

The Enemy Within

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Thank you.

Thank you. All right. What's up, faith family? Got your Bible? Go to Nehemiah chapter 5. Nehemiah chapter 5. We're continuing in our series, our restored series, talking about how God brings restoration out of ruin.

And looking at the story here of Nehemiah, we've been looking at this from really two main perspectives. First is the perspective of Nehemiah. I've been challenging you these last several weeks to be asking the question, what is it that breaks your heart?

What is it that God has called you to do? And then to actually take action on that, to do something about it. God has called every single one of us in one way or another to help bring restoration out of all the brokenness in the world.

[2 : 1 4] And I hope that you're taking that seriously and that you're having that honest question before you and the Lord of what is it that God is calling you to do? Secondly is the perspective of Jerusalem.

That is, you're the one that's in ruin. It's your life that feels like it's in rubble. And this series is to encourage you that God can restore your life, that he can put things back together and make things whole.

One thing I just want to say before we dive in is, is at this point in the series, I would love to hear your restoration stories. Maybe it's not happening right this moment, but if there's been a time in your life when you were kind of in the rubble and God brought life back together, he restored your life.

We would love to hear that testimony, even share some of those in our services to encourage, we'll protect names and details if necessary, but to encourage one another in how God is working in our life.

So, Nehemiah chapter 5, if you got your Bibles, Nehemiah chapter 5, and we're going to begin reading at verse 1 on down through verse 8. I'm going to invite you, if you're able to do so, to please stand for the honor of reading God's Word.

[3 : 25] Nehemiah chapter 5, verse 1. It says, There arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. For there were those who said, with our sons and our daughters we are many, so let us get grain that we may eat and keep alive.

There were also those who said, we're mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine. And there were those who said, we've borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and vineyards.

Now, our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers and our children as their children. Yet, we're forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves.

And some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but it is not in our power to help it. For other men have our fields and our vineyards. But I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

I took counsel with myself and I bought charges against the nobles and the officials. And I said to them, you are exacting interest each from his brother. And I held a great assembly against them and said to them, we, as far as we are able, have bought back our Jewish brothers who have been sold to the nations, but you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us.

[4 : 50] And they were silent and confined, could not find a word to say. This is God's word. Would you pray with me and pray for me as we ask God to teach us tonight?

Father, thank you for this time tonight to be in your word. I think this is a very important message for us as a church, for us as your people. And so, Holy Spirit, come and teach us, guide us into truth, bring conviction, bring clarity on what our mission truly is.

And Lord, just give us an understanding of what it is that you want us to do tonight. And I pray this in Jesus' name and God's people said, amen. Amen. You may be seated. Well, everything fell apart because of fried chicken and beer.

That was the story of the 2011 Boston Red Sox. Any Red Sox fans? If so, get out. All right, get out. I'm just kidding. I'm just kidding.

You can stay. You can stay. That team, the 2011 Boston Red Sox, was supposed to be unstoppable. Following a very disappointing season, the front office brought in a slew of talent, players like Dustin Pedroia and David Ortiz.

[6 : 09] They brought in a stellar pitching staff of Josh Beckett and John Lester and John Lackey. I mean, the AL East was the Red Sox to lose.

And boy, did they lose it. Listen, from April to August, the Red Sox went 80 and 41. They could essentially coast into the postseason.

But when September rolled around, everything fell apart. During that span, they went 7-20. They lost their last game to the Orioles, making them the first team in the history of baseball not to make the postseason after having a nine-game lead during the month of September.

And what was the reason for this crumble? It wasn't injuries. It wasn't that all the other teams just improved their rosters. It was fried chicken and beer.

You see, after the season ended, the Boston Globe reported what was happening in the team's locker room.

[7 : 24] One reporter said this, quote, It was a story of disunity, disloyalty, and dysfunction like few others in baseball history.

Knives were out for everyone, close quote. Terry Francona, the manager, had marital problems and became addicted to pain medication, essentially becoming a lame duck coach.

The players were furious with management because they made them play a doubleheader in the heat of August. David Ortiz was accused of being distant from his teammates.

Players publicly criticized other players for faking injuries. But what got all the headlines was that starting pitchers Lester, Beckett, and Lackey, on the days that they were not pitching, stayed in the clubhouse drinking beer, eating Popeye's fried chicken, and playing video games, listen, rather than supporting their teammates on the field.

When the season was over, the team was completely dismantled. The coach was fired. The players were traded. The general manager left the Red Sox and took a job at the Chicago Cubs.

[8 : 41] Here's the point. A team that was talented enough to beat any opponent on the field fell apart because of what was happening in the clubhouse.

And by the way, Faith Family, nothing gives your pastor more joy than starting a sermon with a story about the Red Sox losing. And all God's people said, amen. That's right.

You better say amen. All right, here we go. Now listen, let's put sports aside, and you know good and well that story teaches us something that we all know is true in life, right?

And it's this, that the greatest enemy we face is the enemy within. Amen? The greatest enemy we face is the enemy within. It happens in so many different areas of life.

You take, for example, companies that have this great marketing strategy, this incredible product, and yet they fall apart because of the conflict with coworkers. A relationship that gets busy with external things while internally growing distant from one another.

[9 : 47] Or maybe we take our health seriously, yet there's something inside that's growing. Or maybe everything appears to be fine on the outside, but as Chris Stapleton sings, we just can't climb the mountains of our minds.

That is, oftentimes, the greatest enemy we face, listen, is internal. And that is exactly what Nehemiah is facing here in Nehemiah chapter 5.

Let me quickly remind you of everything that has transpired thus far. You remember, in Nehemiah chapter 1, he receives news that Jerusalem is in ruin.

It breaks his heart because it's a disgrace to the glory of God. For months, he weeps and he prays and he fasts until he eventually, chapter 2, takes his request before the king.

The king, Artaxerxes, will overturn a decree he's already given. He'll give Nehemiah the leave of absence. He'll appoint Nehemiah the governor of Judah. He'll send Nehemiah with all the authority that he needs.

[10 : 56] And he'll even pick up the tab. And you remember from last week, then as soon as Nehemiah, now we're in the last part of chapter 2, as soon as Nehemiah arrives on the scene in Jerusalem, the sharks start circling.

Do you remember them? Do you remember who they are? Do you remember the enemies that begin to emerge? Three men. Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. They will threaten Nehemiah in chapter 2.

They will try to assassinate him in chapter 4. They will spread rumors about him in chapter 6. All in an effort to shut the mission down. And why are they so intent on shutting down the mission?

Well, there's lots of reasons. We gave you three. First is racial. Sanballat is a Samaritan. And they hate the Jews. Another reason is political. If you reestablish Judah and you reestablish Jerusalem as a booming city, it's going to cut into our power.

And third was financial. Once again, if Jerusalem begins to become the main trade route for everyone, we're going to lose business. And what is Nehemiah's response to all of this external opposition?

[12 : 09] You remember from last week. He remains confident in the sovereignty of God. Remember, he tells them, listen, our success isn't dependent upon you. Our success is dependent upon the hand of our sovereign God.

Amen? And then he takes comfort with the people of God. He rallies the troops together. He will frequently come back to the vision of this is where we're going.

And this is what God has called us to do. And this is why it matters. And then with all of the distractions that his enemies tried to give him, he remained focused on the mission of God.

He refused to become distracted from the mission. Well, now here in chapter 5, Nehemiah is faced with a different enemy.

Listen to me, Faith Family. It's not the opponents on the field. It's his own teammates in the clubhouse. Look at it in chapter 5, verse 1.

[13 : 08] Now there arose a great cry of the people and of their wives against, everybody say this with me, their Jewish brothers. So this is internal.

This is a family problem. For there were those who said, with our sons and daughters we're many, so let us get grain that we may eat and keep alive. This is a very, this is life or death situation.

And there were those who said, we're mortgaging our fields and our vineyards and our houses to, to get grain because of the what? Famine. So there's a severe famine taking place.

And then notice, notice the next. And there were those who said, we have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards. Now, now notice this phrase. Our flesh is as of the flesh of our brothers.

So does everybody see what's going on here? This is not a battle with Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. This is not a battle with the Arabs or the Samaritans. It's a battle with their own people.

[14 : 15] In other words, faith family, we got trouble right here in River City. And it has been brewing for a long time. In fact, this issue has actually been going on even well before Nehemiah showed up on the scene.

What's the issue? What's the problem? Listen to me, faith family. It's the erosion of the unity among God's people. The erosion of unity among the people of God.

And as we learned in our armor series this summer, it is the enemy's most effective tactic. Amen? It is not opposition from the outside.

It's the enemy within. Now, let me explain the context so you understand what's going on here. And just tell me if any of this sounds familiar maybe over the last few years.

The economy is in a downturn. The economy is struggling. There's a famine taking place. I mean, people have been so busy building the wall, they don't even have time to grow food.

[15 : 20] And that means it's very difficult to get basic necessities like eggs and milk and bread. This has caused inflation. Prices are sky high.

And to make matters worse, the Persian government, who clearly is never going to go without, has raised taxes on the people. Interest rates are through the roof.

People can't afford to buy a home. They can't pay their mortgage. It's also there's a military state of emergency where crime is happening everywhere. Judah is being attacked on all sides.

And that's why they're trying to build a wall to protect their borders. Does any of this sound familiar? Has anybody ever experienced something like this before?

I mean, you can't make this up. There really is nothing new under the sun. Amen? And so Nehemiah is facing this crisis. This is taking place externally.

[16 : 21] But the greater, listen, this is important. The greater concern for Judah, are you listening? Say yes. Was that rather than seeing this crisis as an opportunity for God's people to serve one another, they saw it as an opportunity to take advantage of one another.

Notice it on the screen. Here it is. What was an opportunity to do good? It became an opportunity for greed among the people of God.

The haves are exploiting the have-nots. In faith family, it's becoming so bad, people have to mortgage their fields and their vineyards. They even have to send their children to be slaves.

And this, of all places, is happening among the people of God. Now what's wrong with this? Aside from the obvious, surface-level reason, this is a direct violation of the law of God.

God could not have been more clear regarding how His people were to act with one another. Go back to Exodus chapter 22 and verse 25. It says, Look at Deuteronomy 23.

[17 : 54] It's the same idea. Verse 19. You shall not charge interest on loans to your brother. So that is a part of the family, the Jewish people.

Interest on money. Interest on food. Interest on anything that's lent for interest. You may charge a foreigner interest, but you may not charge your brother interest.

That the Lord your God may bless you in all that you undertake in the land and that you are entering to take possession of it. Look at Leviticus chapter 25 verse 39. If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave.

Now you can hire him or you can take him on as a hired worker and as a sojourner. We'll keep the verses up, but let me just very quickly explain the difference.

In the ancient Near East, a slave has no rights. A slave makes no money. They're basically treated like they're not a human being. But a hired hand still has rights, can still make money, can still go home to their family.

[19 : 00] They still have dignity. Does everybody understand? So if you take someone on among the people of God, you don't treat them like a slave. You treat them like a hired worker. Keep reading. He shall serve with you until the year of Jubilee.

And then he shall go out from you, he and his children with you, and go back to his own clan and return to his possessions of his fathers. For they are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt.

Listen, they shall not be sold as slaves. Could that be any clearer? Could it be any more black and white? And what, of course, has God... You remember back many months ago when we went to the book of Exodus.

God is saying, we're not going to treat each other the way the world treats us. That's a good place for an amen. Egypt made you slaves.

We are not going to make one another slaves of each other. And then finally, Leviticus 19.18 shows us what the whole guiding principle of the community of God was supposed to be about.

[20 : 01] Leviticus 19.18 says, You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but what shall you do? You shall say it, love your neighbor as yourself.

I am the Lord. Amen? So if you've zoned out, what do you do? Zone back in. Listen, could it have been any more clear for the people of God?

You're not to charge interest on your own people. You're not to make slaves of your own people. You are to love your neighbor as yourself. And the exact opposite was happening.

They were lending to each other with interest. They were taking each other as slaves. They were not showing love. Now listen to me. The issue here isn't money.

The issue's not money. The issue is selfishness. The issue is rather than serving, you're only concerned about self.

[21 : 06] And that will always destroy the unity of God's people. Somebody say preach, preacher. You want to destroy the unity of God's people?

Then think everything is about yourself. And some of you would say, well, I don't know why you're spending all this time talking about it. We're New Testament Christians. We're not even under the Old Covenant law.

These rules don't even apply to us. And I would say theologically, you're right. But notice what Paul says, New Testament, to New Testament believers.

So then, as we have opportunity, let us say it. Do good to everyone. Shouldn't we be a people that try to do good for everybody?

Yeah. But notice the next phrase. Especially to those who are of the household of faith. In other words, the same principle, the exact laws may not apply to us today, but the same principle does.

[22 : 10] Namely, you should want to do good for everybody. But especially God's people. Because God's people are not to depend on everybody else to take care of them.

They should depend on one another to take care of them under the provision of our God. God. I interrupted your clapping.

Sorry, sorry, sorry. Now, how does Nehemiah, that's the context, how does Nehemiah respond to this, verse 6? I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

As we would say in the South, Nehemiah has his knickers in a knot. He is madder than a piano player in a marching band. You'll get that later. He is fuming mad.

In fact, the Hebrew here really means to burn, to be hot. He is angry. And some of you may say, but I didn't think as Christians we're supposed to be angry.

[23 : 14] To which I would say, where did you get that idea? Moses is angry when he sees the idolatry of Israel. David is angry when he hears Goliath taunt the people of God.

Paul gets angry when false teachers add things to the gospel. I mean, you want a rated R? If you really read it as it actually is in the Greek, you want a rated R book, read Galatians.

Read what Paul says to the Judaizers. Paul says, anybody that adds anything to the gospel, let them be accursed. He says to the Judaizers, I hope the knife slips.

And if you know at all what that context is, you know what that means. I'm not going to explain it to you, okay? Paul has very strong, righteous anger towards anybody that would add anything to the gospel.

Faith family, show me someone who doesn't get angry, and I'll show you someone who has no conviction. Let me say that again. Show me someone who doesn't get angry, and I'll show you someone who has no conviction.

[24 : 19] This reminds me very much of Martin Luther. In October 1510, he took his very first trip to Rome. Luther had never been to Rome before, and he was, as a monk, he was so excited to be able to go to the mothership, to be able to go to Rome, and he was so convinced it was going to be a place of worship.

And when he got to Rome, he did not see people serving one another. He saw people taking advantage of the poor. They were selling, the Catholic Church was selling what's known as indulgences.

Some of you know what that is. Indulgences was that if you paid the right price, you could free one of your family members from purgatory. The old slogan went like this, when a coin in a copper bowl rings, another soul from purgatory springs.

And when Luther began to climb the steps there in Rome, he looked out over this religious circus that was taking place, and this man once full of anticipation was full of righteous anger.

Why? Because Rome was not full of Christian service. Rome was full of religious selfishness.

[25 : 33] And it made Luther angry to the core. Faith family, do you realize that the Bible commands us to be angry? Look at Ephesians 4, verse 26.

Be, say it, angry. That's a present imperative in the Greek. It's a command. Be angry. You should, at times, be angry. But aren't you glad there's the rest of the verse?

Be angry, and everybody say it with me. Do not sin. In other words, here's the issue. Listen, listen. The issue is not your anger. It's what you do with it.

The problem's not being angry if it's righteous anger. It's what do you do with that righteous anger. Because you can be angry and seek to destroy, or you can be angry and try to restore.

You can be angry and make matters worse, or you can be angry and try to make things right or better. But make no mistake, anger is the righteous response towards anyone who is seeking to damage the unity of God's people.

[26 : 40] And why is that the case? Because Nehemiah knows something that certainly if you've been in ministry, you know, and it's this. If you think it's hard to build walls, try building unity amongst a group of sinners.

It's a whole lot harder work to build unity than to build walls, which is why when anybody comes at that, it is right to be angry.

And Nehemiah is angry. It's why Paul says in Ephesians 4, 1, I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, I urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called, with humility and gentleness and patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to do what?

Say it. Maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. That is, you've got to make, let me say it this way, unity is hard work. It doesn't just happen.

You have to maintain it. You have to work at it. Now, think before we move on of the emotions here of Nehemiah. It will tell you something about just how important the unity of God's people is.

[27 : 49] Listen, are you still with me? Say yes. In Nehemiah chapter 1, when Nehemiah hears, he gets a report that the city is not fortified, what is his emotional response?

Sadness. It breaks his heart. He weeps for days. But in Nehemiah chapter 5, when he hears a report that the people of God are not unified, what's his emotional response?

Anger. Do you see the point I'm making? Nehemiah realizes it's a far bigger deal that the unity of God is at stake rather than the city.

In other words, notice it this way. It does no good to build the walls of God's city if we're only going to tear down God's people. Like it misses the whole mark of the work.

Is that we are here to build by God's strength. We don't do it in our own strength. But to build his church, which he's building through us. Again, it's his power doing it.

[28 : 55] So why in the world would you want to tear it down? And that's why Nehemiah gets so angry when the enemy from within surfaces.

Now notice what happens next. Verse 7. I took counsel with myself. That is, he channeled his righteous anger in a righteous way. Preach, preacher.

And I brought charges against the nobles and officials. And I said to them, you are exacting interest from each of his brother. And he said to them, we as far as we are able have bought back our Jewish brothers who have been sold to the nations.

But you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us. So what Nehemiah does, this is so important, Nehemiah doesn't gossip. He doesn't undercut.

He addresses it with them. And he simply points out why their selfishness and lack of support of one another is a problem.

[29 : 56] That this is not how we ought to be with one another. Let me show you very quickly three reasons why it is a problem that the people of God act this way. And again, what I'm saying is rather than being selfish, we want to be servants.

Amen? Rather than being selfish, we want to be servants. And here's why being selfish among the people of God is a problem. Number one, look at verse nine. Look at verse nine. It says, the thing that you are doing, say it with me, is not good.

So the first reason is, it's not good. I went to seminary to build sermons like this, right? It's not good. It's not good. At the most, many of you are like, I could totally do this.

All right? So, listen, at the most basic level, you know this. At the most basic level, this is not how we treat our brothers and sisters. I mean, at the most basic level, you know this is not good.

It's not good to approach people this way. Why? Notice it on the screen. Because ministry is not seeking the good of self, it's seeking the good of others, right? Don't we understand that?

[31 : 02] At a very basic level, it's good to serve. It's not good to be selfish. But here's the next reason. Keep reading in verse 9.

Not only is it not good, but then Nehemiah says, ought you not to walk in the fear of God to prevent the taunts of the, say it, the nations, our enemies?

So here's the second reason. Not only is it not good, it's not godly. What I mean by this is, the entire reason God set Israel apart was for them to be set apart.

The whole reason He set them apart was for them to be set apart. In other words, the nations treat each other selfishly. It ought not to be that way here.

The reason we've been called out is to be different. We are to be salt. We are to be light. We are not like to be, we're not to be like the world in the way we interact with one another.

[32 : 03] Amen? You remember when Jesus addressed this with the disciples, right? Think of it here. This is really a direct parallel, Nehemiah 5 to Matthew 20.

Jesus said, He calls the disciples to Him and He said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lorded over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

And everybody say this next phrase. It shall not be so among you. Do you see? I want you to be different. I don't want you to be like those that exercise their authority on everybody.

No, no, no, no. What I want you to do is to understand this. Whoever would be great among you, come on, say it, must be your servant. Jesus is like, I want you to image me.

I don't want you to image the way everybody else is. So listen, this is not good, but it's also not godly. Because listen, God's people are not to have servants, they're to be servants.

[33 : 10] So how are we going to look different from the world if we treat each other the same way the world does? Here's the third reason, verse 8. This is so important. Come on, let's get this.

We, this is Nehemiah saying, we as far as we are able have bought back our Jewish brothers who have been sold to the nations, but you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us.

Do you know what Nehemiah is saying here? This is so brilliant. It's so truthful. Not only is it not good, not only is it not godly, it's not the goal. Let me explain.

Here's what Nehemiah is saying. Okay, lean in. Lean in. Nehemiah is saying, we worked hard bringing Israel back together and you are tearing Israel apart.

We didn't rescue people from slavery to other nations only for them to become slaves here in Judah. In other words, do you see what he's saying?

[34 : 18] The people of God exist to restore people, not destroy people. When you approach the people of God this way, your goals are not aligned with the mission of God.

Are you with me? So he addresses these guys and says, listen, first of all, it's not good what you're doing. Second of all, it's not godly because it looks just like the world. And third is, you have missed the whole point of the mission of rebuilding this city, which is to bring God's people back together.

Somebody say preach preacher because I'm about to say something that's going to hurt. All right, thank you. I got permission. And I'm not, I'm just telling you, and this is certainly true in my own heart, so don't think that this is just addressed at you, but in 30-something years of being in ministry, this is the most, one of the most, maybe the most sinful mindsets that I have observed as it relates to people who are a part of the church.

Notice it here on the screen. is that the question is, what do I receive from the church instead of what can I give to the church?

It's why people, I don't like the music, I'm out. I don't like what the pastor said, I'm out. Oh, so and so hurt my feelings, I'm out. Why?

[35 : 56] Because you think the church exists for you rather than you existing to serve the church. And I'm sorry if that hurts, but I don't care.

It is a mindset that must be removed from the people of God. This is not a drive-through, fast-food, serve-you place.

This is a community where you give up yourself for a brother or for a sister. And so your question should never be, what's the church going to do for me?

It should be, how can I help the church? How can I sacrifice my time? How can I sacrifice my money? How can I sacrifice and use my talents to build others up, to edify a brother or sister?

Am I right or am I right? Those are your only options. Okay? And so I'm pleading, and listen, I know we get this wrong, I get this wrong, but I'm pleading that here at Faith Family that the question we ask is, how can I serve?

[37 : 11] Not how can I be served? Doesn't that sound familiar? We'll get to that in just a moment. Look at what Nehemiah does next, verse 14. Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the 20th year to the 32nd year of Artaxerxes the king, 12 years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor.

The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people. You see again that reference to Matthew 20. And took from them their daily ration of 40 shekels of silver.

Even their servants lorded it over them. Do you see that reference to Matthew 20? The people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God. I also preserved in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work.

In other words, here's essentially what Nehemiah is saying. I'm going to speed it up so we can get out of here sometime tonight, right? Nehemiah is essentially saying this, listen. You know all the perks that come with me being governor?

You know the food, the wine, the benefits that come with my position? You're aware of that. And yet you're aware that I didn't take advantage of any of that. Instead, what I've done is I've given my life to this mission.

[38 : 33] I didn't sit back in my easy chair and smoke cigars in my air-conditioned office. I rolled up my sleeves and I worked with you. I was a part of this ministry with you. That's what Nehemiah is saying.

Does everybody see it? He's using his own life as a counterexample of those who are being selfish. He's saying, listen, I've sacrificed the rights, the advantages that have come with this position for the sake of the mission.

Now some of you would say, Nehemiah, stop bragging. You know, I mean like if somebody said this in a conversation, wouldn't you be tempted to be like, you bragger. Bragging about all the things that you gave up.

But actually, that's not what's happening here at all. Nehemiah is not doing anything that the apostle Paul doesn't do. Look for example in 1 Corinthians 9, verse 4.

Paul does the same thing. Do we not have the right to eat or drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife as do the other apostles and brothers in the Lord and Cephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living, who serves as a soldier at his own expense, who plants a vineyard without any of its fruit, or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?

[39 : 44] And then verse 12. If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? In other words, these are rightfully our things. Nevertheless, we've not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.

Amen? In other words, Nehemiah is doing the exact same thing Paul did. Namely, he's using his life of service as an example for others to follow.

Do you see? Now, that does not mean Nehemiah is perfect or Paul is perfect. None of us are perfect when it comes to this. We do not get it right all the time.

We have false motives at times as it relates to the church. Amen? But still, we should try to live as an illustration for others of doing good for one another.

After all, notice what Paul told Timothy. He said, let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers, everybody say it, an example.

[40 : 53] So all of us should seek to be an example to illustrate a life that serves rather than consumed with self. You with me?

Alright. Well, does any of this sound familiar to you? And I mean like to a T.

Like exactly, the exact very details ought to already, and I hope that I've taught you well enough over the years that you're already like, already know where he's going, doesn't even have to go there.

But let me ask you this question if you're not there to see if you see where we're about to go. Do you know anyone who got angry when God's people were taking advantage of God's people?

Matthew chapter 21, verse 12. And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.

[41 : 58] Context, Jesus here, just like Nehemiah, gets righteously angry. Why? For the same reason of Nehemiah 5. Rather than the temple being a place for good, the temple has become a place of greed.

The context is it's Passover, Jerusalem is packed with people, hundreds of pilgrims are all around the Roman Empire, hotels are booked, they're filled with out-of-town guests, tents are put up all around the city, there's an estimated over 2 million Jewish males alone in town for the Passover, and if you were traveling from out of town, the money from wherever you lived wasn't accepted there, so you had to exchange it into the current currency.

Well, guess what? The exchange rate was not to your advantage. And not only that, you had to buy a sacrifice. Most people had traveled too far to bring one with them, or most were too poor to bring one that was good enough.

So like food at a ball game, what normally cost \$5 was now \$75, and you had no option. In other words, you were getting robbed on the exchange of your money, and then you were getting robbed on the price of your sacrifice, and you had no other option but to do it.

And how does Jesus respond? Oh boy. He said to them, it is written, my house shall be called a house of prayer, and you've made it into a den of robbers.

[43 : 33] Jesus has his knickers in a knot. Jesus is angry. He is righteously angry, and like Nehemiah, he addresses the issue with the religious leaders.

He addresses the Pharisees. In fact, later on, he will say this, Matthew 23, 25, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside you're full of what?

Greed and self-indulgence. That is, you care more about self than you do service. And like Nehemiah, Jesus will then put forth his own life as the ultimate example to follow.

Go back to Matthew 20. Remember where we left off? It shall not be so among you. Whoever shall be great among you must be your servant. Now the rest of the verse.

Even as the Son of Man came not to be, say it, served but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many.

[44 : 43] Don't you see, Jesus is the ultimate Nehemiah. He's the ultimate Nehemiah. He's the ultimate example of someone who gave of self in order to serve.

And in fact, oh boy, oh boy, if you thought Nehemiah had perks that came with being governor, imagine the perks that came with being God.

God. And Jesus didn't take advantage of any of them. Philippians 2.

Have this mind among yourselves which is yours in Christ Jesus who though He was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. That is, He didn't take advantage of all the things that were at His disposal, but He emptied Himself by taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men.

And why would Jesus, the ultimate, the greater Nehemiah, put aside all the benefits that came with being God to take on the form of man and humble Himself to the point of death on the cross.

[46 : 08] Faith family, it was not to rebuild walls, it was to save the world. So how then should we apply Nehemiah 5 as we close?

We've done this each week first congregationally. Can we have a serious moment here of me asking you some questions and you answering internally? Do you take the unity of this church seriously?

Are you like Nehemiah in that it burns righteously, not in a way that would cause you to sin, but it burns righteously in you when anybody tries to tear down what God is trying to build?

Do you try to restore it? Or do you like to gossip and slander and do hearsay and here's what I heard and destroy it? Do you see the church as a place to get your needs met?

Or do you see this church as a place where you get to meet the needs of others? Faith family, we may not be called to build walls, but we are called to build up one another.

[47 : 30] And that is something like Nehemiah we should take seriously. Amen? Second is the personal application. There are some of you here, your life is in ruins, you're hurting, you're the one that's broken.

And like in Nehemiah 5, like the families here were in need and people were really suffering. I mean, we read about it. They are really hurting.

They are in a real crisis. Faith family, what are we doing to encourage one another in the faith? What are we doing to help those who are in need? And I, listen, we all fall short in this.

From the pastor to the pew, we all fall short in this. But let us commit ourselves to being a community that comes together looking not to be served, but how can we serve and particularly those who are hurting.

Particularly the families that are suffering. Particularly those that are broken and need restoration. That ought to break our hearts and we ought to be the kind of church that does something about it.

[48 : 52] One of the greatest collapses in sports history happened not because of how strong the opponent was on the field, but how divided the team was in the clubhouse.

Like Nehemiah, let us take seriously the unity of God's people. Let us look for opportunities to put self aside in order to serve. After all, remember what Jesus prayed right before He went to the cross.

And what's known as the high priestly prayer. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that's us, that they may all be one.

Say it. Be one. Jesus knew the greatest challenge to the church will not be building walls, but what happens inside them.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for Your word to us tonight. I have no doubt it is convicting for all of us because most of us, if we're honest, treasure self more than we do the unity of others.

[50 : 16] And I pray, Lord, that tonight's message would reshape the way we think, would give us a different mindset, that we really would, what Paul says in Philippians 2, to have this mind that was also in Christ Jesus who humbled himself, had all the advantages, had all the rights, but he did not consider equality with God a thing to be taken advantage of.

He took on the likeness of man, the form of a servant, all the way to death on the cross. And so as we enter into this time where we remember that very thing through communion, that we would be in light of the cross asking ourselves, when I look to the people of God, am I selfish or am I serving?

Because when it comes to selfishness, Jesus says, it ought not be so. After all, Jesus didn't come to be served, he came to serve.

We love you, Lord, and we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.