

I. Introduction and Historical Context

If you have your Bibles this morning, go ahead and be turning to the book of Nehemiah. We are going to be in the first couple of chapters of Nehemiah today. I was laughing with Zach earlier because he asked me, since we got started a little bit late when we came back before the offering, if I wanted him to go ahead and do two hymns like normal or just do one. I said, "I'll go ahead and do two." I said, "I'm not probably going to go very long today." And then I just kind of laughed because every time I say that, I go over like an hour and a half or something. So I am going to try not to do that to you guys today. But I have something that the Lord has laid on my heart, and I hope that He gives me the ability to put it across the way that I need to today.

As you turn to the book of Nehemiah, I always like to give a little bit of background when we get into some of these Old Testament passages. For those of you that are a little bit younger, maybe you are not familiar with this part of the Bible. You are not quite sure what is going on here. You have not read it before. That is okay. But you need to understand a little bit about the history of what is happening here as far as the nation of Israel to have a little bit of context for what we are going to be looking at in the book of Nehemiah.

In order to do that, we really need to back up one book and talk about the book of Ezra. Ezra and Nehemiah, and really you can add the book of Esther in as well, they really go hand in hand. They basically sort of tell the same story, which begins after the end of 2 Chronicles in 606 B.C. when Israel goes into Babylonian captivity. Jeremiah prophesied that Israel would be in captivity for 70 years as a result of their disobedience and their constant backsliding in terms of what God had given them and what God had told them to do and what God had told them not to do.

What we have in the book of Ezra is right about 536 B.C., about 70 years, well, exactly 70 years, as it was prophesied. There was a decree that was made in Persia to allow a remnant of Israel to be able to go back, a remnant of the Jews to go back to Israel to begin to rebuild. In 536 B.C., a small group, about 50,000 men and women, go back, and the altar is rebuilt and sacrifices are offered. They take about another 20 years or so because there was about a 15-year period where the work basically stopped. But by about 515 B.C., they actually finished rebuilding the temple, and it is dedicated to the Lord. This basically brings us up essentially to the beginning of the book of Nehemiah. It is about 446 B.C. So several more years have passed, but there is more work that needs to be done here. Nehemiah is the man that steps up and leads a group to be able to finish the work that needs to be done in Jerusalem.

I want to read you first Nehemiah 2:18.

Nehemiah 2:18

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.

Let us go to the Lord in prayer. Our Heavenly Father, we love You. We thank You for the Lord Jesus. I thank You so much, Lord, for everybody that is here today. First and foremost, Lord, we just want to come to You and pray for Vicki again. We just pray, Lord, that You have Your hand on her, guide and direct the doctors and the nurses that are taking care of her right now, and just do a work, Lord, in her life. Heal her, Lord, help her to get feeling better just as soon as possible, Lord. Help the doctors to make the right decisions and to be able to do the right things so that she can have a full recovery, Lord. We just pray today, as all of our hearts and minds are on her right now, that You will just lift her up and You will just protect her and take care of her.

Father, now, as we get into Your Word this morning, we pray that Your Holy Spirit's will will be done here, Lord, that You will speak through me, Lord, the words that You want me to say, allow me to put it right across the plate the way that it needs to be said today, Lord, not holding anything back, Lord. We will do it for Your honor and for Your glory. We love You. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

II. Nehemiah's Burden and Prayer

We are going to start reading here in Nehemiah 1. The first thing that I want you to see is, as I mentioned already, there was more work to be done. Nehemiah, basically, in the first four verses here in chapter one, we see that he has a burden for this work that needs to be done. If we read these first four verses, it says:

Nehemiah 1:1-4

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace,

That Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.

And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven.

Nehemiah, and you will see in a few verses down here that he was actually a cupbearer to the king in Persia. That is a pretty highly esteemed place within the court. He had the king's ear. He got to basically talk to him and hear about everything that was going on. He was sort of in the middle of all the action and did not have a difficult life by any stretch, being in the position that he was in. But even in spite of that, in spite of him being able to live high on the hog, if you will, his thoughts were on his home and on his people that were back in Israel, that were back in Jerusalem. In spite of the relative success, if you want to look at it that way, that he had from a world standpoint, from a world's viewpoint, his thoughts were not there. His thoughts were not

where he was in the here and now. His thoughts were of his people back in Jerusalem, and he is asking his friends about it.

When it says, "Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah, and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity and concerning Jerusalem." So he wants to know; he has got a burden for what is going on back in Jerusalem while he is kind of living the high life. In verse three, we see the problem here. It says, "And they said unto him, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire." So although Ezra has gone back several years before and they rebuilt the altar and they rebuilt the temple and they reinstated the sacrifices and began to get back to the things that God wanted them to do, and sort of a small-scale spiritual revival went on in Israel, they still got major problems. It says the wall of the city is broken down and the gates are burned with fire.

Look at the burden that Nehemiah has here. He says, "And it came to pass when I heard these words that I sat down and wept and mourned certain days and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven." Turn over to Psalms 122. We are going to get a little insight into why he was so broken about this. Look at Psalms 122. We are going to read verses one through nine, the whole chapter.

Psalms 122:1-9

I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.

Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together:

Whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD.

For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.

Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.

For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee.

Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek thy good.

Then look over just a few pages to Psalms 137:5-6.

Psalms 137:5-6

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.

If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

Jerusalem was an amazing place. It was God's holy city. It was the center of the world literally for hundreds of years as God fellowshiped with His people and had a relationship with His people and they served Him faithfully. At the point when God simply could not take any more of their backsliding, He allowed these heathen nations to come in and put them into captivity, and they literally burned the city to the ground. It is a tragedy. This is the reason that Nehemiah has this great burden on his heart. He is not looking at his circumstances of where he is and the comfort of his life right now. He is thinking about his people. He is thinking about his home, where he should be, where he was from, where he longs to be again. He longs for that city to be what it once was, to be what it was originally.

In Nehemiah 1:4, it says, "he wept and he mourned." Jeremiah 9:1 says, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" I wonder if we have that kind of passion. I wonder if we have that kind of burden for working for the Lord, for the people that God puts in our lives, for the people down at Restart, the people that we interact with when we go out on the street and we witness and we give them food and we give them Bible tracks, or is it just become something that we do every other week? Has it just become another thing that we go and do? Do we really have this burden?

Psalms 56:8, and I actually alluded to this a little bit last week. I stole a little bit of my thunder in my message that I preached last week. But I talked about the things that we cry about and some of the really, really silly things that we shed tears over, when you think about it. The reality is that God has a record that He is keeping, and He actually has a bottle for our tears. If you look at Psalms 56:8, it says:

Psalms 56:8

Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?

God keeps track of every single thing about our lives. It is sort of funny, I did not think about the first part of that verse when I was asking Woody last week and I was talking about that little band that he wears that keeps track of all of his steps. I said, "Wouldn't it be something if we get up to heaven someday and God has kept track of all of our steps?" There it is right now. "Thou tellest my wanderings, put down my tears into the bottle. Are they not in thy book?" We are going to get to heaven someday. We talked last week about don't be afraid to wander for God, that God has called us to wander for Him like Abraham did. It says someday He is going to tell of our wanderings. There is going to be an account that is given. We are going to be the ones that are going to give the account of where we wandered for God or maybe where we did not wander for God. Maybe where we did not do what God wanted us to do.

The tears that we shed, God help us if we shed more tears over pets and over animals and over silly TV shows that we have watched and stupid movies that we watch that are tearjerkers that get at our emotions than tears that we have shed over unsaved people that are on their way to a literal hell someday and are going to burn in the lake of fire for all of eternity. And for brothers and sisters in Christ that are around us and they are struggling that we do not have the time or the patience to do anything for them to help them. We would not dare bow our head to pray for them

for one minute. This is what Nehemiah had. This is what he did. Nehemiah 1:4, I will read it again. "And it came to pass when I heard these words that I sat down and wept."

When is the last time that you guys heard anything about anybody that was there was a tragedy that was something that you cared about that actually mattered when it came to this book and eternity and that you sat down and wept over what you heard? When is the last time that you heard about somebody that was struggling, somebody that was hurting, and you sat down and wept? No, usually we sit down and we start casting judgment about people. Usually we start complaining about people. We just start talking about people instead of sitting down and weeping over their situation. He says he wept and he mourned certain days and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.

Let us talk about these tears. I read that an English scientist, and I do not know who it was, so do not ask me his name. You are not allowed to ask me questions while I am up here preaching anyway, but do not ask me afterwards because I do not know his name. But it is a true story. An English scientist one time proved that human tears actually have the ability to kill bacteria. They can kill microbes. In fact, he showed that one teaspoon full of tears has the power to purify 100 gallons of water. One teaspoon, one little teaspoon of tears. You could dump it in 100 gallons of water and you could kill all the bacteria that is living inside of it. That is an amazing thing when you think about it.

Bob has a saying that he uses sometimes when he preaches, and it goes like this. He says, "If your Christianity is not contagious, then it is contaminated." I think a lot of our Christianity today is contaminated. Let me tell you something. If we would sit down and shed some tears over this book and shed some tears over the people in our lives and shed some tears over what God has done for us once in a while, maybe we could decontaminate ourselves and then actually do something for God. But you have got to get down on your knees and weep a little bit. You have got to shed some tears for the things that God is trying to get done. You have got to shed some tears for the people of God that are constantly just drowning in their troubles and in their problems. You cannot seem to get out of their own way because they cannot get this book in the central point in their lives where it needs to be. You have got to spend some time praying for them and weeping over them and helping them.

Let us look at this. Let us look at Nehemiah and how he prayed for it. Read on and pick it up again in Nehemiah 1:5. This is him praying to God.

Nehemiah 1:5-11

And said, I beseech thee, O LORD God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments:

Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee: both I and my father's house have sinned.

We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses.

Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations:

But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there.

Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand.

O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer.

Look at him. He is going before the throne of God, literally for the entire nation of Israel. He is confessing their sins, but not just theirs. He is not praying for theirs. He says "ours," right? He says, "for the children of Israel, thy servants and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee." He was not pointing fingers at other people just sitting down. "Oh, I will pray for you. I will pray for all your problems." He knows that he is part of the problem himself. He says, "Lord, I am coming to You to confess the sins that we have committed against You. We are the reason we are in the situation that we are in right now. We are the reason that we are in captivity and that the walls of Jerusalem are broken down and that the gates are burned down."

He says in Nehemiah 1:7, "We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses." "Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations." That is getting honest with God right there. That is getting honest about your situation. That is sitting down and telling the Lord, "God, I have got some problems in my life, and I know that the things that are going on are because of my own sins, my own decisions, my own things, my own ability, my own choices to violate Your Word and Your principles." He says they violated the commandments and the statutes and the judgments which God commanded to His servant Moses. It says that He told Moses, "If you transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations." That is exactly what He did. That is where Nehemiah is looking at. That is the situation that he is living, and he is standing right in the middle of it. He is asking God to do something about it.

In Nehemiah 1:9, he says, "But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out among the uttermost part of the heathen, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set my name there." Look at how he is going to God, and he is confessing their sins, but he is reminding God of what He said. He is reminding God of God's own promise that He said, "If you transgress against My law, this is what I am going to do to you. But if you turn unto Me and keep My commandments and

do them, then I am going to take a group of you back and I am going to put you back where you are supposed to be." This is what Nehemiah is praying about.

Nehemiah 1:10, "Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power and by thy strong hand." "O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer." So he is praying to the Lord, and he is saying, "Lord, I have got to go to the king with a request that I just do not know what he is going to say. I just do not know what he is going to do about it. But Lord, You have the ability to do something about it. So I am coming to You today, and I am confessing my sins, and I am confessing the sins of my people, the nation of Israel, and I am asking You to turn from Your anger, turn from Your wrath, and allow us to go back and rebuild these gates." He says, "whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power and by thy strong hand."

It says that if you look at the time period from the beginning of Nehemiah and the month that they were in, and then you look at the beginning of chapter two, four months went by before the beginning of chapter two. It says there in Nehemiah 1:6, "which I pray before thee now day and night." So day and night it says Nehemiah prayed for four months getting ready for this work, asking God to do something, asking Him to do what He needed him to do. Nehemiah was a man of prayer. That is the first thing that we have got to see. Aside from the burden that he had, Nehemiah really got on his knees and prayed about it. I believe Nehemiah was not like all of us, that if we had a problem and we went to Nehemiah and said, "Pray for me, brother," and he said, "I will pray for you," I believe he actually would have done it. So many of us will tell each other, "I will pray for you," and we forget about it two seconds after we said it. We do not bow our head and pray for that person one single minute of the next week. I am guilty of it. I hear a few of you saying, "Amen." You guys are honest enough to admit it. When we tell people that we are going to pray for them, man, I mean, if somebody comes to you and says, "I have a need, I need you to go to the Lord, I need you to pray for me for this," and we say, "Oh yeah, absolutely. Praise the Lord. I will pray for you." And then how many times we just go back to our lives. We do not think about it for a second. My goodness, my goodness. Boy, not Nehemiah. Nehemiah saw a need. He had a burden. He got on his hands and his knees, and he prayed day and night, day and night he prayed for four months, for four months.

Write these verses down. We are not going to go to them and look at all of them. But I said Nehemiah was a man of prayer. You have got this prayer here in Nehemiah 1:4-11. Then you have got Nehemiah 2:4, Nehemiah 4:4 and Nehemiah 4:9, Nehemiah 5:19, Nehemiah 6:9 and Nehemiah 6:14, Nehemiah 13:14, Nehemiah 13:22, Nehemiah 13:29 and Nehemiah 13:31. I am going to read to you Nehemiah 13:29-31. This is the end of the book. It basically says:

Nehemiah 13:29-31

Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites.

Thus cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, every one in his business;

And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

This is a book that literally starts and ends with prayer. How about you? How about your life? How about mine? Does my day start and end with prayer and have prayer all the way through it? We all talk about, we know the verse that says, "Pray without ceasing." We quote it. It is an easy one to remember, actually. It is pretty short. It is kind of funny that one of the shortest, most simplest verses that almost everybody in the world that is a Christian memorizes is the one verse that pretty much none of us ever obey and follow and actually put into practice. He says, "Pray without ceasing." Well, this is something that Nehemiah did.

It makes me think of the Moravians, and if you study church history, you have read about and certainly heard about the Moravians. One of the greatest things maybe that Christianity has ever seen, they set at one point, they appointed 24 men and 24 women, and they appointed them each an hour throughout the day. So throughout an entire 24-hour period, every single day there was a man and a woman, separate places, praying for the work, praying for the work of God. For 24 hours a day, day after day after day, there was always somebody from this group that was on their knees praying. This lasted not, I mean, we could try something like that. I guarantee you we would make it about 21 hours before it would break down and it would fall apart. These Moravians kept this thing going for a hundred years, 100 years, 24 hours a day, somebody was praying, and all that that turned into was maybe the greatest missionary movement that the church has ever seen. That is all. That is all it did. All it did was end up with, I do not know, it was estimated at one point something like 75%, three quarters of the earth, of the people living on the earth were born again, Bible-believing Christians, saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. That is all it did. Not much, not too much of a big deal, right?

III. Nehemiah's Boldness and God's Provision

Let us move along here. Let us pick it up in Nehemiah 2, and we will carry on with our story here. So Nehemiah had this burden. There was work that needed to be done, and he was going to go and figure out a way to get it done. So he got on his knees and he started praying about it. Then he began to prepare for this work. As we pick up the story in Nehemiah 2, it says in verse one:

Nehemiah 2:1-2

And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence.

Wherefore the king said unto me, Why is thy countenance sad, seeing thou art not sick? this is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid.

You have to understand the way that it worked back then in the king's court. Nobody was allowed to be sad. Nobody was allowed to bring bad news. Nobody was allowed to do anything to put a damper on the mood in the king's court. The king did not want to hear bad news. The king wanted to be happy. He basically, if we could put it in modern vernacular, Nehemiah goes in here and he is killing his buzz. It says the king is drinking wine, he is having a good time, he is partying. This is pretty much what he did all day long. Nehemiah comes in, and it says, "then I was very sore afraid." He knew that his life literally was at risk coming before the king where his countenance had clearly fallen. But he had such a burden, such a burden for what was going on with his people, what was going on back in Israel, that he simply could not hide it. If we truly have a burden for people, if we truly have a burden for the work of the Lord, the world is going to notice it. You cannot hide that thing. You just cannot hide it. People will know what is going on in your life. They will know what is going on in your world.

So he says, in Nehemiah 2:3, "And I said unto the king, Let the king live for ever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" Now he is taking a chance here. I mean, at this point, he says, I mean, he is lucky that he is still alive. Even the fact that he was sad. Then he comes back with this. I mean, the king basically says, "Look, what is the matter with you? Why the long face? Let us turn that frown upside down." He says, "You are not sick. This is nothing else but sorrow of heart." And he says to him, "Why should not my countenance be sad when the city, the place of my father's sepulchres, lieth waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?" I mean, he just, he, you talk about boldness. My goodness, man. Lord, give me that kind of boldness. He is standing before the king. He could have, he could have made a command to have his head cut off right then and there.

Nehemiah 2:4 says, "Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven." Wow. Right there. Look at that. Right. I mean, he is talking to the king of Persia, right? He is telling him what is on his mind, what is on his heart. The king says, "For what dost thou make request?" And he bows his head and he prays right then and there. He is like, "Lord, I am going to need Your help right here." He is like, "This is sort of what I prayed for. And here we are. And I am going to, I am going to need You to do something." He prayed to the God of heaven because he knew Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." Nehemiah knew he did not have anything to be afraid of. He did not have anything to fear. If God is on his side, what does he have to worry about? So he prays to God right in the middle of his circumstance, right in the middle of his trouble, right in the middle of being questioned by the king. He says, "God, I need Your help here."

Then he goes on to speak to the king in Nehemiah 2:5.

Nehemiah 2:5-6

And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it.

And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.

He had specifics about what he wanted. He had specifics. He had a plan in place of what he wanted to go and accomplish. He laid it out to the king, and it said, "it pleased the king to send him."

Nehemiah 2:7, "Moreover I said unto the king," He is not done asking for stuff. I love this man. I mean, you know, a lot of people will be like, "Yes, thank you. You will let me go. Okay, that is fine." No, no, no, no, no. He knows that God is going to give him what he needs. So he just keeps it going. He says, "Okay, so not only do I need you to go, but I need some other things."

Nehemiah 2:7-8

Let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah;

And a letter unto Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.

He goes, "Look, I am going to be passing some other governors, some other people that may want to stop me and question me about what I am doing, about where I am going. They are going to know that I am a Jew and that I am probably out of place based on, as far as their perspective goes." He is like, "So why don't you give me some letters that I can give to them that comes from the king that says, 'I am okay to be here. You need to give me safe passage to where I need to get. Don't get in my way. Give me whatever help I need and let me get through to get to the work that I need to do.'"

He is not done there. Nehemiah 2:8, he asked for more. He says, "While you are at it, as long as you are writing letters, king," he says, "How about another letter, a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace, which appertained to the house and for the wall of the city and for the house that I shall enter into." And the king is just like, "Okay, man." That is God right there. I will tell you what. I mean, look at it at the end of Nehemiah 2:8. It says, "And the king granted me how, why the king granted me because I am Nehemiah. I am the great and wonderful, the all-powerful. I came before him and I got what I wanted." No, "the king granted me according to the good hand of my God upon me." If you have God's hand upon you, you have nothing to worry about in this world. You have nothing to fear. You have no reason to hide. You have no reason to cower. You can boldly walk around this earth and do what God has called you to do because you have got the good hand of God upon you. If you have got the good hand of God upon you. But look at how Nehemiah, this is Nehemiah talking. This is Nehemiah. Nehemiah wrote the book. He could have said whatever he wanted to, but he was very careful to give God the glory. He was very careful to give honor to God, even though he was the one that was asking for all these things. He had to have a little bit

of guts to stand up and ask for these things that he asked for. He knew that God was the one that was providing it.

IV. Surveying the Work and Calling to Action

Then let us look at Nehemiah 2:9. It says, "Then I came to the governors beyond the river, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent captains of the army and horsemen with me." He did not even ask for that. He asked for letters for safe passage. The king says, "Yeah, not only that, I am going to go ahead and send the army with you just to make sure you get there. Just to make sure you get back over there to Jerusalem, that city that I do not really care about, that the devil wants to completely obliterate off the face of the earth. And by the way, he pretty much controls me and everything I do, but I am going to send my army to make sure you get over there so you can rebuild that city." If that is not the power of God on display, I do not know what is.

But look at Nehemiah 2:10. It is not all roses.

Nehemiah 2:10

When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly that there was come a man to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

Look, anytime you go out to work for the Lord, anytime you go out to start to do something for God, you will encounter opposition. The king gave him everything that he needed here, but that does not mean that there was not going to be opposition along the way. There were certain men here. There were certain rulers that were not very happy to hear about some man that was coming, that was looking after the people of Israel. Not happy that there was a man come to seek the welfare of the children of Israel.

But he goes on Nehemiah 2:11. "So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days." I love that. God does not really, I mean, these guys come up again. If I remember, I am going to tell you something else that is a little bit interesting about these guys here. But notice it does not slow them down at all. He says these guys heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly. They were not very happy about what was going on. Nehemiah 2:11, "So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days." The work goes on. He says he just keeps going.

Nehemiah 2:12-15

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.

So he is going out, he is taking a look at the job that is in front of him. He spends, it says, three days here. He has not told anybody yet why he is there. He has not told anybody about what is going on. My goodness, we spend our whole lives going around telling everybody what it is that we are going to do. Everybody that will ever listen, "Oh, I am doing this, brother. I have got this going on, and I am discipling this person, and I am that person. And I talked to Bob. Bob is going to use me to do this over there, and someday I am going to teach class. I am going to do all these things." Nehemiah was there three days, and all he was doing was just going around looking to see what work needed to be done. He was just going around seeing what work needed to be done.

Nehemiah 2:16, "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 rest that did the work." He is just going out and taking stock of what needs to be done. He is not going around bragging about what is happening. He is not telling anybody about what just happened with the king, trying to show off about what wonderful things that he had just accomplished to be able to get here. He is just going about figuring out exactly what is going to need to be done because there is a pretty stinking big work that is in front of him that needs to be finished. He sees the city and the walls and the gates in complete disarray. Everything is torn down and destroyed and burned to the ground.

But look at Nehemiah 2:17. Eventually, you are going to have to get some help if you are going to do this work.

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.

So he has got people on board with him now. He has gone around and he has surveyed the job that needs to be done. Now he is telling Israel, he is telling the leaders and the priests, and he is telling the rulers, he is saying, "Here is what needs to be done. This is why I am here. This is what God has sent me to do. This is what God has already done. Now let us go to work."

Look at Nehemiah 2:19.

Nehemiah 2:19-20

But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they laughed us to scorn, and despised us, and said, What is this thing that ye do? will ye rebel against the king?

Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

Oh, here are these guys again. Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian. They brought a friend in this time. That is good. When they heard it, they laughed us to scorn and despised us and said, "What is this thing that you do? Would you rebel against the king?" See, they were not involved in the meeting here that just took place. They do not know what is going on. They do not know what God is doing here. But you better understand that when you go to do work for the Lord, not only is the world going to oppose you, yeah, they are going to laugh at you. They are going to laugh at you to scorn, just like these guys did.

But look what he says in Nehemiah 2:20. "Then answered I them and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem." He basically said, "You guys can just get out of here. You have got no place here." He says, "Our God in heaven, the God of heaven, He will prosper us. And therefore, as a result of that, as a result of my God and the power of my God," he says, "we will arise and build. I do not really care what you say. I do not really care what you think. God told me to go do this job. His hand is on me. He has given me everything I need to do it. So I am going to go build the wall. And oh, by the way, you have no portion nor right nor memorial in Jerusalem." So as they say, "Don't let the swinging door hit your rear on the way out." Just take a hike. You have got to understand God will always take care of you. God will always take care of you if you are in His will and if you are in His plan, if you are doing His work. He is always going to take care of His people. Yeah, there is opposition. Yeah, these guys are laughing at them. But it does not matter when you have got God on your side, He is going to watch out for you. He is going to take care of you.

V. Who Does the Work?

Now let us move on to Nehemiah 3. We are not going to go into Nehemiah 3 in too much depth here. Most of you have already heard Bob preach this and teach this maybe a couple of times through Nehemiah 3 and what is happening here as they go through and they begin to list out all of the gates that get rebuilt. It is a tremendous study to look at these gates and what they represent. But that is not our focus as we move into this chapter. I am not going to repeat something that Bob has already taught and preached here. But we are going to go through and we are going to try to pick up a few things about what God says regarding just who exactly is doing the work. Okay, we know what these gates are. We know what all these gates represent. You guys have been through these things before. But let us take a look at just who is doing this work.

In Nehemiah 3:1, we see that the work should always begin. It should always begin with the spiritual leadership.

Nehemiah 3:1

Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests, and they builded the sheep gate; they sanctified it, and set up the doors of it; even unto the tower of Meah they sanctified it, unto the tower of Hananeel.

Listen, when you are going to get into this work, if we are going to do a work as a church, the spiritual leadership should always be at the forefront. The spiritual leadership should always be at the beginning of the work. Everything that we do in this church, every ministry that we have, everything that we go out and participate in, you are going to find Bob at the front. You are going to find him right in the middle of everything that we are doing, just as it should be. As a pastor of this church, he does not sit up on high. He does not sit up on a mountain top looking down at all the rest of us as we go and do the work. He is right down in the mud with all the rest of us leading the way as a pastor should. But it goes beyond just Bob. It goes beyond just the pastor. The deacons, the elders of this church should be involved in every aspect of the ministry that goes on around here. So my question is, are you involved in everything that goes on around here? Are you leading the way for the younger Christians that are in this church? Are you involved in the work that is going on? Are you too big for it? Are you too important for it? Not really want to get your hands dirty.

Now let us look at the next group here. Go down to Nehemiah 3:12. The next thing I see when I look at this in Nehemiah 3:12, it says:

Nehemiah 3:12

And next unto him repaired Shallum the son of Haloheh, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, he and his daughters.

He and his daughters. Now we see that there were families that were building the wall together. As you go down through here and you study through these gates, you see all kinds of different people listed. You will see groups of people. You will see people from other cities. You will see individuals. Here in Nehemiah 3:12, we see we have got a family working on this part. We have got to get our kids involved in the ministry that we are doing. That is what is going on with the youth group right now. That is what Zach is trying to do with our kids in the youth group as they have launched into this evangelism ministry, teaching them how to evangelize their friends and their family, the people that God puts in their lives at school, teaching them how to teach the Word of God, how to do a devotion, how to share what God has done in their lives with somebody else and getting them involved in the ministry. You have got to teach them at a young age.

I love that it just says this man, it says he was a ruler of the half part of Jerusalem. And it says he and his daughters. I love that it does not say how old they are. You know, because they might have been in, I do not know how old he was. They might have been in their thirties. They might have been older than that. I do not know. They might have been, you know, six, 10 and 12. Like I have got at my house right now. But what it says is that he is up there building and he is repairing and he has got his daughters with him. He has got his kids with him. While God is telling us and He is teaching us and He is imploring us to get our kids involved in the ministry, some of us do just the opposite. We use our kids as an excuse to keep ourselves out of doing the work. I see it all the time. I mean, seriously, just think about it. What are we going to say at the judgment seat of Christ if we did not do the work and we use our own kids as the excuse? "Well, Lord, you know, little Johnny had a hangnail that day and I just, you know, it was going to be Susie's nap

time. Lord, you know, I mean, we just cannot disrupt nap time. God forbid that they should go to bed an hour later than they are supposed to go to bed." Why is that? Because that disrupts my life. That disrupts my world if they are a little bit grumpy in the morning because they are a little bit tired. If they go to bed a little bit later than supposed to, because I do not get to watch my TV show that I want to then.

Listen, I am going to let you in on a little secret. It is okay to be tired because somebody was working for the Lord. It is okay to be a little tired. My kids have never died from being tired. They act like they are going to sometimes. They act like they are going to die from being hungry. They act like they are going to die from everything. I woke up this morning. They were all still alive. I am not trying to say I am the perfect parent and I am the example that everybody should look at, but all I am saying is I was taught to stick my kids in the ministry and teach them from a very young age that this is what we do.

Whenever I teach, whenever I have the opportunity to teach the marriage lessons with a young couple that is getting ready to get married, or if I, even if I am doing marriage counseling with somebody that has been married for a while and they are having trouble, when we get to the end of those lessons, I always, I always leave them with a final thought, a final challenge. It is very simple, and it simply says this: As you go out into your marriage, you have two choices. You can either live your life, and then try to fit God and the work of God in around your life. Or you can set in your heart and set your mind such that you are going to do the work of God and then you figure out how to fit your lives in around that. But there, that is the only, there are only two ways that you are going to live. It is one of those two. You are either going to do what you want to do. You are going to live your life the way you want to live it. And then you are going to try to find room to squeeze God in wherever it is convenient, wherever it will fit, or you are going to live your life for God. You are going to do the work of God, and you are just figuring out how to make your life fit around it. That is the choice that we face. That is the choice that we are going to be held accountable for someday at the judgment seat of Christ.

We should get tired for God while we still have the ability to get tired for God. Zach said something when we were up at camp last summer, he was leading music, and he almost did die. That poor guy sung himself. He literally almost sung himself to the grave. Praise the Lord. Not that he almost died, but that he had that kind of a heart. You guys know I did not mean it that way. But that he was singing to the Lord to that extent. But you know, he said something I had never thought about before. I had never thought about it. One morning he was, his voice was about to go, and he told those kids and he said, and he said, "You know, we should sing out our voices to the point where we have got no voice left down here on this earth while we still can, because there is going to be a day coming sometime soon where we have got glorified bodies and we are not going to be able to sing our voices out to the point where we do not have a voice left anymore. So enjoy the feeling and the sensation of working or singing or doing something for God to the point that you are so physically exhausted that you do not even know if you can get up in the morning just to experience being able to give that much to God because someday you will not be tired anymore. You will not have that feeling anymore to know that you worked

yourself to the bone to the point of physical and mental and emotional exhaustion that you need God literally to pick you up off the ground just so you can move on the rest of that day."

How in the world are your kids ever going to develop a zeal for doing the work of God if you are not doing it yourselves and you are not teaching it to him and showing it to him every single day? It is not good enough just to sit at home and do little Bible devotions with them if they do not see you living it every day and they do not see you out doing the work and more than that bringing them along with you and getting them involved. Titus 2:14 says, "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." We should be zealous of working for the Lord. We should be zealous of doing good works. Instead we are zealous about sports. We are zealous about flag football. We are zealous about the Royals being in the playoffs. We are zealous about KU basketball. I will get in my own world. I will not just yell at you guys. I will yell at myself a little bit. The Bible does not say to be zealous about any of those things. It says we should be a peculiar people zealous of good works.

VI. The Indispensable Role of Good Works

Oh, you have got to see this now though. Look at Nehemiah 3:5. Not everybody was on board.

Nehemiah 3:5

And next unto them the Tekoites repaired; but their nobles put not their necks to the work of their Lord.

Some of the nobles out there did not want to put their necks to the work. Wouldn't you know that it just happens to show up in Nehemiah 3:5, the number of death in the Bible. I think we have got some people like these nobles around here. If we can be honest. I mean, all churches have them. All churches have these nobles that go walking around telling everybody how wonderful they are and how spiritual they are, but you never see them put their necks to the work. You never see them getting involved in anything. I have heard it said by some in this church that you do not have to do works to be spiritual. Really. Well, let us investigate that statement just a little. Okay, now follow along with me here. So we are saying to be spiritual, spirit-u-al, spirit as in the Holy Spirit living inside of you. In order to be spiritual, you must have the Holy Spirit living inside of you because although you were born with a spirit, you were created with a spirit along with your soul and your flesh, the Bible says you were born dead in trespasses and sins. So until you get quickened by the Holy Spirit, your spirit is dead. Amen. So before you are saved, you are not spiritual. Nobody is spiritual. I hear people say, "I am not religious, I am spiritual." Well, let me tell you. Amen to not being religious. You should not be religious, but I know what you mean when you say that. So when you tell me you are not religious but you are not spiritual, what you are also telling me is you are not saved, which means you are not spiritual. Okay, so we have that defined, we understand that.

Now when do you get the Holy Spirit? That is salvation, right? This is not difficult. Ephesians 2:8-9, we all know this verse.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Okay, let us look at those verses there. What does he say? "For by grace are ye saved through faith." Amen, that is right. It is not about works, right? Not yet. Not about works. He says, "and that." What is the "that" that he is talking about? He is talking about being saved. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that," your salvation, "not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Okay, we have got it. Our salvation is not based on works. Everybody in this room, I believe, understands that. Amen. But everything after the "that" in Ephesians 2:8, everything after that is about works. It is all about works. Everybody quotes Ephesians 2:8-9. Have you ever read Ephesians 2:10? Anybody read it? Well, I am going to read it just in case. So we have got Ephesians 2:8-9, we learn how we become spiritual, and then we look at Ephesians 2:10, and oh boy, he says:

Ephesians 2:10

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

God did not create you in Christ Jesus to be spiritual. Even though yes, we should be spiritual, but the bottom line is this, we were created unto good works. We were created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Good works has nothing to do with your salvation, but it is everything, everything after you get saved. Everything in your life should be about good works after you get saved. My goodness, read the New Testament sometimes and see what I am getting ahead of myself, hold on.

Titus 3:8.

Titus 3:8

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly. So what is he saying? This is faithful saying, this is true. He is saying this is like, listen, turn like he is saying like turn up your hearing aids and listen to what I am saying. He says, "these things I will that thou affirm constantly." In other words, constantly affirm them. Tell people, make sure you understand it for yourself, for the people that are around you, for your wife, for your husband, for your kids, affirm it constantly. What are the things that we are supposed to affirm? "That they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works." He says after you get saved, you better make sure you are doing good works.

Ephesians 4:12, for crying out loud, it states the three major purposes of the church. What is the middle one? The work of the ministry. That is what we are here for. We are not here to sit down

on Sunday and get fat and happy spiritually listening to God. I am not including myself in this statement, okay. Listening to great preaching and great teaching, that is not why we are here just so we can become overweight spiritual Christians that do not ever do anything. We have got to get out and take what we have got and put it to work and exercise it and go and do something for God. Works are not required for salvation, there is no question about that, but listen, listen to me and understand this, they absolutely most definitely are the evidence that you are saved. They are the only evidence that you are saved. If you do not have a burning desire and passion in your heart every single day of your life to serve the God who died on the cross to save you from your sins, then you better check and find out if you really have a relationship in the first place.

I found more than 160 verses in the New Testament on works, and I am sure I do not even have them all. You better understand and believe that God pays attention to it. I mean, just look, just look at the chapter we are looking at right now in Nehemiah 3. What is he doing? He is basically going through the whole list and he is naming by name every person, every family, every group that got involved in the work and that rebuilt the city and rebuilt the wall and the gates. Look at Revelation 2 and Revelation 3. God is speaking to all the different churches in the church age. What does he say? Over and over and over. "I know thy works. I know thy works. I know thy works. I know thy lack of works." Laodicea, "I know thy works."

You know some of these nobles, some of the nobles we have got around here, they will like to tell you that knowing the Bible is more important than doing works. Okay, that sounds pretty good. I mean, it is the Bible. It is the Word of God. We are supposed to hide His Word in our heart. It is the mind of Christ, right? Sounds good. I am with you. Let us look at 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Amen. Yes, Lord, that is what I do. I know the doctrine and I reprove and correct and instruct everybody around me all the time. Praise the Lord. Amen. That is what it is there for. That is what I am doing. Do not read 2 Timothy 3:17 because he says all that scripture is given for what? "That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." You cannot get away from it, guys. You can try to, but you cannot get away from it. You cannot get away from it.

Or how about Titus 1:16? I love this one. This is a good one. Let us quote this one. Let us memorize this one.

Titus 1:16

They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

Oh, they profess, "We are going to walk around. Whoo, I know the Lord. Yeah, you better believe it, boy. Yeah, I know God. I have got a relationship with God. I have got a different kind

of relationship with God. Like a different kind than what the Bible defines. That is interesting. Tell me about that, how that works. Yeah, I know the Lord. I know the book. I just do not like to do anything." Okay. Yeah, let us see how that works for you, the judgment seat of Christ. Let us see how that works for you when you stand before Him and you look at the hands and His, or the holes in His hands and His feet and where the spear pierced His side. And you say, "Yeah, Lord, I love You enough to ask You to save me. But you know, I just kind of got busy after that. Kind of got too important after that, you know. I mean, I had reproving to do and I had correcting to do. I had doctrine I needed to learn. There is no time for me to go to work and do anything for You."

Then we have a little subset of this group I have got to talk about for a second. I call them, I just named them this, but I kind of like it. I call them the OWPA Christians. The OPPA, the OPPA's, our OPPA's, whatever you are calling. This stands for the "Only One Pastor's Around" Christians. Yeah, this is, let us just make everybody mad today. Yeah, we have got people like this. Every church has people like this. Matthew 23:1-6.

Matthew 23:1-6

Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,

Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:

All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.

For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,

And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,

I think we have got some Pharisees around here like to do a lot of talking, but then they do not really do anything. Matthew 23:4, "For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers." Hmm. Matthew 23:5, sometimes you do not even have to say anything about these things then. You just read it. The Holy Spirit, it will just cut you apart with it. Matthew 23:5, "But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments." And love the uppermost rooms at feasts and the chief seats in the synagogues. Yeah, they like the uppermost rooms. They like those high places. They like, they like those spots where everybody gets to see them. That is when they like to do the work. That is when they kind of like to get involved. They kind of get involved when they get a part that people are going to see. They get real busy when, you know, doing something whenever Bob is around, whenever there are people around to put on a show for, but it is always very interesting when there is no spotlight and there is work that needs to get done. It is like, "Phew, phew." Those of you do not know what "phew" means. That is the sound that you hear, like when you are playing football and you are trying to cover Will or Zach. Okay. You are like, "I will go cover Will." And they

said, "Said, hunting, phew." That is that sound. Okay. That is the same sound you hear from some of these nobles heading out the door when Bob is not around, when there is work that needs to get done. Some of us do not like to do much unless there is going to be a little glory in it for us. Let us just go and be a little bit of credit, a little bit of a spotlight for us. I did not see Nehemiah looking for any glory. I did not see him looking for any spotlight, but there were some nobles there that said that they did not want to put their necks to the work. They did not want to put their necks to the work.

Now, I have said all of this, not really for these guys. Because let us just be honest. Anybody that fits into the category, what I was just talking about, they stopped listening to me a long time ago. If they were ever listening to me in the first place, because they do not need to listen to the preacher. Not necessary. No, no, no. I said all of this for the young Christians that are in this room. And you guys need to listen to me right now. You need to pay attention to the people that you let into your lives. You need to pay attention to the people that you choose to hang around. You need to pay attention to the people that are going to have an influence over you. I told you, I just spent about 15 minutes, I think, laying out fairly eloquently what you need to look for, what you need to listen for. They will kill you spiritually. They will seek to do it. And they are very good at it. And they will not feel bad about it. They do it on purpose because they do not want to be convicted by some young Christian that comes walking in here and actually has the nerve to be on fire for God and want to do something for Him. So they are going to come in and try to squelch that as fast as they can, because it makes them feel bad about what they are not doing.

Remember last week when we talked about Noah and the work that he did, it said that he, what did it say? I forget the word, it said he, I think it said that he condemned the world by building the ark. Yeah, you are going to condemn some people in their lives when you go to work for the Lord. You are going to condemn some people around here, some people that have been around here for a while, they do not like it. And they are going to do whatever they can. They will destroy your walk by getting you to quit the work and do not be deceived for a moment. I do not care. I do not care who they are. I do not care. I do not care if it is me. If you think it is me, you better turn tail and run away from me as fast as you can. If I do not edify you, if I do not encourage you, if I do not stand alongside you in the work, I would not be my friend. I would not hang out with me. I would not come over to my house to do anything. I would not even bother talking to me when I come in on Sunday morning, because I am not doing anything that is going to benefit you spiritually if I am in that case.

You know, people complain about, and gosh, I have been saved for a while now. Okay, I have been to, I have gone to a couple of different churches and you hear, this is something you hear in every church, every church, and we are just going to talk about it for a little bit and I am almost done. People complain about cliques. All right, let us talk about cliques for a little bit. Let us just get, let us just get honest. What is it? What is a clique? A clique is simply this. It is a group of people who interact regularly and share common interests. That is terrible. I mean, right out of the pit of hell. No, I make a joke about it, but listen, here is the thing. Are there cliques in this church? You better believe there are cliques in this church. Absolutely. The thing is, when we use the term clique, we think of it like when we were in high school, there was like the cool kids

clique. I was never part of the cool kids clique. I was like, Maddie knows she saw the glasses that I wore when I was in high school. She reminds me all the time. She is like, "You were a nerd in high school." Like, yeah, I was, but it is all right. Still got a pretty good looking wife though, right? So it all worked out. It all worked out. Not that that, not that that is the most important thing. It is the inside. She is way more beautiful on the inside than she even is on the outside. Okay. But listen, listen, I have got to, I have got to hurry up, man. I have got to get done. All right. Listen to me. Listen to me. Yeah. Yeah. There are, there are cliques, but here is the thing. Just make sure that you just find the one that is serving the Lord and get in it. It is really as simple as that.

Here is what I have found. Here is, this has been my experience over the last 20 years, the clique of people that just hang out with each other because they love the Lord and they like to do the work of the Lord and they like to go out and serve God. They take all comers. They take all comers. Anybody that wants to get involved is welcome to jump on board. You know, it tends to be the ones that sit around and complain about the cliques that sort of have their own clique. That is a little bit harder to get in. You know, you better not, don't, don't go in there talking about the work. That is for sure. Don't go in there talking about the Bible because that is not what, that is not what they are interested in. So let us just be honest about it. All right, guys, you young Christians need to be careful who you associate yourselves with. Do not be fooled by what you see on the outside. Don't be fooled by it. Don't be fooled. I guarantee you these nobles, they look the part. All right, and I bet they talked a big game. But when it came time to do the work, it says they would not put their necks to the work. And it is as simple as that. You have got friends in your world, in your lives that find every excuse to miss church. They find every excuse to skip out on going to Restart or maybe they do not even do it in the first place. They find every excuse to not be a part of our athletics ministries and different things that we are doing. Any ministry that we have, they find reasons not to support the youth group and what they are doing. Do not hang out with them. Just don't because you will become who you hang around. Everybody knows that. Everybody knows that you are what you eat. You eat too many Twinkies and cupcakes. You are going to get start getting soft in the middle like Twinkies and cupcakes are. I speak from experience. Well, I do not know why I always have to talk about my weight when I preach. I just feel like I need to do that. But you know, you are supposed to confess your faults one before another. So that is just how it goes.

VII. The Perfect Word and Final Challenge

Now listen, before I close, I just have to, I have to leave you with one more thing. It is just one of those nuggets that God throws in there that I had never really seen before. And I just thought this was the most awesome thing, you know, just to kind of put a, put a cherry on top of the sundae here. Look at Nehemiah 3:26. Now, this is the verse that talks about the Watergate. Now we know that the Watergate represents the Word of God. It just so happens that this Watergate, which represents God's Word, God's holy Word, it just so happens that it is the seventh one that is listed here. It is the seventh one out of the, out of the nine gates, which number seven just happens to be the number of perfection. But notice this too. It is the only gate that needed no repairs. Do you understand that? The whole wall, all the walls of the city, the gates were torn

down and were burned down. You see every single one, this gate was built, this gate was repaired. That gate was built. The one gate that represents this book is the one gate that it says needed no repairs because God has given us a book that is perfect, never needs any work or improvements done to it. Psalms 119:89, "For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven." This book has to be at the center of everything that we do. It was the one part of the work that they did not need to do anything with. It was already fixed. It was already settled. It was already perfect. They had to build everything else around it. And that is what God gave us to do the work. But if we do not put it first and foremost, and we do not put it central in what we are doing, and we are not going to be able to get the work done.

I am going to close with this story. There was a painting a few centuries ago by a painter, if I am saying his name right, I believe it is pronounced Dominico Fetti or Fetti. I am not sure. It does not matter. The title of the painting in English was called "Behold the Man." It was basically a picture of Christ on the cross. It was or Christ with a crown of thorns on his head. At the bottom of the painting, it had this phrase written. It said, "All this I did for thee, what hast thou done for me?" In the early 1700s, there was a 19-year-old young man who saw that painting. As a result, he dedicated his life to the service for the Lord. That man's name was Count Zinzendorf, who just happened to be the one that went on to start the Moravian church. The Moravians we talked about earlier that prayed around the clock for over 100 years. Yeah, because he saw a painting of Christ with a crown of thorns. And that one simple phrase that said, "All this I did for thee, what hast thou done for me?"

About 150 years later, there was a woman, her name was Frances Havergal. Again, I do not know if I am saying her name right either. She saw the same painting, saw the same phrase on there and was inspired and wrote a poem that ended up becoming our hymn, "I Gave My Life for Thee." I am going to read you the verses to this hymn. In our hymnals, it is hymn number 375. She wrote a couple of the hymns that we sing. And it says this:

- > *I gave My life for thee,*
- > *My precious blood I shed,*
- > *That thou might'st ransomed be,*
- > *And quickened from the dead.*
- > *I gave, I gave My life for thee,*
- > *What hast thou given for Me?*
- > *I gave, I gave My life for thee,*
- > *What hast thou given for Me?*
- >
- > *My Father's house of light,*
- > *My glory-circled throne,*

- > *I left for earthly night,*
- > *For wandering, sad and lone.*
- > *I left, I left it all for thee,*
- > *Hast thou left aught for Me?*
- > *I left, I left it all for thee,*
- > *Hast thou left aught for Me?*
- >
- > *I suffered much for thee,*
- > *More than thy tongue can tell,*
- > *Of bitterest agony,*
- > *To rescue thee from hell.*
- > *I've borne, I've borne it all for thee,*
- > *What hast thou borne for Me?*
- > *I've borne, I've borne it all for thee,*
- > *What hast thou borne for Me?*
- >
- > *And I have brought to thee,*
- > *Down from My home above,*
- > *Salvation full and free,*
- > *My pardon and My love.*
- > *I bring, I bring rich gifts to thee,*
- > *What hast thou brought to Me?*
- > *I bring, I bring rich gifts to thee,*
- > *What hast thou brought to Me?*

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we love You and we thank You for the Lord Jesus, and just thank You for the opportunity to be able to get up here today and open up this book and just the wonders of it, Lord. I pray that You will take the things that I said today, Lord, and it is not just intended for the people out here, it is intended for myself, Lord. We all need to make sure that we are diligent and that we are putting our necks to the work, Lord. We all need to make sure that the works that You set before us, that You want us to be involved in, are the number one priority

in our lives. And it is because of what You did for us, Lord. It is because You loved us enough. You loved us enough that while we were yet sinners, You were willing to come down and die on the cross, shed Your own innocent blood to save us from our sins when we did not deserve it, Lord. And because of that, all You ask is for us to give You everything that we have, Lord. You gave everything for us. You just want us to serve You with all of our might. Help us to do that, Lord. Help us to do that. Every single individual in this church and this church as a whole, Lord. Help us to do that every single day and be faithful to the very end, to the time that You come to take us home to be with You, to be faithful to doing these works, as it says over there in Titus, to be a peculiar people, Lord, zealous of good works. Let us be peculiar to this world because of how much we love You, Lord. Let us be peculiar to the people around us because of how much we love You. Let us be peculiar to our own family and our own friends because we are zealous of good works, Lord, because of how much we love You and how much You loved us. We just pray that You will take these things, let us lay it to our heart, Lord, and do something about it, Lord. Not let it just be something that vanishes out of our thoughts and our minds two seconds after we walk out the door today, Lord. And, Lord, we do not want to leave here without, of course, asking You to continue to take care of Vicki this morning. And we pray, Lord, that Your hand will continue to be on her and the doctors and the nurses that are helping her. We just lift her up to You today, Lord. And we just ask You to help her and to take care of her. And we will give You the honor and glory for all that was done and said today, Lord, we love You. And we ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. All right. Don't forget hot dog buns and chips for Restart.