think this is my favorite. Luke 15:17 is my favorite too, so are Luke 15:14-16. But it says in Luke 15:20, "And he arose and came to his father." You see, that is the next act once you get to the point, and most people cannot do that. Sometimes pride will not let them come. Sometimes they are just arrogant. Sometimes they are never going to admit they were wrong. But when this kid admitted that he was wrong, he made the comparison. He saw what he lost and what he now finds himself in. He says to himself, "I am getting out of here. I am going home to my father," and he has all the intent that he arose and came to his father. But I love this: "But when he yet was a long way off, the father saw him."

God never has His eye off of you. You want an interesting concept of study in the Bible? God winks, but He never blinks. That is one of the most profound things I ever found in the Bible, next to the last 500 profound things I found. God winks, but God never blinks. You know why? Because God never has His eye off of you. You see, you can wink with one eye and still have one eye on something, but when you blink, you close both eyes. God never blinks. He winks. The book of Acts says, but He never blinks. He never has His eye off of you and me.

When that kid, I can see it right now, that old man walking out every night by that fence post at the gate, going out there to the road that leads to the far country, and he would watch every night, every night for a year, 365 nights. He walked out every morning, walked out, and one day, one day, he walks out there, and he is sitting there, and he is looking out there, and all of a sudden he sees this figure come over the horizon, and he says, "No, it cannot be," and he gets a little closer, and sure enough, his son came back. God never has His eye off of you. He is always ready for you to come back. Always wants you to come back. Always wants you to come back. It says while he was a great way off, the father saw him,

and the Bible says in Luke 15:20, "and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

5. There was great joy at the restoration.

What happens in Luke 15:22-24 is another great thing because the Bible says that there was great joy, and it was a great time, and it says that there was great joy, and they made merry at the restoration. You hear, and the Bible says that they took the best robe. He put a ring on his hand. He put shoes on his feet, and then they killed the fatted calf and did everything in the world now that this boy was back. That is a picture of you and me.

I want to tell you something. You hear me talk a lot about Bible principles. You hear me talk a lot about how Bible principles in your life, your goal ought to be to come to the point in your life where you learn the Bible principles, and they replace your own physical emotions and feelings. We all have feelings about things. We all expend energy in feeling about things or thinking about things. Many times it is the wrong feeling and the wrong expression and a waste of energy. I believe the job of every Christian, when the Bible says, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," I believe the job of every Christian is to find out what God thinks about everything on this planet and then throw out of your mind what you think and put in what God thinks and make that the rule of the day of your life.

You know why I am telling you that? Because the Bible says that they made merry. They rejoiced, and in your Bible, you know what you find? You find seven things they rejoice about up in heaven and make merry about. Seven things. Seven things. I would not embarrass you this morning. I probably would. I would not do that at all. But if I would pass a piece of paper around here and ask you guys what are the seven things that they make merry and rejoice about in heaven, you would not have a clue. You would not have a clue. You would not have a clue. You know why I tell you those things? Because that is the whole point of principles. I do not know what you make merry about and rejoice over and get happy about, but I will tell you what, very little of it has to line up with the seven things that they do up in heaven.

Biblical principles keep your emotions in check and then let it out based on the biblical principle so you do not waste all your emotions. You only have so much of it. Have you ever gone to work in the morning or had a bad day at work and you have to think all day, and you have to work mechanical stuff, and you have to think, think, think, think, think all day, and for eight or nine hours, your mind is constantly trying to work out this, calling this, getting this ordered, working this out, getting it all together? You know how exasperated you are at the end of nine hours? That is the same thing you get into in your life when you deal with people. People draw from you just like your job draws from you, and you have to learn where to spend your energy wisely, just like you have to learn where to spend your money wisely. Principles help you do that. There is great joy at the restoration. My son was dead, spiritually speaking, and now he is alive again. He is back in fellowship with the father.

6. Not everybody was happy he was back.

I said, not everybody was happy he was back. I found some interesting things here, and when I look at this thing that boy says down here, the elder one, he says in Luke 15:29, "And he answered said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither

transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." That tells me that the older boy here does not have a lot of things in perspective because I found just one little word. Look back here at Luke 15:11 again at the beginning of this, would you please, with me? I want to show you some things about this older boy. "And he said, A certain man had two sons: The younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them." The older boy got his when the other kid got his. It says, "He divided to them." Both boys got the inheritance. Then the kid says, "You never did this for me." What are you talking about? You got the same inheritance that he got.

I will tell you something else. The younger boy went to a far country, but when you come down here, when this older boy is out there working, you know where he is working? He is in the field. The field is a type of the world in the Bible. You know what that tells me? Just because you do not go to the far country and you stay in church does not mean you are not in the world. There is something about this older boy's attitude. Being right with God has never had anything to do with your geographical location. We take for granted because you are here this morning, you must be right with God. Nothing is farther from the truth. Geographical locations do not set your spiritual tone. Your spiritual relationship with God is never based on whether you are here this morning. Some of you are here, but you are not here. There are people not here today because they are way out in the far country, and there are people here whose body is sitting here today, but your mind is someplace else. These are the lessons you learn. This is a great passage.

I am not going to be around forever. As you know, I just turned 60. Somebody told me today, I just read in a book that you are not really old until 70, so I have 10 more years to feel like I am young. Well, you need to tell my body that because my body does not believe that. I am not sure I believe it either. My father, Mel Shabaka, is about ready to die. I got a call this week that they put him in a rest home, and it is probably just a matter of a couple of months, and I reflected back on that and thought about that and thought to myself, and I kind of rekindled all my thoughts in my heart about the things that I have learned from him. I do not pretend to put myself up on the same platform with Mel Shabaka, but I want to tell you something, while I am here, there are some things you better learn.

I appreciate learning from people. Show me you cannot appreciate that. I do not know why you cannot, but you cannot. I marvel at some of you young guys the way you play sports. I do not have a speck of athletic ability. The only way is that I can pitch as well as I do. If you ever watch me pitch, I will study the plate 10-15 seconds before I drop the ball. You know why? Because I am picking a spot up there, and me and Buddha are trying to figure out where to drop that thing, and it goes right on the spot. It is meditation all the way for me. If I happen to catch the ball, it is because I just got in the way. If my mouth would have been open instead of my glove, I would have caught it in my mouth, but it just happened to work out that way.

I watch you guys come up to bat, and I wish I was younger. I could not do it now, but I would learn some things. I watch you come up, and some of you hit left-handed, and then next time you come up, you bat right-handed. That always impresses me because it gives the impression you

know something I do not know about softball. I love guys who can fix cars. I love a guy when a lady's car is stuck on the freeway. He pulls up, he pulls up the hood, and this is the famous word, and I love this kind of talk. He says, "Give me a screwdriver." Then he reaches down inside that car and says, "Now try it," and it starts. To me, that is akin to Moses taking his rod and smacking the Red Sea, and then it divides. That is an incredible thing. I tried that one time in the privacy of my own home. I burnt the tip off the screwdriver. I got a shock all the way up to my elbow. I do not know what you touched, but it was not what I touched. But I have got to admit, I am impressed by stuff like that. I wish there were guys that would, some of you guys can listen to an engine and tell what is wrong with it. Somebody says, "My car will not start." I said, "Pick up the hood. There is the problem." "What is it?" "An engine." That is my take on it. I do not know.

I appreciate guys. You know how they have learned that? Experience. I will watch you guys come up to bat. First time I pitched to you, you are batting left-handed. Next time you come up, you are batting right-handed. You know something I do not know. I know you are thinking that you are going to place that ball someplace. I love guys who know where they want to hit the ball when they go up. Remember the famous thing? Who was it? Was it Babe Ruth in the World Series went up and pointed where he was going to hit the ball, and everybody laughed at him, and then he came. Was that Babe Ruth? Then he came up, and he hit the ball right where he said he was going to go. I am impressed with that. I could never do that. If I put myself on a line like that, I would strike out. But I watch you guys come up, and you play the ball. You read the field. You see out there, and you watch where the guys are at. You watch where the holes, and you either hit it long, you hit it short, you hit it left, you hit it right. In other words, you have learned through experience how to play that game, and you know where you pretty much drop the ball. Me, I just get up and take the hardest swing I can and hope it goes somewhere where nobody is. But I appreciate that. You know what? The younger guys can learn from you. You have obviously attuned yourself to sports, and you know, and another great game. I just marvel at it. I do not like to watch it because it is boring, but I marvel. It is tennis. Tennis is not about how fast you run. Tennis is about placement of the ball. You get the other guy running back and forth up and down inside, and now you wear him out. If you just stand in the same spot, if you can put the ball. You can run great things from that.

My point in all that is this. I am going to start writing a column for the Kansas City Star and take Jason Whitlock's place on sports. No. That would be good. My first article would be, "The bases are loaded, the devil is pitching, and you are going to throw your three fastballs. You better watch out because if you strike out, you go to hell." That would be good, wouldn't it? My point in all this is this: learn some things from me while you can. I have spent 35 plus years dealing with people, and I have seen some infallible things that never fail.

I want to tell you, based on our study in Ezra and Nehemiah, and this is a true statement, and if you do not write anything down, write this down because this is why I try to push you to get involved with people. This is why I try to get you to disciple. This is why I try to get you to give devotions. This is why I will tell your captain, "Put them in." This is why we try to get you into the mission. This is why we try to get you doing things, working with people, and then moving you up the ladder. When we finish up sometime this year in our Bible Institute, we are going to

go into biblical counseling, and I am going to take some of you and walk you through every aspect, and I am going to show you the things that have taken me 40 years to figure out and learn about people and life, and it will be some valuable stuff in here.

But I am telling you, if you do not hear anything else I am saying, hear this: The people who have the older brothers in Christianity, the people who have the hard time forgetting and forgiving and restoring people, will always be the people who never work with fallen people. Now you can write that down and take it to the bank. The people who make up the older brother, who always have such a hard time forgiving, forgetting, and restoring, 100% of the time will be people who are not actively involved working with people who have problems. Do you know why that is? Because you cannot work with people who are fallen and in their problems and not see yourself. It is the great, great evening out platform in the Christian life. Telling somebody what they need to do in a given situation when you know that you are not doing it yourself. Boy, you have got to be some kind of person to be able to pull that off, and most people just are not that cold. For you to sit there and say, "Well, this is what you need to do," when you cannot do it yourself, most people cannot do that. When you start to work with people, one of the things that keeps you humble, keeps you honest, and keeps you into the mode of forgetting and restoring forgiveness and understanding that you are working with fallen people, is because you see yourself in their scenarios. You see yourself in their scenarios.

It was the opening verse that we talked about in this whole concept when we started it, where we said, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself." There it is. There it is.

Over the last couple of weeks, when we have talked about David, I have given you some great, great, great prayers of David. Last week, I gave you an incredible one. Here is one you ought to read today, and this ought to be your reading for today. You ought to read Psalms 78. Psalms 78 fits into right where we are at in our timeline. Psalms 78 is basically where God takes the kingdom of heaven from them. If you do not have that note at the beginning of Psalms 78, you need to put that note there that this is where the kingdom of heaven leaves the nation of Israel. He goes down into that thing, and he tells them all that they did, all that God had done for them, and what they absolutely did nothing for Him. But here is how he ends it. How do you not? How do you not? How do you not put this into your life once you realize what God has done for you?

I just want to read a small part of it because it is the whole chapter, but it gives us a real good perspective on how God views us in His unending mercy and the desire to restore us, just like that father looking at the fence, waiting for that boy to come back. If you are in the far country today, that is exactly what God is doing, and He wants you to come back. The success of this little church will be us bringing you back and the merriment that we have because somebody who was lost spiritually has now been found. But you are always going to have the older brothers.

Psalms 78:35-39

And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer.

Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues.

For their heart was not right with him, neither were they stedfast in his covenant.

But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.

For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.

That is a perfect picture that God had to kill every one of us in this room. We sit here so pious, so self-righteous, we are judgmental toward others, but at the bottom line, if the mask was stripped off today, we are as black as the sides of the bottomless pit. But you know why God does not kill us? A good verse you need to remember about yourself and other people is Psalms 78:39. "For he remembered that we are but flesh, a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again." God remembered. God remembered they are just flesh. He remembered that they are so weak, they are so fragile, they are so easy to go astray, so easy to walk away from the father into the far country. The Bible says He had compassion on them. My friend, my understanding of compassion and forgiveness on God's part will always lead to forgiveness and restoration on my part.

VI. Dealing with the Fallen

Now let us look at the second study, and this is a New Testament story where Matthew is still a picture of the nation of Israel. There is no picture here other than the clear biblical New Testament teaching to the church. 2 Corinthians 5. Again, we have never looked at this or never studied this. I am going to read 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, and then I am going to make some comments on it. Again, we do not have time to get into this, but I am going to give you four or five things here that you want to see.

1 Corinthians 5:1-5

It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.

For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed,

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ,

To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

This is a great, great, great, great principle here. Here is the situation, and obviously it is not a good one. A man here has got involved sexually; fornication is the word for it here, with his

father's wife. That would be a son with his own stepmother. Yet the church is not willing to deal with it, or it appears they are not dealing with it properly. In 1 Corinthians 5:2, they have got the wrong attitude. Instead of feeling remorse and mourning this bad thing because the cause of Christ has been damaged, they puffed themselves up, and this is what you have got.

From 1 Corinthians 5, it seems that the man here that committed this deed is unwilling to repent. So the New Testament teaching on it is to separate yourself from that man, and that is of course what sets the protocol for the New Testament church, and this is what Paul is doing here. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:5 that you "deliver such a one unto the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." What does that mean? It means that when you have somebody that will not do what is right, like our study over there in the prodigal son, you know what he did? He went out to a far country. You know what happened in the far country? The devil destroyed his flesh. In other words, sometimes you have got to leave him go to the far country before you can get him restored, and that is what he is talking about. That is what he is saying, "to deliver such a one unto the destruction of the flesh," your body, the flesh, "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ." In other words, let the devil have him if that is his mindset, if he is not willing to do what is right, if he is not willing to repent, then the only thing he can do is go to the far country, and when he is in the far country, let the devil deal with him. Let the devil deal with him.

Sometimes, and this is hard for people, I know it is, sometimes the illustration here of the instruction is very clear on how to deal with a very hard problem that happens to this church, and it happens to all kinds of churches and all kinds of situations. Sometimes you have to break off the relationship to in time restore the relationship. When your son goes into the far country, and I call them helicopter parents, they are always throwing their child a life raft, they are always throwing them a life preserver in every bad situation they get in. They are so afraid of what is going to happen to them out in the world if they go. They cannot conceive of their daughter or their son living under a bridge and under I-435. They cannot think of him being down the City Union Mission, and maybe that is exactly what they need. Maybe they have got to come to the place where they lose everything they have before they see what they have lost.

Putting cable TV in a pigpen is not a good idea. Putting curtains on the wall in a pigpen is not very good. Hauling in your best comforter, mattress, and a soft bed in the middle of the mud is not very good. Running food out to them in the middle of a pigpen so they do not get hungry is not a good idea. You will never come to yourselves unless you are willing to let the destruction of the flesh break them like it did in the prodigal son, and it is very clear, and this is what the Bible talks about all through there, that in the book of Proverbs, sometimes you have to break off the relationship to restore the relationship, and this is the clear New Testament teaching. This guy would not get right, and so Paul says, "You separate yourself from that person. You do not have anything to do with them. Turn them over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. Let them go to the far country. Let them eat the pig swine. Let them eat that. Let them see what they once had but they do not have anymore," because that is the only way they are going to ever come to themselves. Yet we want to take that away from them. We want to take that away from them.

Now come to the book of 2 Corinthians. Here is how this thing plays out. 2 Corinthians is our handbook on ministry, and I cannot wait to get into that, but we have got some things we have got to learn for it before we do that. I really want to tie it into our counseling, so it will probably work out pretty good that way. Now here is how this thing plays out in 2 Corinthians 2. You want to turn over there. At some point between the two letters, 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, there is about a year's difference between the two. The same man gets right with God, and now Paul has to deal with the issue of restoring him, and by doing so, again, he sets the model for every New Testament church for the next 2,000 years, and this is how you learn to do the ministry.

2 Corinthians 2:6-11

Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.

So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.

For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.

To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ;

Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

You can begin to see here how Ezra and Nehemiah, how this pictures like Israel, this man's sin was a terrible thing, but just as God brought Israel back and restored them because God's main job is restoration in two forms, now you can be able to see how Ezra and Nehemiah picture this New Testament principle and sets the character and nature of God and His mercy and love for us and the basis of His forgiveness.

There are a number of things here, five things exactly, we want to see, and these are very important.

7. This guy got right.

He was dead wrong in 1 Corinthians 5, and he did not want to do what is right, so they booted him. But at some point in the process, he has come back. He has made it right, and he wants to get his life restored, and this is Paul how he addresses that. Look at 2 Corinthians 2:6, "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many." He is saying, "It is over now." Yes, this guy made a mistake. He did a terrible thing, but he came and he got forgiveness, so it is over now. This guy does not have to carry the burden of his sin for the rest of his life. How would you like to do that? How would you like to have God pull something out on you and beat you to death with it every day of your life? We would not like it. He says down through here, "Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many." He says, "It is over." In the word, we talk about, "You do the crime, you pay the time." He paid the punishment. Now he has gotten right, and he has made it right. Paul says, "It is over. He does not have to pay for this mistake the rest of his life."

8. Forgive him and comfort him.

2 Corinthians 2:6 says, "which was inflicted of many." Simple fact: everybody was against him when he would not do right, and they should be. But now when he wants to make it right, everybody should be for him. It does not get any clearer than that. No exceptions. He says in 2 Corinthians 2:7, "So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." "So that contrariwise," what does contrariwise mean? The opposite way. Counterclockwise. Reverse your former position. Change your direction. The New Testament doctrine is simply this: when he will not do what is right and stays in his sin, kick him out. That is plain, clear, no misunderstanding, 1 Corinthians 5:5. So the contrariwise, when he gets right and makes it right with God, New Testament doctrine, principle, when he does right, forgive him, restore him. Plain, clear, no misunderstanding, 2 Corinthians 2:7. It is just that simple.

9. You cannot have restoration without forgiveness.

The book of Ezra sets the picture for this New Testament principle. You cannot have restoration without forgiveness. You just cannot. You cannot restore somebody without forgiving them. You cannot do that. But at the same time, you cannot forgive somebody and not restore them. The two go hand in hand. Here is the danger. A while back, we talked about the judgment seat of Christ. You want to see the danger in this at a judgment seat of Christ? Here is what he says. Here is the danger: somebody sinned and fell in 1 Corinthians 5. In 2 Corinthians 2, he gets right and makes it right with God and then pays the price for that sin. But the Bible says you have got to restore him and bring him back and comfort him and confirm your love to him, else he will be swallowed up in much sorrow. What does that mean? It means when you and I make somebody who has sinned, who is no different than you and I, pay for that sin every day of their life, you try not to get swallowed up in it. You try not to swallow that God takes something in your dark past that God pulls something out that you think nobody knows about it, nobody does, and dangle it in front of your nose and say, "I am going to hold out against you," and every time you go to God, God says, "Oh yeah, well what about this?" The greatest character quality of God is He forgives and He forgets. Ezra and Nehemiah, that is what He did with Israel. Christ, my Restorer. Christ, my Restorer.

10. The commandment is to comfort him.

Look at 2 Corinthians 2:8. Not only forgive him and restore him, but then the commandment is to comfort him. "Wherefore, because of what I just said, I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him." I have been in this business a long time. I have never understood why God's people, who are sinners just like everybody else, would see somebody fallen when they try to make it right and snub them, see them walk in and you walk the other way because you do not want to talk to them. I have never seen a situation in all of my years that I have understood that your job and my job, once they want to do what is right, is to pick them up, lift them up, restore them, and make it work. The bottom line is, who in the world do you think you are that after God saves you from the pit you are in and deals with your ungodliness and my ungodliness every day of my life, that you would see somebody, some brother, some sister in a fallen state and turn your back on them? God help you. God help you make it a point not to talk to them. How would you like it if God treated you like that, made you pay for your sin every day of your life? How would you like it if God

said, "Well, I forgive you, but I am going to avoid you because of what you did"?

Look at Luke 18. I want to see these two brothers. I will show them to you. I will show you the one that got out into the far country and came back, and I will show you the older brother.

11. Lest Satan should get an advantage of us.

An unforgiving spirit of self-righteousness will kill any church trying to follow the Bible. Look at 2 Corinthians 2:9, "For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things." Do you not just hate when the Bible principles get that cut clear that the Bible says that he is proving them by how they restore this kid? Listen, the greatest character quality of God showed all through the Bible should be the greatest character quality of us as God's people: forgiveness and restoration, lifting up the fallen.

Look at 2 Corinthians 2:10, "To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ." And in a great verse, 2 Corinthians 2:11, "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices." Make no mistake, my dear friend, Satan dwells and exists in the world of unforgiveness. He certainly does. The book of Ezra lays out Christ as my Restorer.

VII. Nehemiah: Christ Our Rebuilder

Now watch how this book ties in. Come over to the book of Nehemiah, next book. Watch this thing. As we saw Christ typified as our Restorer in Ezra, in Nehemiah we see Him typified as our Rebuilder. You will see how these two books together form a complete New Testament Bible concept for every New Testament church. Your New Testament verse here is Acts 20:32.

Acts 20:32

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

Whereas in Ezra, they go back and God brings them back and restores them and forgives them, in the book of Nehemiah, God now takes them and starts to rebuild their broken lives. These books not only are important as a historical hub, but they should be our model for ministry and everything that we do. I said in the last message that people who never get to the place where they actually get involved with helping people get through their issues will never have a full understanding of the grace of God in their own lives. The reason for that is you simply see so much of yourself in the problem with other people, and a great part of the ministry is keeping us honest, but we do not become self-righteous.

Years ago, I started my ministry, I realized one great truth based on this, and you have heard me say this many, many, many, many times, and I stand on it today and will stand on it until the Lord takes me home. In this church, I do not care what you have done, where you have been, and who you have done it with. It does not matter to me what your background is. It does not matter to me what you have done or what you have been into. The bottom line is simply this: if you want to do

what is right now and you have made the amends that you needed to make with God, then we are good to go.

I look at this church the way it should be looked at. This church is the hospital. Matthew 9:12. Christ Himself said, "The whole have no need of a physician." Christ is called the Great Physician. You and I are attending physicians. When you deliver a baby, new birth, when you are the attending physician at the new birth, you bring that baby into life. You are a doctor. Some of you are doctors. As doctors, you can diagnose problems. You have been in this thing for a while. You have learned the biblical principles. We have worked together. We are going to set the basis down. You are like any doctor you go into. He listens to your heart. He listens to your cough. He listens to your throat. He checks out this. He checks out that. Then he simply makes a diagnosis and then prescribes something for you. That is what you do. That is what you should do. That ought to be your job.

I have broken the counseling scenario down into three aspects: Band-Aids, Mylicon, broken legs, and appendectomies. Some of you do heart transplants and brain surgery. It is the same thing. Some of you are doctors. Some of you are nurses. Some of you are orderlies. Some of you are candy strippers. My greatest example is little Nancy back there. Everybody knows the story. About a month and a half ago, she was hit with a car. One of the things that proves that there is no safe place on planet Earth. She was not in the road. She was not jogging in the road. She was walking out of a grocery store through the pedestrian crossing, and some guy ran over her, beat her up pretty bad. When I first saw her in the hospital, I could not believe it. She was busted up from one end to the other, and I watched that process, and we prayed for her, and I watched a situation where, and here is what they did: she was broken all over. She was taken to the hospital. They got her into the hospital, and what they did after the first two or three weeks was they stabilized her. Once they got her stabilized and got her to the place where she could function on her own, and she was okay, and she was getting along better, and she did not hurt as bad, and she was getting a little bit better, then they sent her to rehab.

You know what they are doing in rehab? You saw her here today. She is walking. She is walking with a walker. She can walk some without the walker. You know what they are doing? They are rehabbing her. You know what they are doing? They are rebuilding her back to a functional life that she now will be able to go to work, pick up her life where she left it, and go on from there. In a biblical sense, that is our job. Our job is to take them in, stabilize them, and then begin the process of rebuilding them back to a normal functioning life. They rehab her a couple times a day. You rehab people every time you sit down and disciple them or sit down and work them through the Bible. What you have in Nehemiah here is an incredible picture.

I want you to turn over to Nehemiah 2. This is all I want to read to you today out of Nehemiah 2, but it is a powerful thing. It is a powerful thing to me because it is one of those personal places in my Bible where I just always never forget what we have got. We have a lot of nurses in here. When a doctor becomes a doctor, I do not think they do it anymore, but years and years and years, they have to take an oath. It was called a Hippocratic Oath, and a Hippocratic Oath was based on a pagan Greek guy, Hippocrates, who was called the father of Western medicine, I believe it is. So for years and years and years, the doctors took what was called a Hippocratic

Oath. That Hippocratic Oath is an oath that they will not look at color skin, what a person has done, where a person has been, that they will treat that person because their medical profession knows no boundaries.

Anybody know who Dr. Mudd was? We have got one over here hanging up there. I will let you answer it. Did anybody know who Dr. Mudd was? Well, the expression, "My name is Mudd," remember hearing that? "My name is Mudd" comes from Dr. Mudd. Who is Dr. Mudd? He set John Wilkes Booth's leg. That is right. Very good. Very good. You get a star on your forehead. Leah, just kiss him on the forehead. That would be on the forehead, Leah. That is much better than a star, I am sure, in his case. John Wilkes Booth assassinated Abraham Lincoln. He jumped out of Ford's Theater off the balcony and broke his leg. Got on a horse, took off. Dr. Mudd was a doctor that found who he was and set his leg, and then he went on his way. Dr. Mudd got 20 years in prison for setting John Wilkes Booth's broken leg because he had killed the President of the United States. His defense was the Hippocratic Oath. They did not care. He went 20 years in prison, and there was a movie out a while, many years ago, on it, but it was a great movie. This is where the phrase, "My name is Mudd," came from. He was hated because Abraham Lincoln was everybody's beloved president. Everybody knows that. Thought so much, they put him on a five-dollar bill. Five dollars is not much for being loved so much, but that is what he stuck him. I guess they thought more people had five-dollar bills than they do a hundred-dollar bills. There it is. Anyway, 20 years in prison, all because he took an oath, a Hippocratic Oath. You know what? God's people, they take an oath. It is a hypocritical oath. They take an oath, it is the hypocritical oath. They do not help anybody.

What you have here in this thing is, I love this. Look at Nehemiah 2:11. I was going to say my favorite passage, but we know how that goes.

Nehemiah 2:11-18

So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days.

And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.

And I went out by night by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire.

Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass.

Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall, and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned.

And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers of the rest that did the work.

Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.

Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.

What you have here, ladies and gentlemen, is Nehemiah going down at night. We know in the Bible, nighttime is a picture of the church age, looking at Jerusalem. We know that Jerusalem was the city by which God had to have where the temple was for Him to get the job done, and yet we are seeing it in total destruction. The walls are down. The gates are often burned. Jerusalem, Nehemiah 2:7, "lieth in waste."

The first thing I want to say here very quickly is to clarify something. This destruction did not happen through a natural disaster. I want you to understand that. This did not happen through an earthquake. There was no mudslide like we see in other countries. There was no tsunami. This was no cataclysmic event that took place. No, no, no, no. This destruction happened because of sin. This destruction in Jerusalem, which is a picture of your body and my body, the potential thing that God has to have for the work of God, for them it was Jerusalem, for you it is our body, the temple, and now it is in total disarray. This total and complete destruction of God's city came about because God's people left and violated just about every principle that God ever told them, and this destruction is basically them reaping what they sowed.

How many times have I seen God's people, looking over this crowd, many of you whose lives were in the same total destructive mess because of the same reason? How many times you came into my office and laid it out very painfully, very detailed, and I, like Nehemiah, when you were done, maybe in my heart I did not say anything to you, but I looked across the thing with all the things that you said to me, and I said the same thing Nehemiah said, "Where in the world do I start? How do you begin to unravel something of this magnitude?" Many times it was bad marriages. Many times it was alcohol or drugs. Many times it was kids out of wedlock. Many times it was pornography. It was sin had completely come in and destroyed you from anything that God had called you to do. Boy, I will tell you what, your walls were broken down. Proverbs 25:28 says, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls." You had no defenses. His city broken down without walls is like somebody that has no rule of his own spirit. The gates, we already saw that when we came through it, it is no ministry in your life. In Jerusalem, the city of God, lying waste, everything about you as a child of God was upside down and in a mess, and we dealt with it one way, and the only way we could deal with it was with God.

I remember my wife and I were talking about a lady this week that when this lady had come in to see me about four years ago, she never went to our church, and she got recommended to me because every pastor she went to could not do anything with her. One pastor she went to decided she was demon possessed and hung her upside down and tried to cast the demons out of her. She had went to psychologist after psychologist, psychiatrist after psychiatrist. When I first met her,

she was taking 18 pills a day for her problems. She was diagnosed with everything from bipolar to up-down polar to North Pole to South Pole to every pole in between and around the equator four or five times. This lady was an absolute basket case.

I told her that night, when you talk about looking at somebody whose life, her kids were against her, her husband was against her, she hated everything in life, and boy, you take a look at it, and it is just an example. When you look at her life, and where it was in the destruction it had been wrought in her life because of the fact that she never had what the Bible and what God wanted to have in peace by peace, we did exactly what Nehemiah did in the rebuilding process that we have to do with people's lives once we forgive them and restore them. We must rebuild them. We got the drugs out of her life. We got the concept beginning to go in. I remember she had took six weeks just to figure out what a biblical principle was, and then one day she got it. When she got it, she started to move forth. About a year later, maybe a year, two months later, that woman was right on top of it. She was out of the drugs. She was out from under the doctor's care. She was functioning just exactly the way that she wanted to, needed to function, and she was back in ministry and doing what God had called her to do. You know why? Because you have to rebuild them. You have to rebuild them. You have to rebuild them.

I know exactly how Nehemiah felt because I felt it too when I have looked at the mess and thought, "Where do you start and even begin to fix this?" But I want to tell you something, I know that we can get our lives in a mess, and most of us have in our lives, and most of us have come to the place where we were in the far country, just like the prodigal son. Many of us have come to the place that we have got things in our life that we would never want anybody to know about. But I thank God for the God who restores you and forgives you, and I thank God that when you find yourself into that mess, look at Nehemiah 2:17-18. This is what I tell them, maybe not exactly like this, but this whole thing. Tomorrow night when I meet with this couple at six o'clock, my whole thought process is going to be right out of the book of Nehemiah. When they lay out their problem, just like some of you have laid out your problem, when they lay out their heartache and their burden, just like so many people have in one way or another, this is what I am going to tell them, and it is out of the great two books of the Bible. One shows God, my Restorer, the other one shows God, my Rebuilder.

Nehemiah 2:17-18

Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach.

Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.

That is what God wants. He wants the honor and glory out of your life. He wants the sin out of your life. He wants you to be restored, be forgiven, and rebuilt so you are no longer a reproach to the name of Christ. "Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work." I will tell you what I am going to tell him

tomorrow night. I tell him the same thing all the time. I tell him about the good hand of God in my life, what He has done for me, and I tell him that I have got the word of a King that says, "Rise up and build." Wherever you are at, whatever you have done, get it right, get rebuilt, rise up and build. You know what they did? The same thing this church needed to do in every given situation. They strengthened their hands. They came together for the purpose of rebuilding. That is the job of the church. That is the job of the church. The job of this church is to band together and strengthen our hands together to forgive, to restore, and to rebuild people's lives.

VIII. The Church as a Hospital

I am giving you one last thing, and I am done. You have heard me say this before, but I want to leave you with this. 1 Samuel 22, my other favorite place in the Bible. I have told you this story. It is the story of the cave of Adullam. I have told you that in this story, David is in a cave, and they bring people down to him, and he ministers with them, and the Bible says 400 people come down. I have told you many, many times that this is something that God gave me years and years ago, that I personally believe that that is about as big as a church can get and still do a job, maybe a little bigger, but 400 people is a lot of people for one man to minister to, and I think personally that that is my model for Old Path Baptist Church. Not that we will ever hit 400, but I think that that is a good model for anybody.

But there is something else here, and I have told you how I look at this. I love our cave. Some people would rather have a fountain out front and big crystal chandeliers and a tennis ball court and a racquetball court and a Starbucks coffee, but I love the cave that God put us in. That is just where I am at. I do not know how long we will stay here. I do not know how long God will move us out. God may give us something else down the line someplace, but it will not be because I go looking for it. There have been people that will not come to this church because it is in a basement. Thank you. I do not know what to tell you. We need your seat. I do not care. I do not want to have to spend more money for chairs. I will just keep weeding them out and keep using the ones we have got, and then we will buy some down the line. It is fine with me. I do not care. I love this cave. It is embarrassing to some of you, I know that, but I love it. I love it. You like it. It was a nice fancy place with all kinds of things on it. I love it. I love it. I love it because it is plain. I love it because it is simple. I love it because it is just like us, and you better be careful going to a church that puts on a bigger show than it really needs to put on because you will start thinking that you have got to live up to that show. I know human nature.

1 Samuel 22:1-2

David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him.

And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men.

That is to me what a church should be. But there is something else here. There is something else here in this little church that David had. Anybody see it? What else do you see in here? We have

got plenty of time here. What else do you see? Let us read it again, and we need to work this through here. This is not something we want to hurry. "David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard it, they went down thither to him. And every one that was in distress and every one that was in debt and every one that was discontented gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them; and there were with him about four hundred men." Anybody see it? John hit it right on the head in 1 Samuel 22:2. They are in distress. They are in debt. They are discontent. Everybody has a problem in this church. There are no whole people here. There are no clean people here. It shows you that in this church and every church, we only think we do not have any problems. They all have problems. Even the leaders have problems. Three times he says, "everyone, everyone, everyone." You know why? Because sitting here today, every one of us has issues. We just like to pretend we do not.

IX. God's Threefold Plan in Ministry

Three great verses and principles in our ministry and our lives, and I am done with this. We need to forgive. We need to restore. And we need to rebuild.

12. Forgiveness Ephesians 4:32

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. The Bible says, and over there in the Gospel, I believe it is in Matthew, that if you are unwilling to forgive somebody in your life, and remember now, because so we keep the principle straight, there can be no forgiveness without restoration. Without that, it is a two-way street. You cannot say, "I forgive you, but I will not restore you." It does not work that way. Now that we understand the Bible, and the Bible says that as long as you are unwilling to forgive somebody else and their daily sins, God will not forgive you and yours. You just mark that down, put it into a hash pipe, and have at it. "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." That is forgiveness.

13. Restoration Galatians 6:1

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

14. Rebuilding Acts 20:32

And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

God's threefold plan in ministry for His church: lifting up the fallen, lifting up the fallen, illustrated by Ezra, Christ my Redeemer, and Nehemiah, Christ my Rebuilder.

Every head bowed. Father, I feel so sorry for most of the young men that are in the ministry today, that they stand in pulpits and they preach, and many of them hold the right book, but Lord, they have no idea of how that book unfolds itself to lay out every principle, not only by the way this church should operate and needs to operate, but by the very principles that each of us in our lives need to operate. Father, these Old Testament books are not just there for history. They are there to show a great concept of Christ in some aspect of His life, and we have seen it in 1 and 2

Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles. We saw and asked ourselves the questions, "Who sits on the throne of our lives? Who sits on it?" We saw every aspect. We saw David at his best. We saw David at his worst. We saw David as ourselves. We saw David commit a worse sin that a man could ever conceive to commit, of adultery and then murder to cover it up, something that we in this room would never think of doing. Yet You picked the man that did those things and then stated about him that he was a man after Your own heart. Boy, there lies the enigma. There lies the great mystery, and yet it is not much of a mystery at all when we see that David was just flesh, and God saw his weakness. God saw his temptations, and God understood, and God forgave him, gave to him the sure mercies of David, like He has given to me the day I got saved, and then You restored him. Father, after his life was long over, You said about him, "Here is a man that did what was right all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." You said about him that he was a man after God's own heart, clearly showing us that we are all sinners. You showed us how that when he sinned, that when he confessed that sin, he did not confess and ask Uriah to forgive him, or Bathsheba, or anybody in Uriah's family. He simply said, "Father, against Thee and Thee only have I sinned," and he took his sin in his confession to where it needed to be because we learned, Father, that we all sin against You. For me to go up and to take away from You that position of You forgiving me, when Lord, we always, everyone in this room has done disservice to others. Lord, we learned that who sits on the throne of our lives in those great books, and then today, Father, we look at Ezra and Nehemiah, and we see God, my Restorer, and then God, my Rebuilder. Lord, next week when we look at Esther and then move on into the wisdom books, Father, how You portray Yourself that You give us in all of these areas everything that we need to understand who You are. I pray today, Father, we will go out of here today a little wiser, a lot smarter, and a lot more in tune of who we really are, and we will take off the mask that we are that way, that there are no issues in our lives, that we will take off the mask that there is any difference between anybody in here, including me, that we are all just sinners that You put in this little cave down here, that we can come when we are in distress, we can come when we are in debt, and we can come when life turns us the hand of discontent, and we can come in our sin, that this place will not be a judgmental place, but a forgiving place, a restoring place, that in this desert of wilderness of uncaring, unforgiving, and pious people, that people here will find an oasis to drink from the cool brook of Kidron, to drink the water of God out of the rock that restores and then rebuilds, and we will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

God bless you. You are dismissed this morning. Please take the time to sign up there. If you want to get baptized, please come and talk to me, and we will give you the dates on that. God bless you. You are dismissed.