

# The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Father, sometimes your word is frightening. Sometimes we come upon a part of your word and we wonder why it is that we've never noticed that before and it makes us uncomfortable.

But Father, we know that you have spoken to us for our good. You have spoken to us so that we would know Jesus and that we would grow in wisdom and sanity and wholeness.

And so we ask, Father, that you would grip us with the gospel, fill us with the spirit as we read your word and think about it today. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please be seated. A bit of a slow opening of my different books getting settled.

There's a famous Western movie, a landmark movie at its time, and it's had a big influence in lots of other movies.

[ 1 : 0 4 ]     And it's called The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. It was one of the movies that started to make Clint Eastwood famous. It's known as a spaghetti western. And in some ways, the chapter that we're going to look at today, which is the last chapter in the book of Nehemiah, it could be summarized as we're going to look at the good, the bad, and the ugly, because all of them are in the story.

Good things, bad things, and really ugly things are in the same text. And it can be very confusing for us when we read a story that has the good, the bad, and the ugly, to try to figure out which is the bad and which is the ugly part and why they're bad and why they're ugly and why they're good.

And it's a long text. It's 31 verses. And those of you who have been to the church for a while or those of you who have watched online for a while know that sort of one of my commitments to us as a congregation is that I'll never just sort of skip over the bad and the ugly parts.

Like what I could do is just look in this chapter and remember the touching prayers, Remember Me, O Lord, and not look at, well, I'll just tell you, there's parts in this text which we're going to look at that imply that Moabites, certain groups could never, ever, ever, ever enter the temple.

And there's, in fact, a sort of a graphic scene of Nehemiah pulling the hair out of people who disagree with him. And so I could just sort of preach around it.

[ 2 : 3 0 ]     You'd never know it. But that, I wouldn't be fair to you. And, in fact, there's parts of this text which is, you know, if you're outside the Christian faith or if you're on the way out of the Christian faith, you'd say, See, this is exactly the sort of text that causes me to not want to be a Christian or to leave the Christian faith.

But I'm, as always, I'm going to suggest that if we actually keep in mind Jesus and we walk towards the text, we actually see that this text is really important for helping us to lead a nuanced and coherent and centered life.

That this text is very important in helping us to live a nuanced, coherent and centered life.

So, some of you have Bibles. If you have, open them up. If you don't, the words will be up on the screen. I'm not going to read all of the 31 verses. I'm going to summarize some of them.

But I won't summarize anything that is, in a sense, very controversial. And here's how the text begins. It's just before the part that Josiah read very ably a few moments ago.

[ 3 : 43 ] And it goes like this. In fact, actually, this is the text that's going to shock you. Because it seems to imply that it's proper to get rid of foreigners, whatever that means.

And that some people are forever excluded from the assembly of God. Like a pretty shocking text. Let's hear what it says. Nehemiah 13, verses 1 and following. On that day, just sort of a day, they read from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people.

And in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God. That's not just the Jewish people, but the people who worship in the temple.

And, you know, sometimes I'll tell you, in fact, later on, there's going to be a part that the Hebrew helps you to understand something a little bit. But here, the text has been translated pretty accurately. There's no sort of, if you knew the Hebrew, it doesn't quite mean.

No, no, it's translated quite accurately. Verse 2. For they did not meet the people of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them.

[ 4 : 53 ] Yet our God turned the blessing, the curse, into a blessing. Just sort of pause. Part of what also makes this text difficult is that this story that they're referring to happened a thousand years earlier.

So this implies that God's a bit of a vindictive bully who never forgets. Verse 3. As soon as the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.

Now, just a very simple point, which I'll sort of maybe return to in a little bit. But every time you see the word foreign in there, it's an unfortunate translation, especially in our day and age.

Really, what it's really referring to are different religions. That's what it's really referring to. People who are still worshipping as pagans.

And the significance of that, I'm not going to go into it. If you look at my sermon from a couple of weeks ago called Embracing the Beautiful Vision, I take some time to actually explain what Canaanite religion was and what it did.

[ 6 : 01 ] The child sacrifice, the ritual sex, the sexual abuse that went on in it. And I'm not going to go over that again. You can go and you can listen to the sermon. But this is a very hard text.

And it seems pretty harsh. Now, the first thing I'm going to say about the text is what we see here in the text, it's going to be more obvious as we read the next little bit, is a very, very human problem.

It's the human problem of going from one extreme to the other. It might very well be that maybe you were brought up in a very, very, very, very legalistic home.

And so you say that when I get out of the home, I'm going to go the complete opposite direction. Or maybe you were raised in a home that was quite wild with no limits. And you say, when I'm older and I have kids, my kids are going to have limits.

And you can end up being very, very harsh. It can be the same type of thing in who you date or who you end up marrying. There's a tendency, there's institutions, they get really worried about one thing and they go to the complete opposite extreme.

[ 7 : 11 ] And that's a very, very deep, persistent human problem. And what we see in the text here is part of that, of a going from extremes to extremes.

The Bible actually doesn't teach what they say it teaches. So part of it, if you actually go back, if you look at Deuteronomy, the original text, part of that is in there, but actually it doesn't say that no foreigner can ever enter.

It does say something about Moabites and Ammonites, and I'm going to return to that at the end of the sermon. But it doesn't actually say that. It actually gives some criteria for when they actually do join the temple. And the fact is that if you're trying to interpret the Bible from their point of view, there's been a whole pile of other parts of the Bible that you have to read to try to figure out exactly what's going on.

Amongst other things, because I said how it says, no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God. Well, they would have known that King David, and if you go back and read Ezra and Nehemiah, King David's crucial to all of Ezra and Nehemiah.

They keep going back to the great reforms that he brought in. They're using his Psalter, all of that. David's great-grandmother was a Moabite. And they would have known that.

[ 8 : 26 ] And if you read Isaiah, that this whole part has, in a sense, been rescinded in a part of Isaiah. So it looks like they're being very biblical, but they're actually not.

They're actually being far stricter than the Bible is. Now, what's the other extreme? What's the context within which they're acting? Well, I'll just read one verse, and then I'll summarize the rest.

If you look at verse 4, here's, in a sense, probably the other extreme that they're reacting to. Because these are the people who gather in worship. And it goes like this. Now, before this, verse 4, Eliashib, the priest who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah, prepared—actually, well, I guess I'll read verse 5 as well.

You probably don't have it. But prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levite singers and gatekeepers and the contributions for the priests.

Okay, what's going on here? So, first of all, I'm going to use a bit of a controversial example. And so, hopefully, those who are here and those who are online, you're going to extend me a little bit of grace. And it's been Pride Month, and I have not made any comment about Pride Month.

[ 9 : 42 ] But I want to use an example around Pride Month that will maybe help us to understand this. And if you're here, or if you're watching online, you know, people—I know that if I was to say this in the average, like a Bridgehead or a Starbucks, I'd get a lot of problems.

But everybody in our culture and everybody who's involved in the Pride Movement, you all know this, that historic, traditional, thick, deep Christianity is opposed to Pride Month.

Like, that's not a surprise. You know, me saying this might make you mad. It might make some of us very tense for me to say that. But I'm—and if you want to have a conversation with me about it this week, I'd gladly have a conversation with it.

But I—and I think this is—us as a church, we want to be a church which is—we want to follow Jesus. And I think all of us, if we're honest, would acknowledge that most of the time we're not very good followers of Jesus.

But the direction of our life is that we want to be followers of Jesus, and we want to accept his teaching and the teaching of the Bible in as biblical and deep and thick way that we possibly can.

[ 11 : 03 ] And everybody knows that that's going to be quite different than everything— than most things articulated in Pride. Not everything, obviously. We'd all agree that, you know, you have to do things with HIV and that there should be, you know, human rights for people.

That's not points of difference. But we all know that there's a very significant difference between those who are fully committed to the Pride agenda and to deep—people who desire to be deep, historic Christians.

And I'm unashamed and unembarrassed about wanting to be a Christian. I just want to say, if you're watching this and you're getting tense, Jesus is the hope of the world. He's your hope. He's the only hope.

Only he has defeated death. Only he has defeated that which causes death. And he will share that victory with you if you humbly put your faith and trust in him.

And he is your hope for a wise and sane and whole life. He is the hope of the whole world. And I'm unembarrassed about it. But I might have caused some tension by making such a stark comparison.

[ 12 : 10 ] So here's the thing which is going on in this story. Tobiah has connected to the high priest. And the high priest says that Tobiah can have this main room right in the very, very center of the area where the Jewish people are gathering to worship.

That would be like us hiring a Pride activist on staff. Now, I can tell you, you might not know this if you're watching it, if the council found out that I knowingly hired a Pride activist on our staff, I'd be fired.

And I should be. I should be fired for this church. Okay? But that's what's going on. It's not just that, I don't know, you know, Tobiah, he likes lots of garlic and cilantro and, you know, and other people, they like, they're not into that type of sauce.

They like different types of spices, you know, maybe with more tarragon or something. It's not like that. This is a fundamentally different direction that you're heading in life.

And right at the very center of where people should be gathering to worship, those who desire have a thick, deep encounter with Yahweh, they have brought in somebody with a completely and utterly radically different agenda.

[ 13 : 37 ] And everything that that means follows from it. He gets rid of this stuff for worship. He puts himself there. And he's right there. Whenever discussions are going on, he's right there.

And he's obviously welcomed into it. And then if you go on, and you'll see later on, that it also means then that it ends up worship goes away because the Levites, the singers, all the people involved in worship, he stops having them paid, or he has a role in having them no longer be paid, and people aren't concerned.

And so the worship declines and all of that type of stuff. And so there's this complete and utter abandonment of the Jewish faith. And so that's the context for these people wanting to be even harsher and not let anybody all like Tobiah ever all be in.

They've gone from one extreme to the other. And then the other thing which comes just immediately after that, which is all part of this whole thing, is that they're worshipping together on Sunday for the people of Israel.

And all of the things which are connected to it, those completely and utterly get abandoned. And what happens in verses 5 to 22 is Nehemiah comes back.

[ 14 : 45 ] He discovers that this has been going on, and he deals with it. He kicks Tobiah out of the room. He has the place cleansed. He has the stuff needed for worship put back in. He starts paying people again, and he starts having the conditions made for people to worship.

He has that reinstituted. He comes in, and he does a good thing. He does a good thing. And that's what's going on in this particular story.

Now, here's the thing. If you could put up the first point. I have a lot of points this morning, but I tried to think of something clear to help you understand. And so here's the first one.

If you are more biblical than the Bible, you are not biblical. In other words, if you are more biblical than the Bible, you're not actually following Jesus.

You're following something else. That was the part of the first bit. They actually didn't want... I mean, the Old Testament said that there's ways that Moabites and Ammonites can be part of the people of God.

[ 15 : 46 ] Ezra 6 says that there's people from those backgrounds who are all part of the people of God, but they want to get rid of them all. They want to be more biblical than the Bible. They want to be more Christian than Jesus. Well, if you want to be more Christian than Jesus, you're not a Christian.

It's... In fact, actually, the danger for churches like us is really in those first few verses. The danger for churches like us that want to have a thick, deep Christian faith is that we can end up wanting to be more Christian than Jesus and add more rules and be more exclusive and more harsh.

If you could put up the next point, if you are less biblical than the Bible, you are not biblical. If you are less biblical than the Bible, you're not biblical. You're not following Jesus.

That would be the case for people. It doesn't matter if, you know, these... You know, Tobiah wants to be part of it, and, you know, we're all just religious people of goodwill. And, like, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. That's not right.

You've lost the plot. Now, earlier on, I said that this sermon could be called the good, the bad, and the ugly. We've already seen some of the bad and the ugly in terms of wanting to exclude people.

[ 16 : 57 ] But now this part, the ugliness, well, there's... Let's just look at it. There's an ugly text, which comes immediately afterwards.

Nehemiah has done good to get people paid again, to establish worship again. He's done some really good things, but... Well, let's look. Verse 23. It goes like this.

In those days, also, I saw the Jewish people who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people.

And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, You shall not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves.

Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin on account of such women? And among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all of Israel.

[ 18 : 12 ] Nevertheless, foreign women, pagan women, made even him to sin. Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?

Now, I said there's something a tiny bit that's a bit helpful. In the Hebrew, that verse 27, this isn't as if...

What it is is that Nehemiah would have said, Listen, this is the way we need to go. And the people that he was confronting, they got right in his face and hostile.

It's implied in the language, in the original language. So it would be as if I try to rebuke people and say we need to go in a different direction, but rather than people having a conversation about it or even agreeing with it, they get right in my face with full hostility and full anger, and that's part of the context of the violence, the cursing and the hair pulling.

Now, the other thing, as I said earlier, the issue isn't... Foreign is an unfortunate translation, and if you go back and listen to my sermon on embracing the beautiful vision, the religions of those days involved child sacrifice.

[ 19 : 29 ] It involved, let's say, somebody like... We have some families here with lots of daughters, of giving several of their daughters at a very young age to the temple where the women could be sexually abused in the name of God.

I mean, these are horrific religions. And one of the things I said in that sermon, which is really important to us to understand, and it's important for us to understand today, is that God doesn't want more Nigerians in his kingdom.

He doesn't want more Chinese in his kingdom. He doesn't want more Lebanese or Australians or Indians in his kingdom. He wants more children. That's what he wants.

He doesn't want more Rwandans. He wants more children. And in a sense, the second you give your life to Christ, in some ways, God never obliterates your cultural identity.

But he will relativize your cultural identity as your primary identity is found in him. And so the entire Old Testament, the book of Exodus, records how when the people of Israel, I was just reading this in my devotions within the last week or so, when the people of Israel left out of bondage and slavery in Egypt, many Egyptians accompanied the people of Israel to become part of the people of Israel.

[ 20 : 54 ] In Ezra chapter 6, we learn that many of the pagan nations, they come to their senses and say, how on earth do we think that we can worship God by giving our daughters to be sexually abused?

Or giving our sons to be murdered? Maybe we should become followers of Moses, of Yahweh. And God welcomes them.

So part of the language here is, and so it's really not about foreigners, it's about people who, it's not that they want to become Jews, they want to maintain their cultural practices, they want to, not their cultural, they want to maintain their worship practices.

And in a sense, they want to create, within their family structure, people who are, well, you can't, you know, how, you know, just think about it for a second. Like, you know, how could you both say, I'm going to come to church on Sunday where my daughters will be honored and protected and encouraged and loved and cherished, and the day before, I'll go to a place where I give my daughters to be sexually abused.

Like, how can the two things coexist? Like, how can they coexist? And that's what Nehemiah's point is.

[ 22 : 11 ] Now, should he have been cursing them and pulling their hair and beating them up? That's the ugly. That's the ugly. So here's a couple of things to help you understand.

There's a very, very famous line in Matthew chapter 27, verse 5. I'm not going to read it, but it's very simple. Judas has betrayed Jesus and he realizes he's done an evil thing and he throws the money in the temple and he goes out and he hangs himself.

So if you could put up the next point, this would be very helpful. Be careful of saying about any, about a biblical narrative, go and do likewise. Just think of Judas hanging himself.

Like, if you read a biblical narrative, don't read it thinking everything in the narrative means I should go and do likewise. No, that when, you know, they tell you that Judas hung himself, it's not saying everybody go out and hang themselves. When they have a story here about Nehemiah doing these things, it's not saying that that means you should go out and pull people's hair and beat them up and curse them.

You know, that's not what's, that's not the right way to listen to a biblical narrative. And I'll make it clear by making a couple of other points. The next one, if you could put up the next point, and this is the, this is really important for us to understand.

[ 23 : 23 ] You see, because when I say that the Bible's not teaching to go out and pull people's hair and curse them and beat them up, it's not because I've read Eckhart Tolle, Deepak Chopra, Brene Brown, and Glennon Doyle.

It's because I've read the Bible. See, if there's the next point, there's only one true hero in the Bible, someone who is unfailingly courageous, wise, and good, and his name is Jesus.

It's only when I read the narratives of Jesus that I could say, you know, that's, I need to pay attention to that in a way that I need to obey it. And part of the brilliance of the overarching story of the Bible is you read Abraham and you see how he's done some really remarkable things, but he's also sinned.

You read about Moses and the remarkable things, and he sinned. You read Joshua, remarkable things, and he sinned. You read, you know, you go on, David, you read Nehemiah, and on and on.

And, you know, Ruth wasn't without sin. And, you know, Esther lived a life of profound compromise before those acts of courage that ended up, in a sense, defining her life, her conversion.

[ 24 : 37 ] And so, you know, when you're reading the story of Nehemiah, you're not to read, there's many things in the story of Nehemiah that are exemplary, but he does some good things, but he also does things which are bad and ugly.

And here's the most important question about reading the Bible, if you could put up the next point. A wiser question to ask as you read a biblical narrative, that's a story, is this.

Is it I, Lord? Is it me, Lord? That actually is a quote from Matthew 26, verses 20 to 22, where Jesus tells the disciples that one of them is going to betray him that night, and each of the disciples say to Jesus, is it I, Lord?

You see, here's where you start to see the power of the biblical narrative. It's where you start to see how the Bible, reading the stories in the Bible, help you to live a nuanced life and a coherent life and a life of compassion that is centered and has a firm direction.

You see, amongst other things here, I mean, just in terms of biology, I'm closer to the Moabites and the Ammonites than I am to Nehemiah.

[ 26 : 03 ] You know, by the way, one of the things about that thing, which is a deep irony about that earlier part, that earlier part of the text, which has to be nuanced, where I said they were too harsh, it also forbids eunuchs from entering the assembly of God and Nehemiah was a eunuch.

And Nehemiah is, although a fallen hero, the hero of the book of Nehemiah. You see, here's where it is. When I read this story, if I'm to read this story the way that Jesus wants me to read this story, I'm to read the story and say, Lord, is it I?

Am I the one who's too harsh? Am I the one who's trying to be more biblical than the Bible? I'm to read the story and look and say, Lord, am I the Ammonite or the Moabite?

Am I the one who's, in a sense, cast off? I'm to read the story and say, am I the Tobiah? Am I causing problems in this church or in this movement?

Am I Eliashib? I can't remember how it's his name right now. Am I the one who's laxing my duty and allowing these terrible things to go on? Am I the one who's violent?

[ 27 : 16 ] Maybe not physically, but verbally and violent and doing the verbal equivalent of pulling people's hair. Am I the one whose hair is being pulled? See, that's a wiser way to read the Bible.

And when you read the Bible in that way, you see how all of a sudden, rather than just being good guys and good guys and bad guys, rather than what happens in our culture where you have, you fall into echo, there's the danger of falling into an echo chamber that will just make you always mad at everybody else.

To read these stories is all of a sudden, if I'm asking myself the question, am I the one too harsh? Am I the one pulling out the hair? Or am I the one to be like Nehemiah and step up and do something to fix it?

It's training you to look at people and look at yourself from different directions. It's training you to have compassion for people. It's training you to see nuance.

It's training you to pause. And yet all clearly centered, as we'll see in a moment, in our hero, Jesus, which is sort of as how the story is going to continue.

[ 28 : 31 ] Okay, George, those are all very interesting and I must confess I never thought you'd end up here.

But, I don't know, George, doesn't it still seem cruel? Like, does the Bible actually say that no Moabite can ever enter the assembly of God or no Ammonite? Well, here's where you need to read all of the Bible.

And here's where you need to read all of the Bible and then, and think about Jesus and go back and look at the text.

If you go to the next point, one of the things the Bible tells us is that no one has the right to God's presence and love. You don't have a right to being in God's presence.

You don't have a right to His love. We tend to think you do because our culture forms us to think that, like, our culture, the reason our culture would be deeply offended by what I said earlier about the difference between the pride worldview and the deep Christian worldview is that, at the end of the day, they think the deep Christian worldview doesn't refer to anything at all other than taste.

[ 29 : 53 ] That it's really just like me yelling, chocolate ice cream's the best and others yelling, no, strawberry ice cream's the best. And we just, our culture sees that that's all that religious claims are.

That's what they think. But that's a mistake of our culture. That's definitely not. I believe Jesus really existed. That's what history says. I believe He really died.

That's what history teaches. I believe the grave was empty. That's what history teaches. And I believe it's empty because He rose from the dead, that that really happened. It is just as true as to say that Joe Biden's the President of the United States of America, or Justin Trudeau's the Prime Minister of Canada, that these are truth statements.

And that, in fact, these stories are telling us the truth about the world and how to live in the world. And if we actually think of God as being real, not just something fanciful, but real, well, in a sense, to put it very simply, you don't have a right to have my wife Louise love you.

You can't just treat her any way you want. You can't just go up to say to her, you have a right to love me, you have a right to take me home, you have a right, no, I'm sorry, I have a right that you would take me home, I have a right that you would feed me, I have a right to do whatever I, no, you'd never say that about a human being.

[ 31 : 08 ] Well, why would you say that about God if God is real? We have no right, just like I have no right to say to one of you, you need to do this and this and this and this for me, you need to feed me.

No, no, no, you have no right, like get out of my face, have some boundaries. That's what we say, have boundaries. Well, if God is real, he has boundaries.

But you see, here's the thing which the Bible wants to teach you. It's why it is that Ruth was a Moabitess and she was welcomed into the assembly of God and why she's the great grandmother of King David who's responsible for most of the Psalms.



These next 10 weeks, we're going to be looking at Psalms and many of them will be Psalms written by a man whose great grandmother was from Moab. If you could put up the next point, no one is so good that they do not need God's grace and mercy and no one is so bad that they will not freely and lavishly receive God's mercy and grace when they humbly call out to him.

See, that's what the Bible is teaching us. You think you're good enough? There's no one good and so good that they don't need God's mercy and grace.

[ 32 : 37 ] You're deluding yourself if you think you're good enough. And there's no one so bad and there's no one from such a terrible family tree.

Doesn't matter if you can say my parents were terrible abusive alcoholics and my grandparents and my great-grandparents and my great-great-grandparents and my great-great-great-great-grandparents and I feel all those things of alcoholism and abuse in me and I don't love myself.

I can't imagine no, I can't even imagine why God would ever love me and I've been abandoned and I've been passed over and nobody loves me and nobody and I'm just completely not, there is there is no one so bad no one so left out that they will not freely and lavishly receive God's mercy and grace when they humbly call out to him.

What's the point of these texts about the Moabites? Father, I'm a Moabite. Have mercy. Have mercy.

God smiles and says you will receive my mercy. Come to me. Just wrapping it up.

[ 33 : 55 ] Nehemiah finishes his letter by saying something which points very much to the gospel. He says something which is deeply human and also points to how deeply wonderful the gospel is and how it centers us in reading stories.

Look what he says. Actually, if I start reading at verse 30, Claire, thus I cleansed them from everything foreign or pagan and I established the duties of the priests and the Levites each in his work and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times and for the first fruits.

He summarizes what he's done. his whole life has been about cleansing and establishing and providing good things to seek to do and then he closes with this, remember me, oh my God, for good.

God, I hope you remember me. Isn't that a deeply human prayer? God, I hope you remember me and in the Bible when it says remember, remember also means not just that he remembers but that there's affection and that he's willing to act on your behalf and in a sense the cry of the human heart is to at times say, God, please remember me.

But here's how the gospel changes everything. If you could put up the final point, the good news of the person and work of Jesus is that it turns your heart from saying, remember me, Lord, to saying, my Lord and Savior remembers me.

[ 35 : 33 ] My Lord and Savior remembers me. Not out of pride, not out of arrogance, but he remembers me.

I'm dealing with a very ugly thing. He remembers me. He's my Lord and my Savior. He remembers me. And I have the basis and the grounding and the hope to repent and amend my life.

I'm dealing with very hard things. I can say, you know, I've given my life to Jesus. I called out to him for mercy. And every day I can say, my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, he remembers me.

it's the cry of the heart of those whose heart belongs to Christ. I invite you to stand.

See, when you know that he remembers you, you can look at stories like this and you can ask God, in my family, am I the abusive one?

[ 36 : 50 ] In my workplace, am I the abusive one? Am I the one who's being abused? Do I do both? Do I abuse and am I also abused? Am I the one who's called to step up and be courageous and stop something which is wrong?

Am I the one being too narrow and not seeing the full grace of the Bible? Am I not wanting to take a stand and allowing the world to have its rules?

And I, you know, if we remember that, if we go into the text saying, my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, remembers me, there's a centered place by which I, it's not so much that I'm self-possessed, but that I know that I'm possessed by him.

and so I can ask those questions of the text and ask him for that wisdom and insight into my life and then make the changes I have to make.

Maybe the step of courage to cleanse, maybe the step of repentance because I've been abusive. but knowing the truth that my Lord and Savior remembers me, if that is not yet your place to stand, call out to him now.

[ 38 : 14 ] Call out to him now. Let's pray. Father, we give you thanks and praise that your word, that you wanted to humble us, not to humble us, Father, so that we would grovel, but that humble us so that we would be free, that we know we need to call out to you for mercy, that you want to give us mercy and grace, that that is your deep heart, the heart of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, three persons, one God, is that we would humble ourselves and come to Jesus.

And Lord, Father, we give you thanks and praise that that is your heart. And I ask, Father, for each one of us who are here, that you help us, Father, day by day and throughout the day, to be able to say, my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, remembers me.

Father, help it to be the prayer that we pray, the way we preach to ourselves throughout the day. Father, help those to be the words.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Amen.