

# Ascension Sunday

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Father, we, week after week, come before you as we open your word, and sometimes we can take it for granted, that it is just a good deed to do for respectable people like us.
- But Lord, if we're honest with ourselves, apart from you, there is no good in us, as the prayer book says. Lord, we desperately need you in our lives.
- We need your grace. We need to know your love afresh every week. So as we open your word, will you speak to us through it? Would you open our minds to understand and our hearts to receive what you would have for us this morning?
- And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. We've talked about this in the past, how in our day of bounty and affluence and, dare I say, decadence, there is a meaning crisis.
- There is, at no point in human history, so much things at our disposal. And yet, generally speaking, people are desperate to find meaning.
- [ 1 : 1 3 ]     A meaning crisis. Oftentimes, meaning is to be found through self-expression and self-achievement. But this seems to not be the antidote for a lack of meaning, but something that perpetuates the lack of meaning.
- That might give reprieve from the feelings of meaninglessness for a time, but will never fully satisfy. I put forward to you this morning that only by knowing and doing God's will will we find deep meaning in this life.
- A meaning that will stretch through this life and into eternity. That's the deepest, biggest, fullest source of meaning for the human heart that exists.
- So today we will read of Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem and the preparation for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, its walls, its gates. And on the surface, this is a very straightforward text.
- Steve read, Nehemiah comes, he inspects, he rallies the people, he's opposed, he stands against them. And then soon, in chapter 3, we're not going to touch on chapter 3, you'll see if you read it yourself, it's just a list of names and what they built.
- [ 2 : 2 9 ]     But building begins. It's very straightforward. But hopefully we will see that Nehemiah has been tasked by God to not just rebuild a decrepit and broken down city, but to rebuild a decrepit and broken down people.
- People that are in a very real way meaningless. That are not walking in God's will. In fact, because of that, their city, their hearts, their lives, this people, they are broken because of the very reason that we'll see that they are not walking in God's will.
- Nehemiah is calling them back to this. So Nehemiah is doing God's will and helping the people to do this. And through it, hopefully, we will see three key aspects of what it means to walk in God's will and help us to enjoy real, deep, long-lasting, eternal meaning in our lives.
- So the first thing, the favor of God that accompanies those who do God's will. We'll see that verses 9 and then 11 to 16. The second is the empowerment that God gives to those who are doing his will.

So he doesn't simply call us to do his will, but he gives us the means by which to do it. And that's in verses 17 and 19. And then we will see that there is great prosperity in doing God's will.

[ 3 : 54 ] And we'll define what that prosperity is. And we'll see that in verse 20. So the favor of God, the empowerment of God, and the prosperity of God as it pertains to doing God's will.

If you have a Bible, it would help a lot if you followed along. Feel free to jump up and grab a Bible from the back welcome table at any point. Don't worry about interrupting.

Please, it would help quite a bit. So let's look at the first point. The favor of God as it pertains to doing his will. First and foremost, the Lord is about his business. He is about his redemption, his glory, about his will being accomplished above all others.

And to that end, we labor for and with him in accomplishing his will. So it's not as if we have our goals and our will that we want to see accomplished and God is kind of our help.

He gets on board with our plan. It is actually the opposite, where there is God's will and we get the privilege of participating and joining him in doing his will, accomplishing his will.

[ 5 : 07 ] And as we do so, his favor will accompany us. And what does that favor look like? So we won't read, but if you remember from last week, Nehemiah is, he's all tore up inside.

Jerusalem is, he hears news that Jerusalem is laid waste. He is praying, he is fasting, he is looking for opportunities to canvass the king.

He is the cupbearer for the king. To canvass the king, to reverse the king's decree to stop the rebuilding of Jerusalem. And then he does. And the king's favor is with him.

And not only does King Artaxerxes of Persia say, yes, rebuild Jerusalem and the gates and the walls. He provides patronage to see it through.

And protection to protect God's people as they rebuild. All of this, as we read, is just pure favor from the king to Nehemiah.

[ 6 : 05 ] However, we remember that, in fact, although the king had a huge part to play, it was God who showed the favor as Nehemiah was doing his will.

We see this in verse 8 of chapter 2. If you want to turn there, it says this. The keeper of the king's, I'm sorry, I'll just jump to the very last bit of verse 8.

And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me. Verse 9 continues. Then I came to the governors of the province beyond the river and gave them the king's letter.

So did the patronage work? And the answer is, most certainly it did. Now the king had sent me with officers of the army and horsemen.

But circling back to the last part of verse 8, it says, The favor of God opens doors that are otherwise shut.

[ 7 : 09 ] How on earth would a cupbearer, who is the servant of a king, and in a sense, he's not, well, he's certainly not native to Persia.

He has been captured, his people have been captured by successive kingdoms, and he is a mere servant. And now, this open door is given to him.

Why? Not because he caught the king on a good day, but precisely because the hand of the Lord was upon him. He had favor from God. This favor of God allows, it allows God's will to be accomplished through his people in situations that are either difficult or impossible in our own strength.

But to be clear, just because the Lord's favor rests on a person doesn't necessarily mean that they will experience ease or smooth sailing. Hard work is required.

God invites us to labor, but it is certainly labor. Nehemiah is working hard. He doesn't act haphazardly at all. He waits.

[ 8 : 15 ] He works. He waits. He works. He has an opportunity, finally, to talk to the king after a good amount of praying. And he, even when he is allowed back to Jerusalem, he gets there and he begins working even harder.

Look with me, verses 11 to 16. So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. Verse 12. Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me, and I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem.

There was no animal with me, but the one on which I rode. I went out by night, by the valley gate, to the dragon spring, into the dung gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire.

Then I went on to the fountain gate, to the king's pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the valley gate and so returned.

And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.

[ 9 : 32 ] Even when Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem, the favor of the Lord upon him, he doesn't take for granted that there's hard work ahead of him. He has the wherewithal to inspect and assess the sad state of affairs without being noticed or caught.

Now this is a key bit, and we'll get into it a bit later on. There's opposition. There's also potentially suspicion as an outsider, even if he is a Jew. He was not born in Jerusalem.

He was born in Persia. He has enjoyed the fine things in the Persian court. He's an outsider, even though he is ethnically Jewish. There's suspicion.

Nevertheless, Nehemiah, he is not naive. He works hard. He thinks through strategy. He is very serious about how he is looking to labor for the Lord.

He needed God's favor to fly under the radar, to avoid suspicion, and ultimately we'll see in the next section to empower the people to join him in the Lord's work.

[ 10 : 34 ] You know, we're going to, in the coming months and years, who knows how long, you know, this church will exist, either because the Lord's going to come back, or, you know, a hundred years from now, who knows.

But as we seek to labor for the Lord, bearing witness to him, faithfully in our workplaces, in our neighborhoods, to raise our children, in the fear and admonition of the Lord, to confess our sins weakly, and choose the narrow way of the gospel of Christ, instead of the broad way of the cultural winds that blow, we can be sure that as we follow and seek God's will, he will give us favor.

God, again, is about his business, is about his will being accomplished. And as much as we partner with God, or get on board with God, he will give us open doors where there are closed ones.

And that, by the way, doesn't necessarily mean success, the feeling of success. You know, there's countless examples of missionaries that have gone to foreign lands, and their ministry has proven completely unfruitful.

And yet, so they either die, or go back to where they're sent. And yet, their faithfulness to doing God's will, has laid the foundation for what will come.

[ 12 : 02 ] The conversion of whole people groups. Following God's will, knowing his favor, doesn't necessarily feel like success all the time.

But, we continue on, we press forward. And I think the big question is, when we ask the question, what is God's will? How do we know his favor? The big question to ask as we make decisions, and seek God's will, is this.

Will this bring glory to Christ? According to the scriptures. Will this lead to life? According to the scriptures. Will this shine light in the darkness?

According to the scriptures. Will this result in God's kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven? According to the scriptures. Notice, according to the scriptures is key in this, because it's not just how we define, what is good, or what is true, or what is beautiful, or what is light, or what is life.

It's what God says, according to the scriptures. So like I said, this divine favor may not always feel like success. Nehemiah gave up much as he walked, in the favor of the Lord.

[ 13 : 11 ] We talked about this last week, and I referenced it a bit already. He enjoyed the finer things of life. He enjoyed a type of prosperity and bounty, in Persia.

And he left it, to make a thousand mile journey, to a place he only heard of, to experience opposition, and to not even necessarily have his own things, the things that he would be used to.

He felt the scorn of opposition, and weathered the abuse, as he walked in the favor of the Lord. He labored hard, as we have seen, in the favor of the Lord.

But all of this, he knew God's favor. He spent his life, not on the beauty of Persia, but on the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Things that aren't fleeting, but are eternal. And God helped him with this. God empowered him. Another way to say it, is God equipped him to this end. So, going to the second point, the empowerment of God, that he gives to those, walking in his will, seeking his will.

[ 14 : 15 ] Verses 17 to 19, if you can look with me there. Then I said to them, these are the people, the Israelites, the Jewish people of Jerusalem, you see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins, with its gates burned.

Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision. And I told them of the hand of my God, that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me.

And the people said, let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work. And pause there. Nehemiah was doing something extraordinary that was nearly impossible.

The rebuilding of Jerusalem. He was an outsider. He needed the help of a broken and wayward people. He also was opposed by a host of powerful and influential enemies.

I'll reference them shortly. And even with all of the patronage and support of the king, success was not for certain. More often than not, God will empower us to do his will in ways that aren't necessarily supernatural.

[ 15 : 33 ] In the case of Nehemiah, you think, how does a cupbearer, probably has silky, soft hands, who has only known the beauty and the bounty of the king's palace.

He's a cupbearer. He's tasting. He's like a sommelier. Like, how is that man going to rebuild Jerusalem? And yet, in the courts, this was a training ground, equipping that God was doing years and years and years before Nehemiah arrives in Jerusalem.

He knows how to organize, how to assess, how to advise. He knows how to make a pitch and how to give good, inspirational, and yet, wise counsel.

We see this here. Often, God equips us with the experiences and the skills that are already existing in our lives.

Sometimes, he gives us supernatural equipping as well. Or maybe, we know what to do, but we need training and he provides the means by which to do that. But nevertheless, God has equipped us, you and I, to do his will.

[ 16 : 54 ] The church is called a body for a reason. It's talked about in the New Testament. Not everybody's an arm or a leg or a nose. We work together as a body. You will have opportunities to do God's will with your skill set that God has ordained for you to accomplish his will as a community, as his people together.

This is what he's doing with Nehemiah. It's incredible to think that God in his providence has put you in situations and in training, circumstances, or circumstances that has led to training years and years and years before that will be transferable for you doing his will today or tomorrow or next year.

It's remarkable. God is about his business and he invites us into it and he equips us to do just that. Nehemiah says to the people as he gathers them together in this rousing speech, first, he's saying something like this, first and foremost, God is with us.

He is directing our steps. Notice that he doesn't lead with, I have all the papers from the king. We have kingly, royal backing.

He doesn't lead with that, does he? What does he say? Verse 18, And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good and also of the words that the king had spoken to me.

[ 18 : 24 ] That comes second. Nehemiah, he's saying to the people, first and foremost, God is with us. He is directing our steps. He is showing us great favor.

The king is on our side. He has overturned this moratorium that he had previously spoken. The moratorium's over. We can start rebuilding again.

He has given us resources and protection to get the job done. And what do the people say? This is what they need. You know, these people weren't the cream of the crop that were taken away by the Assyrians a couple generations prior.

They were the peasants that were left. Now, mind you, Zerubbabel and Ezra, we read about those two leaders in Ezra, they rouse the people, but there's been 20 years of lost momentum between those leaders and Nehemiah.

So any kind of empowerment, any kind of strength that was previously there, it was sapped. And Nehemiah, really God through Nehemiah, he is rousing the people.

[ 19 : 35 ] And now we see the good hand of God who has helped Nehemiah convince the king and the people. And we look at what the king has given and we say, what a miracle from God.

But when people are broken and despondent and they are lacking any sort of self-worth to convince those people to rise up, to strengthen their hands and build, that is a miracle.

That's something only God can do. Only God can take broken and desperate and hurt people and heal them and use them then for his glory to accomplish his will.

It's remarkable what is happening here. The people are empowered. Why? They get on board to God's plan to accomplish God's will, the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

The empowerment of the Lord is a supernatural blessing but also the regular blessing upon God's people to trust and act upon God's word. To believe that God's promises are true, to walk in obedience with Him as a response to His love towards us.

[ 20 : 44 ] Throughout the New Testament this is called the grace of God. The grace of God that He gives in abundance, grace upon grace to do His will, to live out His will, to walk in wholeness to see His kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

They need it, don't they? They rally, the troops need rallying but also it's not just that they need rallying, opposition is coming and it's heavy.

Look with me in verse 19. But when Sanballat, the Horonite, and Tobiah, the Ammonite servant, and Geshem, the Arab, heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, what is this thing that you are doing?

Are you rebelling against the king? These are three characters, well the two, Sanballat and Tobiah, Tobiah, they bookend this section.

We see them in the verses 7 to 9, they show up and they do not want to see Jerusalem rebuilt. They accuse the people of rebellion.

[ 21 : 53 ] Now rebellion against the king, it's not just sticks and stones, may break my bones, words will never hurt me. These words will get them hung if it's true.

Create a narrative that this Nehemiah, he might have the patronage of the king, but he was tricking the king. He is going to rebuild Jerusalem, he is going to rebel. They're serious statements and these men are very powerful.

We won't get into a character study on them, but just know that they represent the political power, that would be Sanballat, he is the governor of Syria, Tobiah, he is a servant of the Ammonites, which are the enemies of God, but also he's like this Jewish person that has kind of bought into the foreign gods and the foreign worship, but also keeping, in a sense, the Jewish faith.

He is this strong religious power that is opposing the true religion of God's people. And then Geshem, the Arab, who has this kind of huge series of Arab lands, big economic strength in the region.

So now God's people are surrounded on all sides by enemies and by almost all spheres of influence, political, religious, and economic.

[ 23 : 26 ] This is a huge problem if you're trying to rebuild Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the rebuilding of Jerusalem was not in their best interests. And these people, if they truly do represent the prevailing political, religious, and economic forces in the region, it shows us in a sense that as we engage in walking out God's will, we will feel the weight of opposition.

temptation. And there's a great temptation to give in or to give up. It's a very real thing. To walk in this world as a true Christian, trusting in God's empowerment and in His favor, it will always be opposed by the prevailing political forces, the prevailing religious spiritualities, the prevailing economic philosophies.

there will always be opposition to God's people as we seek to do His will. To be a Christian, we've talked about this a lot in our house, these days is to no longer be on the home team.

And that means that decisions we make will not be treated with indifference but with opposition. I'm not talking about flaunting what we do and being loud and boisterous and not unwinsome in doing life in a kind of a I don't know, not wise way.

I'm talking about just the decisions that we make, the things that we hold our children back from, how we spend our money, what we spend our money on, the things we lobby our government for, or if you're in government, the things that you refuse to do because it goes against your faith and the reality is there will be real opposition to what we do as Christians, living out God's will.

[ 25 : 26 ] But it's been like this forever. It has. And God has promised us as we walk according to his will, he will give us favor and empowerment to do it.

And that doesn't mean there won't be consequences to suffer, but it means that the consequences that we suffer will only be superficial in this life. but the benefits will go on through eternity.

And it's hard to see eternity in this life, but this is where we cling to the promises of God so that we can trust that no matter how much we suffer for God's sake in this life, that truly the reward in the life to come will be infinitely greater and because it's eternity, infinitely longer.

that is an empowering thought. That is God's spirit at work in our lives to think that way and to feed ourselves with that and to encourage one another with that and to read about that in Holy Scripture that in a sense we are just sojourning through this life.

It doesn't mean we pull out from this life, but it means that we are brave by God's empowerment by his equipping to live out this life well.

[ 26 : 51 ] The church, friends, is an outpost of heaven. It really is. In a landscape of meaninglessness, the call is to find meaning through almost anything else but a humility of bending our knee to the will of God.

It's always about accomplishing our will. and yet here we are in outposts of heaven proclaiming the gospel of Christ, trusting that the Holy Spirit is empowering us and we believe, according to scriptures, that God will use his people to transform this world, to transform Ottawa, our neighborhoods, our schools, wherever we may be, our workplaces.

That is foolishness to the world, but God uses the foolishness to what? Shame the wise. It's a remarkable thing. We will experience real suspicion and hostility like the people of Jerusalem did as they began to work for God, but by God's strength they will walk in obedience and so too will we.

Not perfectly, we will repent and confess and then get back up and keep going by God's strength. faith. But just trust that if God is calling you and he truly is to do his will, he's giving you everything you need and it is better than shrugging it aside and trying to in a sense build your own kingdom here on earth.

It will always be better. It might not feel better at specific junctions of life, but certainly it is. Doing God's will, enjoying his favor and his empowerment is really the good stuff of life.

[ 28 : 39 ] We get a glimpse into this now through Nehemiah's response to the mockery and the accusations of these three men, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem. And look with me in verse 20.

This is what Nehemiah says in response to their accusations and their jeering. Then I replied to them, the God of heaven will make us prosper and we his servants will arise and build, but you have no portion or right or claim in Jerusalem.

The weight of these words are hard to fully comprehend. Understand how detrimental a curse is to these three and to their followers. You really, in a sense, have to understand the significance of Jerusalem and what the heavenly city represents throughout the scriptures.

I've had the incredible privilege of going to Jerusalem a number of times. I remember the first time I went, I was exhausted.

And it was a red eye and I arrived there. I don't know when I, whenever you arrive after a red eye, I don't know, I was tired. And I got in this little minibus and I just wanted to get to my family's house in Jerusalem.

[ 29 : 53 ] And I remember being so tired, but then all of a sudden I see a sign that says, Jerusalem 20 kilometers away, 15 kilometers away and all of a sudden I sit up and it's like there's this anticipation building.

It's also very interesting that you travel up to Jerusalem. The Psalms of Ascent are called the Psalms of Ascent because the people are ascending to Jerusalem, but also ascending to God.

But there is something about this. And I mean, Jerusalem itself, I mean, I've never been to Rome, but I've heard about Rome being a very filthy city, dirty. Jerusalem's kind of like that.

There's an infestation of stray cats, kind of a random fact, and they are loud and they fight. It's kind of grimy. But the old city, you approach it and you think, these walls are millennia old.

The Romans were here. Before that, it was King David. Before that, it was Abraham visiting. But most importantly, this is where Jesus himself walked through.

[ 30 : 57 ] It's a remarkable place. Jerusalem itself is a regular city, but in the scriptures, regular city today, but that old city, the temple, the city itself upon the hill, the city that David, King David founded where our Lord Jesus walked.

It's Zion, it's Jerusalem, it's a heavenly city, the city of God. And throughout the scriptures, it is the place where God will choose to dwell with his people. people. Psalm 48 verses 1 to 3 says this, Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, his holy mountain.

Beautiful in elevation is the joy of the earth. Mount Zion in the far north, the city of the great king. Within the citadels, God has made himself known as a fortress.

Throughout the Bible, Jerusalem is where God dwells with his people. But more importantly, it is with the entire thrust of the Bible, looks towards the return of Christ and the establishment of the new Jerusalem that will come down at the end of the age.

And it will be the place where God will dwell with all his people, world without end. If you've attended church for a while, you'll be familiar with the revelation of Jesus to St. John, and especially verses, or chapters 20 and 21 and 22 that have this wonderful, cosmic, kind of crazy picture of this new Jerusalem coming down, perfect cube, whether or not that's literally what will happen, it is a remarkable thing that the new Jerusalem will come.

[ 32 : 36 ] But it's very bizarre if you think about it. It is a very bizarre sight. And if you are skeptical of the faith or becoming increasingly skeptical, I can relate to you.

It seems like like in this world, to see a cube drop from heaven, and we are to believe this, it's a bit of a bizarre thing. It seems a bit fantastical. However, this idea, in fact, is not just a fantastical thing, and I know that it fights against the skepticism that you might feel, but let me put it forward to you that it is the basis of all of the greatest stories that we enjoy and believe.

What do I mean? The heavenly city is something that is throughout our myths and our legends. Camelot, Atlantis, El Dorado, Asgard, if you're into Marvel movies, Wakanda.

These heavenly cities, these cities where they're full of treasures and riches, advancements, technologies, where people will risk life and limb to find them.

Big adventures to find these heavenly cities, the cities where you will enjoy true happiness and true glory, a place where you will dwell with the gods.

[ 33 : 57 ] This idea of a heavenly city, this new Jerusalem, isn't just a cool story that the Bible invented, but it is a hope that God has put on the human heart.

to dwell with God in the heavenly city means to be in union with the creator of all things. It means enjoying happiness and bliss and complete satisfaction without envy.

Imagine that. Imagine having complete satisfaction without being jealous of somebody. It means being at peace with ourselves and others and most importantly, God.

seems that the dwelling with God in the heavenly city is one of the greatest cries of the human heart. There's a motivation for our desire to accumulate wealth, the feelings of meaninglessness that we have when we feel like we do not have direction because we chase after things that promise what the heavenly city will guarantee us.

Everything, our desires to be whole and happy, they find meaning. in our heart's desire to dwell with God in the heavenly city. So to oppose a building of this city isn't just a mean thing of San Belat, Tobiah, and Geshem.



[ 35 : 18 ] They're not just being mean here. They are actively opposing true life itself. They are actively working to undo the source of life and because this is what they are doing, they have no portion, right, or claim.

They are not only in the heavenly city. It is a pronouncement of damnation upon them. But it's also a warning for us, isn't it?

The Bible is very black and white. I mean, okay, I'll say this. The Bible is a lot of, there's a lot of gray that is in the Bible. It doesn't tell us about how to live life in a lot of different aspects.

I mean, it requires wisdom and we can get wisdom from the Bible. But the Bible is also very black and white when it comes to what is God's will and what isn't God's will.

And there's no gray allowed. There's no wiggle room here. And either we are throwing ourselves at the mercy of God, trusting that as we, by his strength, working out his will and getting on board with that, that we are going to have a portion and a claim and a right into the heavenly city.

[ 36 : 34 ] But if we actively push against it, it is a warning for us that there is true, that there is true damnation for those that oppose God's will.

To not have a portion or a right or a claim to the heavenly city is an eternal curse. And friends, by God's kindness and grace, if you hear this warning this morning and you are troubled in your soul, God is at work pointing you towards him.

And don't stifle it. Don't push it away. Embrace it. Throw yourself at the mercy of God. So can you hear the weight of verse 20 here?

Can you feel the weight of Nehemiah's words? Can you also feel the comfort for those that actually do have a portion and claim and right in the heavenly city? What does he say at the beginning of verse 20?

Then I replied to them, the God of heaven will make us prosper and we will arise and build. Prosperity is found not in the accumulation of things, but the partnering with God to arise and build, to walk in his will and to do the things he's called us to do.

[ 37 : 58 ] That's prosperity. That's what it is. It's to have a portion and a claim and a right to dwell with God in the new Jerusalem forever.

How do we, here in Ottawa, sitting here on this absolutely stunning Sunday morning in mid-May have a portion and right and claim in the city of God, in the heavenly city and in the Zion to come?

And the answer is simply this, not by our own ability. Not by our own effort, not by our own hard work, but only through the shed blood of Christ on the cross of Calvary.

You see, the will, partnering with God to do his will, it's always in response to becoming a part of his family, to be, being a part of his kingdom.

So it's only through the shed blood of Christ on the cross of Calvary. And I'll end with this. We have access to the heavenly city, being made citizens of the new Jerusalem that is, that is, that is going to come, who knows when, but is going to come precisely because Jesus, when he was condemned for a crime he did not commit, was spat out of Jerusalem.

[ 39 : 12 ] He was hung on a cross at the place of the skull, outside of the city limits, and he died in our stead. He gave up, in a sense, his citizenship for a time so that we could then get citizenship to the new Jerusalem, to the heavenly city, to dwell with God forever.

His citizenship, in a sense, was revoked so that ours could be granted. His death has brought us life. Hebrews 12, 22 says this, But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn, who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.

Verse 24, And to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. To the blood of Christ, we are citizens of the heavenly kingdom.

So may we enjoy the favor and empowerment of the Lord as we do his will, but may we even more revel in the cross of Christ. That, in a sense, that visa that is given to us, that citizenship that is given to us, that grants us a portion, right, and claim to the new Jerusalem.

And as King David says, let us make it our prayer. Psalm 16, verse 11, You make known to me the path of life in your presence. There is fullness of joy at your right hand pleasures forevermore.

[ 40 : 40 ] This is, this is what we get to claim. This is our portion. This is our right. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for, for the rebuilding of the temple by Nehemiah.

But we're, we're more thankful of, of, of what it represents and how it is deeply, deeply instructive for us this morning. Lord God, help us to be about your will.

Help us to trust as we are about your will, that we will receive your favor, that we will receive your empowerment. But ultimately, Lord, that we will enjoy the prosperity of what it means to be your people.

Lord, as we go our, our, uh, go on this week, let us be, let us be, uh, people that, that just ask the question every morning, throughout the day. Lord, use me.

Lord, use me to accomplish your will. But also, more importantly, that we'll pray, Lord, help me to see the cross of Christ in, in its fullest beauty. Help me to understand that I truly am, by your grace, a citizen of the new Jerusalem to come.

[ 41 : 47 ] Lord, we thank you. We thank you that you bless us with pleasure and joy and fullness and life and light for eternity. In Christ's mighty name. Amen.