

The Covenant Promises of God! Part II

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Preacher: Rev Brian Macleod

[0 : 00] Well, it was this month, back in 1958, that a pastor called David Wilkerson, maybe some of you have come across David Wilkerson through his book, *The Cross and the Switchblades*, sold over 50 million copies.

It's been made into a feature film. It was 50, sorry, 1958, this month, that he made a simple decision that would change not only his world, but the world.

He started to pray very intentionally in his evenings. He started seeking God, and he was sitting a couple of weeks after beginning to do that, looking through magazine *Life*, and he saw a picture of seven gang members on trial in New York City for the brutal killing of a 15-year-old polio victim, and it moved David in ways that he couldn't explain, and he found himself weeping over these boys, these lost souls, and he sensed God by his spirit speaking to him there, saying, go help these boys, go help these boys.

And this was the real defining moment of David Wilkerson's life. He began seeking out these city gangsters, ups and downs in the whole midst of it, but there was one guy he came across, Nicky Cruz, a rather handsome Puerto Rican.

He was the leader of one of the most wild and dangerous gangs, the Mao Maos. And so with the switchblade in hand, Nicky Cruz, he threatened to kill this young preacher, David Wilkerson.

[1 : 28] But David looked him in the eye and said these famous words, you could cut me into a thousand pieces and every piece of me would cry out that God loves you, Nicky. Speaking at David Wilkerson's funeral in 2011, many years later, Nicky Cruz would say, I've now come to say goodbye to my spiritual father.

And I've told people for years that if it wasn't for David Wilkerson, I'd be in the pit of hell today. Not only did David Wilkerson work alongside gangs and gang members, he also founded Teen Challenge, which helps 24,000 young people every single day to get free from their addictions in a thousand centers across 80 nations.

God turned this rather humble pastor into a world changer because he prioritized the place of prayer and because he heard also God speak to him specifically, go help these boys.

And he was willing to obey. And this morning, we're continuing to journey through this first chapter and we will get through into the second chapter and beyond that.

But this first chapter is so key into introducing who not only Nehemiah is, but his call and his purposes to God is, and how it can shape our prayers and shape the life of our church.

[2 : 47] Nehemiah was a man of prayer, but a man who also responded to God's call on his life to go and help his people. And he was willing to obey just as we see with David Wilkerson. And God would begin this renewing work among his own people through Nehemiah.

And just as he did it with Nehemiah, God can do it in our day too. God can begin the renewing work in our hearts through our own willingness to obey.

And actually, I believe that God is already doing something new in our midst for his good and for our benefit. And God is doing something fresh in churches up and down the country. Last Sunday, I was back in Mark's Memorial Church in Stornoway.

It was the communion season in the town. There was 11 new members in the church. There was four of them got baptized over the course of the weekend. And it was just such a joy to see the sense of fellowship and God's presence there and how encouraging to see that unfold.

And the people that were coming into the church were folks who came through the Shed Project and through the, you know, many of them or some of them have various addictions still going on.

[3 : 53] And it was that kind of willingness to say, no, you belong here and you can come to the table. It's not a case of you behave first and you get saved and then you belong.

It's no, you belong first and we sort out the rest as Jesus works in your life. It's that sense of welcome. And as we hear these stories happening in Stornoway, we also hear them all across our country.

And God is doing something in our nation again, though we don't often hear about it. Maybe we choose not to hear about it. Maybe it's easier to hear of the bad news. But may our hope and prayer for all of us today and as we continue the journey through this book be that God will use his word to pierce hearts and that he will bring us that ever-increasing hope for what he longs to do in us personally but also corporately as a church and throughout this community and nation once again.

And so just to briefly remind us where we're at in the book and the start of Nehemiah, he's a thousand miles away in Susa, a palace there serving under the king Artaxerxes.

He's the cupbearer, which is a really high and trusted office, the equivalent to the prime minister if you want to think of that today. And he is a Jew, Nehemiah. He's a thousand miles away from his own people.

[5 : 08] And he receives these rather unsettling news we heard there that the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, gates have been burned with fire. We've thought about that over recent weeks. And Nehemiah, he's a descendant of the exile.

So the longing of his heart is still with this place that he knows so well. And even though he's a thousand miles away, he responds in such a way that he, the only way that he knows how, and that's through prayer.

He prays, as we thought about a couple of weeks ago, to the Lord, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, merciful and compassionate, steadfast in love.

He's got that high view of God that he's reminded of how this God, our God, he keeps his covenant promises to those who first and foremost love him and also keep his commandments.

He prays, preparing for himself to go to the king, to ask this king, Artaxerxes, to be part of God's own plans, even though he was a pagan king. And so Nehemiah, he knew that he would need divine favor.

[6 : 07] And he also knew at the same time that he was being called to this radical action, this radical action plan to see God divinely work in his favor as he had done in the past with the likes of Moses and with other people through Israel's history.

But there would be another stop-off point in this prayer, and that's repentance. And so Nehemiah, as a true leader, we see that day and night he prays on behalf of God's servants as a servant himself.

And he places himself with the sins that God's people have committed. He doesn't say that because I'm a thousand miles away, then you guys are a million miles apart from my situation.

Even though the walls have fallen and I'm in a palace, he concludes himself. It's a very personal thing. It's also a corporate thing. It's a leader knowing that he's not exempt from blame.

He, as we read there from the end of verse 6, he says, It's so personal here.

[7 : 22] But he's including himself even though he's a thousand miles away. Now I wonder, this is, you know, two and a half thousand years ago. How might this speak to us today?

We're going through changing times in the Church of Scotland as a denomination. And it might be easy for us. And I know I've done this and I've not been well with this.

I've not done this well. But it can be easy to say, well, the Church of Scotland is going in this direction. It's becoming more progressive. It's becoming more liberal in theology. And we hear decisions on the General Assembly floor.

And we say, well, that's them making that decision. It's not us. We've got the word evangelical, Bible-believing Christians over our doorway. So that's not us. That's them making those decisions.

Them in the General Assembly. I know I've done that. I know I still do that. And I need to repent of that. Because I think we need to be careful as how we critique what's going on in our church.

[8 : 25] It's not that we can excuse ourselves of what's going on. But we, as though we get a free pass. Saying, oh, it's them. And this is us. We're the sound ones. And these are not.

But here's also where we don't get a free pass. You know, all the kind of decisions that have been made in the General Assembly in recent years. You know, in terms of same-sex marriage and, you know, a few other things.

Here's where we also don't get a free pass. And it's by simply being faithful but not being fruitful. And as churches up and down the country, we've been found wanting.

And just being there in the Presbytery meeting a few weeks back, I looked around. And bar one or two others, it was myself and Phil Gunn. We were the youngest there by 30-odd years.

And I'm not saying that to be ageist or anything like that. But this is the frightening situation that not just churches that are more liberal or whatever find themselves in.

[9 : 26] But evangelical, Bible-believing, Bible-professing, Bible-following Christians. And as I was there in the meeting, of course, there were people who were saddened at the decisions being made.

Churches closing and various cutbacks that we're having to make. But there was also a sense of holding on. There was a, well, do you remember we did that 20 years ago? That's 20 years.

That's a long time. 20 years ago. Did you remember so-and-so has been there for 40 years? 40 years, it's a long time. Similarly, I had a conversation with a member from a neighboring church.

And again, I confess that my tone wasn't as gracious as it should have been. And we talked about music. And the comment was how it felt as though the music from the lockdown services at the BBC and services at the Quay.

And I'm sure many of us were blessed by these services. But she said, you know, these songs, they were only new. And they've forgotten about our generation. They've forgotten about it. It's only the new songs. And I wondered that if I wasn't a 33-year-old minister but I was a 16-year-old boy, hearing that, just, oh, it's just, why don't they just go back to the songs that we've always known and we've always sung?

[10 : 43] I don't want to hear these new songs. I wonder if we're in danger of simply saying that we're not willing to move forward and we're losing the next generation and the next generations as a result.

Because we might convince ourselves that we're about Jesus and we believe the Bible and we hold firmly to Scripture and the cross, the centrality of the cross.

But are we about Jesus? A closer look may uncover more about us. And I'm struggling with this because I know I need to repent of this myself. That if we profess to have the name, we're an evangelical Bible-believing church above our door.

If we are bearers of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But if we've held off and we've held back in traditionalism. Or if we've held back in legalism.

Or if we've held back others through simply just not being open. If we thought that people are automatically going to come back to church. I mean we saw coming in.

[11 : 45] The crowds, the cars on the road up there. With the rugby pitch and the football pitch. How can churches compete with that? In one sense. If we expect people to come to us.

Rather than we to them. And it's we who must repent of this. I who must repent of this. We must humble our hearts before the Lord. The God of heaven.

The great and awesome God. Merciful and compassionate. Steadfast in love. This is the bad news before the good news.

The getting real with God. And saying God. This is how it really is. We're not fudging over anything. As we might have done in years gone by. We're saying this is how it is. This is the situation we find ourselves in.

The people are up the road there. Not in a church on a Sunday morning. They're elsewhere. They're not connected. We're aging. We're depleting in numbers. But we're still rich in resource as a church. This is where we are.

[12 : 46] But it's also an amazing time to be a Christian. It's an amazing time. It's an unusual day to be a Christian. I mean heck. We saw it this week with the treatment of Kate Forbes.

I mean it's as if you could be anything but a Christian. Isn't there something interesting happening? It's not a time to play it safe. And Kate Forbes. Man God bless her.

God bless her. She just spoke it as it is. So it's not a time to play it safe. And I don't say that with any sense of youthful enthusiasm. I say it as our nation has been sapped of hope.

And Fred Drummond spoke to us about that a few weeks back. There's a hope deficit in Scotland. And people are looking for it in all sorts of different places. All sorts of different ways except the church.

And he said that the world does not understand the Christian faith. We've allowed a caricature of ourselves to be accepted about us. So we're not in a good state. That's the bad news.

[13 : 45] But there will be good news. Just imagine this church. This place being a beacon of hope. Beacon of light. Flowing outwards into every part of this community.

We know the potential is there. We know the potential is there. We know that there's good news beginning to spread. But repentance must first begin in the house of God.

We've got to clear out the old tables and let God come in afresh. Clean hands. Pure hearts. And it's repentance that takes us to that deeper place with God.

And in Nehemiah it's all about the heart reconnecting with God himself. God's not looking at the outward appearance. He's looking at the heart. And in repenting of where we've gone wrong.

God gives fresh hope to his people. That in the dying embers. In the rubble in Nehemiah's day. And in the changing situation of our day.

[14 : 43] It's the key to restoration and renewal. It's the common pattern of every revival. Every move of God. God's people humbly and sincerely repenting. As Tyler Staten puts it.

The new creation is seeded by the prayers of God's people. And watered by their tears. Both are ingredients. Key ingredients in the remaking of the world.

I wonder if we'll be a people who are willing and humble enough to look to the God of heaven. To say this is where we've got it wrong. But you're the God who loves us with an everlasting love.

Would you do a work in us. A fresh work in our day. Would you move in your spirit. In a fresh way. To lead us and to guide us. Into all your purposes.

And to fulfill all your promises. As we stand in your word. As your faithful people. Faithful and fruitful. This is the day that we're living in. And when God does something difficult.

[15 : 46] Something that can be difficult. To think about. To talk about. In the hearts of his people. Such as repentance. And thinking about what that means. And naming specific things. And coming to God.

Before his throne. And doing so with confidence. With grace. It's that we might know him. And experience him. And love him in a deeper. And profound. And more intimate way.

It's an invitation. From God the Father. Who is the Father? Of compassion. The God of all comfort. It's an invitation. To see his son. More clearly. It's an invitation.

To know fellowship. With the Holy Spirit. To know that renewed experience. With Father, Son. And Holy Spirit. And so we. We repent.

And we. We say God. We come to you as we are. Broken. Unashamed. Before your throne. And as we.

[16 : 42] Repent. We're brought then. To remember. To remember. What God has done. In the past. And this is how Nehemiah. Continues in his prayer. Verse 8 onwards. By saying to the Lord.

Remember. Remember. The instruction. You gave your servant Moses. Saying. If you're unfaithful. I'll scatter you among the nations. But if you return to me. And obey my commands.

Then. Even if. Your exiled people. Are at the farthest horizon. I will gather them from there. I'll bring them to the place I've chosen. As a dwelling place for. My name.

They're your servants. Your people. Who you've redeemed. By your great strength. And your mighty hand. You see how the prayer shifts. You did this God. You did this. You did this. You did this. And you can do it again. It's personal.

Because it's the covenant promises. Of God. Yes. Relations have been. Broken. People of God. Have sinned against the God of heaven. Remember the story of the prodigal son. Father. I've sinned.

[17 : 38] Against heaven. What happens. When he comes with that humble repentance. He gets the. Cloak of honor. The ring. My son. So God says.

In the place of brokenness. And repents. You're my sons and daughters. Come back to me. And such is the confidence Nehemiah has in God's word.

That as he remembers what God has done. He goes back to the days of Moses. The days of old. Where Deuteronomy. God was merciful to his people.

That Nehemiah knew that. The conditions God presented to his people were. If you keep my statutes and commandments. If you did this. Then you'll be blessed. And you'll prosper.

You'll live by them. If not. You'll be scattered. And they are scattered. But there was also the words. But if.

[18 : 34] But if from there. From your place of scattering. You seek the Lord your God. And you will find him. If you seek him. With all your heart. With all your soul.

But when you're in distress. All these things have happened to you. And in later days. You will return. To the Lord your God. And obey him. For the Lord your God. Is a merciful God.

You will not abandon. Or destroy you. Or forget the covenant. With your ancestors. Which he confirmed to them. By oath. God had promised. That if. His people return. From their waywardness.

And commit themselves to him. Afresh. Even if they've been banished. To the. To the. The most distant land. Under the heavens. From there. The Lord their God. Will gather them. And bring them back.

He's the God of all compassion. And the God of all comfort. You know. We listen. At the beginning of the service. To a prayer from. Keddie's.

[19 : 29] Actually I think it's his cousin. Not his uncle. I think I got that wrong. Reverend William MacLeod. And you know. He was involved in the revival. In 1949 onwards.

In Barvis. In the Isle of Lewis. After the revival. Began spreading from Barvis. To other towns. It was God's power. Began increasing. And in the village of Arnall.

There was a. A bitter opposition. From some of the other ministers. And so 30 leaders. And people. Christians gathered. To pray. Together with the.

The leader of the revival movement. Duncan Campbell. They went to a local farmhouse. They began interceding. And about midnight. Duncan Campbell. Called a local blacksmith.

And said. God. Wants you to. Lead us in prayer. And he prayed for about. Half an hour solid. And he looked up at heaven. Coming to the end of his tether.

[20 : 25] Saying. God. Do you know that your honour is at stake. You promised. To pour water on the thirsty. And floods on the dry ground. And God. You are not doing it.

There are five ministers in this meeting. I don't know where. One of them stands. In your presence. Not even Mr. Campbell. But if I know anything at all. About my own poor heart. Then I can say. And I think that you know.

I stand before you God. As an empty vessel. And I'm thirsty. I'm thirsting for thee. And a manifestation of thy power. I'm thirsty to see the devil. Defeated in this parish. I'm thirsty to see this community.

He gripped as you gripped Barvis. I'm longing for revival. And God. You are not doing it. I'm thirsty. And you promised to pour water on me. And he paused.

And he said. God. Your honour. Is at stake. I now take it upon myself. To challenge you. To fulfil. Your covenant engagement. Maybe some of us know the story.

[21 : 24] Of what happened after. That. The granite house shook. Like a leaf. It's known as the house that shook. One of my friends. My old youth worker. Norman Gunji Morrison.

He lives there now. A jug on the sideboard fell. And it broke. Dishes. On the dresser. Were rattling. And wave upon wave. Of divine power.

Sweat through the room. At that moment. The spirit of God. Sweat through that entire village. People were awakened from their sleep. They got dressed. And they made their way. To church. Crying out for God.

To have mercy. And so overwhelming. Was the presence of God. Sometimes. That people. They were. They were simply afraid. To open their mouths. Such was the sense of God. A holy fear. Of what God has done before.

He can do it again. And it might not look the same. But God can do it again. A broken heart. And a contrite spirit. He will not despise. I despise.

[22 : 20] The seeds of rebirth. Are in the tears of repentance. And God's moving all over the world. He's moving right now. In Asbury. In the university there.

In the USA. And it's a very different kind of. Move of God. So it seems. It's among many students. And young adults. They're experiencing. Where one eyewitness says. It's an inexpressibly deep sense.

Of peace. Wholeness. And holiness. And belonging. What was an ordinary chapel service. God moved sovereignly in their midst. Through a tangible sense of peace.

God's moving in a town of 6,000 people. They've had 90,000 visitors. They had in the last couple of weeks. And God is moving. In a generation that has perhaps most keenly felt the effects of a pandemic.

Young people. Young adults. And a generation that seeks belonging. And that is looking for everywhere. But the church to find it. And God has moved among them.

[23 : 20] Under in five years time. It's a long time away. In five years time. Where do we imagine this church to be? Who do we imagine to be in through these doors? What do we want the church to be?

To look like? What do we want to offer? Every generation. The next generation. Every generation. To declare the mighty works of God. We want the next generation's floor.

To be our ceiling. We want this to be a place. Where all people come. To worship the living God. What is it God needs to do in our hearts?

What is it we need to come. And bring before the Lord. And say God. Would you do that afresh in our day? Like you did in the past. We thank you for your faithfulness.

Through many generations. But what is it you need to do in our hearts? In this day. Just closing off our thoughts this morning. We see that the book of Nehemiah.

[24 : 21] The whole book. Is a visible reminder of God's mercy to his people. Yes life had changed for God's people. For the Israelites. All their treasured institutions.

They were no more. They're a weak people. They're vulnerable. But even in this sense of vulnerability. God promised he would be with them. His covenant promises stated as such.

Even if they were a mere handful. Even if they were scattered. And we thought about what. About how Nehemiah's prayer. Was based upon what God had said. And done in the past.

That God had done it before. And he can do it again. We thought about how the Church of Scotland. At the present time. Is going through a pruning of sorts. A humbling. And a scattering of sorts.

That Nehemiah. As we finish off our time. Verse 11. He. Looks forward with hope. And with confidence. To the God who's revealed himself.

[25 : 20] And to the God. Who redeems his people. Where we read this. Lord let you in ear. Be attentive to the prayer. Of this your servant. And to the prayer. Of your servants. Who delight in revering your name.

Give your servant success today. By granting him favour. In the presence of this man. Who of course is the king. He's looking for divine. Favour.

It's the pause. Of this prayer. Nehemiah's prayed this. Over several months. And now was the time for action. For Nehemiah. To go to the king. And he would need divine favour.

Just as we need divine favour. In our day. And for us. As people. We're not of the old covenant. As Nehemiah. As one looking to the coming of the Messiah. We are people.

Of the new covenant. Who through Jesus. We can approach God. Through God's throne of grace. With confidence. So that we may receive mercy. And find grace. To help us in our time of need.

[26 : 18] And as we're asking God. To move in our midst. We can already be thankful. Of what he's doing. At present. What is God doing in our midst? Last week.

What about the generosity of this church? Amazing generosity. Of the people here. What a wonderful witness that was. To the community. Going to Syria and to Turkey.

What a wonderful witness that is. What about little buddies. And the witness that is. To the parents. That the mums who come through. And that one of the mums.

Who regularly attends. Would. And who works for the local co-op. And as part of the fundraising. Efforts of the local co-op. The little buddies were awarded. A hundred pounds.

They recognize the good work. That they're doing. And that we're doing. In this church. That's a sure sign of God's blessing. That the community is taking notice. Of what's happening in these. Four walls.

[27 : 19] And which we can say. Well we want to now bless our little buddies. It's going to go back to blessing our buddies. Blessing our community. What else? Well. As a church.

We've been invited. To be part of the meetings. For the Invergordon Development Trust. Steering group. They said in an email. That they feel the church.

Is an important part of the community. And their voice is needed. Our voice is needed. In the community. Isn't that a great blessing? At the end of last year. We received some funding.

To do not only the Santa's Grotto. But to get started. With our warm space initiative. We received some leftover funding. From the Church Scotland. That got a call from the grants manager. He said. We've got a bit of money for free. Just.

It needs to go. Do you want it? Great. He knows what's happening. We were able to donate. Then 250 pound. To Park School. And then 250 pound. To South Lodge.

[28 : 13] That will go to help families. Who are finding these times. Really tough. And. At South Lodge. The head teacher. David. Messaged and said. This is going to go towards.

Our breakfast club. Where the stigma. Of kids coming. To school. With empty tummies. Will be gone. We want to have a breakfast club. And that will work towards that. I just think. What a blessing that can be.

At the church. We have a. A voice in our community. We want to. Show people Jesus. In all sorts of different kinds of ways. What about our. Regular. Weekly.

And monthly clubs. We have a. We have a. We have a. Our bite and bladder numbers. Which have been consistent. Our soup lunches. Which the numbers have been really good as well. What a blessing that is. To see people coming back.

And integrating with the church. See new members. As part of our church. And what a blessing they are to us. In so many ways. See new children. Coming. We pray God for more.

[29 : 07] Children. For families to come through the door. We have seen great numbers of primary age kids. Coming to our. Our games nights. We have over 40 at the last one. Just think the potential is there.

We are going to start. The S1 to S3. Drop in lunch club. We will receive some additional local funding. That will go towards helping that. Take place. We have got new chairs on the way.

And that will just help our. Our space here. To be a multi-purpose. Multifunctional. Seven day a week space. And the potential is all there. And God's blessing the work.

And the next few years. Are critical for us as a church. And we pray. And we pray. And we pray. Into the work. But we also. Continue.

In the work. I wonder if God is calling some of us. To that place of prayer. And that's our place. That's where God is calling us. I wonder if some of us. If God is calling some.

[30 : 04] Some others of us. To the place of action. In Amaya. He prayed. And he got to work. And it may be. That moving forward. May well be.

That some of our personal preferences. Whether that's pews. And chairs. Whatever. Styles and music. Whatever. Not that we're leaving. Everything. Old.

And traditional. Behind. Not at all. But some of our own. Personal preferences. And I need to put. To one side. And say. God. What do you want to do? What do you want to do? For a new day?

For the bigger picture. Of your plan here. Because we can be so encouraged. Of what he's doing at present. And as we look forward. We see that as Nehemiah. Responds to God. There's a.

Dogged. Determination. In him. To do something. To have faith in the God. Who can do anything. Our faith. Sometimes only takes us so far. But we. Have faith in the God.

[31 : 00] Who can do anything. God. A God. A God. Who can move. And do the same. In our day. As he did. In Moses day. In Nehemiah's day. In days in Lewis.

In the revival. And in other days. Glenn Scrivener. Sums it up for us. Really well. The Christian message. Is the greatest story. Ever told. Of the God.

Who took flesh. And plunged the depths. Of human experience. He died the death. Of a slave. Under the judgment. Of God. He plumbed an infinite death. Of pain. And curse.

He rose up again. And invited the world. To a table. Where there are no lords. Except him. The servant king. And where we are all. Brothers and sisters. It is an unimprovable story.

Because you couldn't have. A higher power. Plummet to a deeper pit. To make more impact. For more people. Forever. We have the greatest hope. The hope of the gospel.

[31 : 55] And we must march on. Forward. Keep on looking to Jesus. The author. And perfecter of faith. Because when the odds. Are stacked against the church. In history.

That's when God moves in power. That's when he shows himself. To be who he is. If we're willing to say. God. This is where we are. We've got it wrong.

In some ways. We want to be faithful to you. In our day. In our time. How will you reveal yourself to us? How will you learn? Show us the way. We yield to you.

We pause. We rejoice and reflect. And remember and repent. We ask God to do something. And we yield to him. P-R-A-Y. So let us do so.

Yield to Jesus. In the power of his spirit. And for his sake and glory. Amen.