

Them, Us, and You, O Lord

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Date: 25 February 2024

[0 : 00] Let's begin our worship this evening by singing to God's praise in Psalm 146. It's in the Scottish Psalter version. Psalm 146, page 445.

And we're going to sing from verse 1 to verse 7. Psalm 146. Praise God. The Lord praise, O my soul. I'll praise God while I live, while I have being.

To my God in songs I'll praises give. Trust not in princes nor man's son, in whom there is no state. His breath departs, to earth he turns. That day his thoughts decay.

We'll sing from verse 1 to verse 7 to God's praise. Praise God the Lord. Praise, O my soul.

I'll praise God while I live, while I have being.

[1 : 04] To my God in songs I'll praises give. Trust not in princes nor man's son, in whom there is no state.

His breath departs, to earth he turns. That day his thoughts decay.

O happy is that man unblessed, whom Jacob's God doth hate.

Whose hope upon the Lord doth rest, and on his God his state.

Who made the earth and heaven's eye. Who made the swelling deep.

[2 : 20] And all that is within the same. Who truth doth ever keep.

Who righteous judgment executes. For those oppressed that be.

Who to the hungry giveth food. God sets the prisoners free.

Let's come to God in prayer. We'll bow our heads in a word of prayer. Lord our gracious God, as we gather in your name anew this evening, we are thankful for the blessing of praising your name.

The blessing for being able to lift our voices to you in song and to rejoice in your goodness to us.

We thank you that we have been reminded in this psalm of the man who is blessed, whom Jacob's God doth aid.

[3 : 38] And we thank you for every way, Lord, that you help us on a daily basis. That we can lean upon you. That we can find our rest in you.

And we thank you, Lord, for your upholding strength toward us. We thank you that as we come to your word anew this evening, that we are reminded through it that the joy of the Lord is indeed the strength of your people.

And that that is not when we feel strong, but so often in our weakness, Lord, that joy is what sustains us. For you remind us that apart from you, we can do nothing.

And so we praise you as the God who made heavens and earth, made the swelling deep, as the psalmist describes. And yet your truth is constantly with us too.

And we thank you for every reminder you give to us of your power and of your goodness towards us. That as we see the wonder of your creation, as we see the seasons changing, even at this time of year, as we see the days growing longer, we see the signs of spring.

[4 : 49] We see new growth around us, Lord, as we see flowers begin to appear. And we thank you, Lord, that it reminds us of the wonder of the creation, but the wonder of you as the God of it all.

That when there is a time when things seem dead and lifeless, that even underneath, Lord, there is the signs of hope. That there is life, that life that comes to fruition.

And we see it in our own world and in our own day at this time. And we think of the deadness of the world in the spiritual sense. When we think of how we have put your word behind our back, as it were, and turned away from you.

When we see, oh Lord, people just living for self and for their own gain. No thought for others or for you. We, oh Lord, are in pain and grief over this.

As we think, oh Lord, of what it means for us as a people, and what it means for those who are a people who are perishing, as your word describes. But yet we thank you for the gospel.

[5 : 58] We thank you for the hope that that gives of new life. We thank you for the power that is in it to revive and to give life anew through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The one who came that we might have life and have it abundantly. And so we pray that your word will be blessed to us all here this evening. That we would, as we heard this morning, not just hear your word, but be doers of it.

That we would receive your word with gladness and joy and go into the week ahead, renewed by your spirit, refreshed by your word. Eager, oh Lord, to live for you and to serve you as your people here.

We pray, Lord, that your word will be blessed to all ends of the earth today, as we thank you that you are not the God who is confined as so many of the gods of this world, made by the hands of men and women, made by us to represent what we see as worthy of glory.

But we thank you that your glory is far and wide, that you are worthy of the praise of all of your people, near and far, and that you have your people throughout the nations of this world, people who call on your name, people who worship and praise you, people who, even as we are praying, that you are hearing their prayers as well, that you hear a people who call upon you at all times, day or night.

[7 : 29] And so we ask, oh Lord, that you would send out your power into our midst, the power of the gospel, what the psalmist describes as your light and your truth, that they would go out to all ends of the earth, directing people to you, reviving people who are dead in sin, and bringing us all to praise your name all the more.

Bless us as we consider your word together here this evening, as we open it up, as we read it. May your spirit help us in our understanding of it, and may you guide us through it in all our thoughts, and what it means to us, oh Lord, as our people.

It may be that it means something different to each and every one of us, but may there be a word to be heard from you this evening for each one of us, a word in season, a word to bless, to challenge, to encourage, to do us good.

We thank you for all we've enjoyed from your word in this past week as well. As we look back to time of communion last weekend, we thank you for the blessings that we've received from your hand there, being under the preaching of your word, enjoying the sacrament together, and the fellowship of your people together as well.

We thank you for all that was done for us, Lord, for our good, and we pray that we will continue to be encouraged going forward. We will not lose sight of the hope of the gospel, and we continue to pray for your blessing over us as a people, homes and families in all our communities.

[9 : 04] And this communion season throughout our islands, oh Lord, we pray blessing on all who gather in your name in these days, to know the power of your spirit working, to know people coming to profess the Lord as their saviour, people growing in their knowledge of you and understanding of you, people being encouraged in so many different ways.

We ask, oh Lord, that you would continue to build your church in our midst and to make us as a people, Lord, a people who would be full of your joy and your strength.

We pray for our nation at this time, oh Lord, we ask for our leaders, our governments, that you will help and encourage them in their day-to-day lives of administering direction for our nation.

Lord, we feel a drifting away from you, but we know, even as we read in the scriptures of the times when nations were in disarray, turning away from you with no sense of direction, that you are pleased in the past to come in your power and to redirect them towards you.

We pray that for our own nation, oh Lord, to know that redirecting, that renewal that comes from you. We pray that for all who are involved in governments nationally and locally as well, Lord, to give the fear of the Lord as the beginning of all wisdom, to give them that sense of dependence upon you.

[10 : 36] Remember to our royal family, we pray for each one of them, and remember the king just now as he continues to go through treatment for his own time of ill health, and that your hand be upon him to bless him and his family too.

And again, that they would rule with you in mind in all things. There may be kings in this world and presidents and powers and authorities, but we know that they are all from your hand.

And we pray, Lord, for you to rule above all and to rule in a way that would bring wisdom and help to our world as a whole, to bring peace with this conflict, to bring peace with this persecution, to bring a people to yourself.

Remember us then in all of these things. Remember us in the week ahead as a people here. Lord, bless the Youth Fellowship as they will meet this evening. Bless all that takes place throughout the

week, the meetings for prayer, the work among the young people, and all that we do in your name, Lord, to share the gospel.

May it be that you hear us and receive us in all of these things and show us your hand, your hand of power, working mightily in our midst. So continue with us now, Lord, help us as we sing your praise and hear your word, do all with all of our hearts, to lift our voices to you as our Lord, as our King, as our Saviour, as our Redeemer, the one to whom we look even at this time for forgiveness for all our sins, as we come anew, confessing our thoughts, words, and actions that are so often against you, Lord.

[12:16] We pray your pardon towards us. Hear our prayers, Lord, continue with us, and we ask all in the precious name of our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, for his sake and glory.

Amen. Amen. We'll again sing to God's praise, this time in Psalm 106, in the Scottish Psalter, page 378.

Psalm 106, we'll sing from verse 1 to verse 6. Give praise and thanks unto the Lord, for bountiful is he, his tender mercy doth endure, and to eternity.

God's mighty works, who can express, or show forth all his praise. Blessed are they, that judgment keep, and justly do always. We'll sing from verse 1 to 6, to God's praise.

Give praise and thanks unto the Lord, for bountiful is he, His tender mercy doth endure, and to eternity.

[13:45] God's mighty works, God's mighty works, who can express, or show forth all his praise.

Blessed are they, that judgment keep, and justly do always.

Remember me, Lord, with that love, which thou to thy dust bear.

with thy salvation, O my God, to visit me draw near, that I thy chosen's good may see, and in their joy rejoice, and may with thine inheritance triumph with cheerful voice.

We with our Father sinned, have and of iniquity.

[15:36] Too long we have the workers been, we have done wickedly.

We can turn to read together now in the Old Testament. We're turning back to the book of Nehemiah. This evening we're going to be in chapter 9, as we continue our study in this book.

It's Nehemiah chapter 9. You notice it's quite a long chapter, and really what it is, is a prayer that the people are offering up, and that's what we're going to be looking at this evening.

We're not going to read through it all. We'll read from verse 1 down to verse 17, and then we'll jump forward to verse 30, and read down to the end of the chapter.

So Nehemiah chapter 9, the beginning of the chapter. Now on the 24th day of this month, the people of Israel were assembled, with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads.

[16:55] And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place, and read from the book of the law of the Lord, their God, for a quarter of the day.

For another quarter of it, they made confession and worshipped their God. On the stairs of the Levites stood to Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bani, Sherebiah, Bani, and Cheniah.

And they cried with a loud voice to the Lord, their God. Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Ahashebaniah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethathaniah, said, Stand up and bless the Lord your God from everlasting to everlasting.

Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise. You are the Lord, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them.

And you preserve all of them. And the host of heaven worships you. You are the Lord, the God who chose Abraham and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham.

[18:26] You found his heart faithful before you and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perisite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite.

And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous. And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers.

And you made a name for yourself, as it is to this day. And you divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land.

And you cast their pursuers into the depths as a stone into mighty waters. By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go.

You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments.

[19 : 41] And you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant. You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst.

And you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them. But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments.

They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt.

But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and did not forsake them.

And the next number of verses there carry on going through the various times of the children of Israel as they made their way through to the promised land.

[20 : 52] It speaks of their rebellion and their disobedience along the way. But what we see time and again is the wonder of the grace of God. And we take up our reading at verse 30.

For many years you bore with them and warned them by your spirit through your prophets, yet they would not give ear.

Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless, in your great mercies, you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day.

Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully, and we have acted wickedly. Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them, even in their own kingdom, enjoying your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them.

[22 : 25] They did not serve you or turn from their wicked works. Behold, we are slaves this day in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts.

Behold, we are slaves, and its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress.

Because of all this, we make a firm covenant in writing. On the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests, and so on.

And may God bless that reading from his word. Before we turn back to this passage, we're going to sing again to God's praise in Psalm 103, and we'll sing Psalm's version, Psalm 103, and we'll sing from verse 1 down to verse 11.

Praise God, my soul, with all my heart. Let me exalt his holy name. Forget not all his benefits, as praise my soul in song proclaim.

[23 : 38] The Lord forgives you all your sins and heals your sickness and distress. Your life, he rescues from the grave and crowns you in his tenderness.

We'll sing from verse 1 to 11, Psalm 103, to God's praise. Praise God, my soul, with all my heart. Let me exalt his holy name. Forget not all his benefits, his praise my soul in song proclaim.

The Lord forgives you all your sins and heals your sickness and distress.

Your life, he rescues from the grave. and crowns you in his tenderness.

[24 : 44] And crowns you in his tenderness. He satisfies your deep desires from his unending storage of good, so that just like the eagle's strength, your youthful vigor is renewed.

The Lord is known for righteous acts, and justice to them, broadened ones.

To Moses he made known his ways, His mighty deeds to Israel's sons.

His mighty deeds to Israel's sons. The Lord is merciful and kind, to anger slow and full of grace.

He will not constantly reprove, or in his anger and his face.

[26 : 08] He does not punish her misdeeds, or give her sins their just reward.

How great is love as high as him towards all those who fear the Lord.

Towards all those who fear the Lord. We can turn back to our reading in Nehemiah chapter 9.

I'm just going to pick out a few verses throughout the chapter just to show us where we're going this evening. Verse 6, first of all, where the people are praising God, and they say there, you are the Lord, you alone.

You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, and so on. You are the Lord, you alone.

[27 : 24] Then in verse 17, we see how the people refused to obey. It says they refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt.

But you are a God, ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

People disobeyed, and yet God is still gracious and slow to anger. Verse 26, there it says, nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you, and cast your law behind their back, and killed your prophets who had warned them in order to turn them back to you.

So again, we see the rebellion of the people, putting the law, turning away from the law of God. And then we go down to verse 30.

For many years you bore with them and warned them by your spirit through your prophets, yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

[28 : 40] Nevertheless, in your great mercies, you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

I'm sure it surprises you as it surprises me so often just how patient God is with us all, how long-suffering he is despite all that we do amiss towards him, despite the way we so often treat him and are cold towards him.

The Lord's mercies are still there for us. And that's a powerful reminder that we have throughout this chapter that we're studying together this evening as Nehemiah and Ezra and the people are gathered together.

Here they are gathered around the word of God once again and they're hearing over a long period of time just how faithful God has been and even in the midst of their disobedience, how often he has shown mercy and graciousness towards them.

Nehemiah came to Jerusalem as a leader for the people but where was he leading them to? Or to what end was he leading them?

[29 : 57] As we've gone through this wonderful book we've seen how he came and found a city that was in disarray in so many ways. The walls were in ruin, the people were in distress, they were in trouble.

There wasn't much hope for them and so he came to rebuild the walls and we've seen how that was done and how that was completed but that was not the end because from the moment that Nehemiah had this great burden from God for the people of Jerusalem the burden was not just for rebuilding the walls.

That was just a part. The burden was for the people. And that was a burden that was not going to end with a city that was rebuilt.

That burden for the people was not going to come to an end until the people were walking in the right way with God because that was his ultimate aim to relieve the trouble, the distress that they were in.

And the greatest distress, the greatest trouble they were in was their relationship with God. The relationship that had broken down, the relationship that had led to them being taken into captivity in the first place, the reason why the walls were in disarray, the reason why the people felt hopeless, the relationship with God had broken down.

[31 : 27] And so his ultimate aim was to restore Jerusalem and God's people as a people of worship, worshipping a holy God and having his joy in their hearts.

And as we looked at the last time in this book, chapter 8 was a high point. Chapter 8 was a point where we see the people gathered together.

The wall had been completed. They were gathered around the word of God and it brought tears to their eyes. They were weeping, weeping with sorrow over all that it meant, all that they had done against God.

But they were told that this was not a time to mourn and to weep. This was a time to rejoice, to rejoice in the joy of the Lord as their strength.

The joy of the Lord was their strength. And what a wonderful blessing it was for them to know the Lord had not turned his back on them and that they could rejoice in this.

[32 : 36] And they did rejoice. They enjoyed a feast. They enjoyed a time of feasting that went on for a number of weeks. In chapter 8, as it continues, you find the feast of booths celebrated there.

A feast that went on probably for around three weeks. And now as you come into chapter 9, that feast has ended. And just a few days later, they're gathering again together around the Word of God.

So they had this high point in chapter 8. They had this moment of joy and rejoicing in the Lord as the joy of the Lord is their strength.

But then as you come into chapter 9, you find it's quite a different environment. Again, the people of Israel, they're coming to confess their sin.

There's a sense of mourning once again. And it's a great reminder to us that this is the way our lives so often are. There are high points, high experiences in our lives and in the Christian life especially.

[33 : 46] There are high points in our life, but the majority of our lives just the ordinary. The day-to-day routine. The day-to-day walking with God.

And if we just look back a week, last weekend, it often is a high point. A time of communion in the congregation. It's a time of blessing, a time of fellowship, a time of being gathered around God's Word, a time of feasting together around God's Word and in fellowship together, but we must come away from it.

We have to come away. We have to come back into the ordinary way of life. So how has the last week been for you? How has the last week gone? We pray we all enjoyed a high over the weekend, but how's the ordinary Monday to Saturday gone since?

How are we going forward? Well, that's what's of interest to Nehemiah here as well. The high point of chapter 8 and the feasting and rejoicing that there is there.

But now to go forward in the ordinary. The day-to-day life. And how are they going to do that? How are they going to go forward? And how do you and I keep going forward as well?

[35 : 08] Well, as we go through chapter 9, we find that the people are learning together what it means to go forward. How they can learn from their own experience and the experiences we see from generations past as well.

How are they going to go forward? Well, they're going to learn lessons from the past. They're going to look, as they're praying here in chapter 9, they're looking to their fathers, to the people in the past generations.

How they've ended up in a situation of trouble. What was the cause? How did they stumble when God had been so good to them? And what can they learn going forward as well?

Well, they landed in trouble because they rejected God. That's what we see in verse 26. The generations in the past says in verse 26, They were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back.

They killed the prophets, the ones God had sent to teach them in order to bring them back to him. So the word of God that they had rejoiced in had been taken and cast away.

[36 : 27] It was put behind their back. They didn't do the word that they'd heard. As we were hearing this morning, they'd heard the word of God, but they didn't keep applying the word of God to their lives.

And yet the wonder of it all is that again and again, we're reminded in this passage, almost a summary of the Old Testament in many ways, a summary of how the people were blessed and then were disobedient, but a God who is merciful.

In verse 17, you have these wonderful words, But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.

Even though they forsook the word of God and put it behind them, God did not forsake them. And so the people here now in Nehemiah's day, they're seeking to learn their lessons.

They're wanting a renewal with God, and that's what's at the end of the chapter, in verse 38. Because of all this, we make a firm covenant in writing.

[37 : 43] We're wanting this relationship with God renewed. Renewed because again, they know the mercy of God, of verse 31. You did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

And so for us, as we seek to go forward, how can we learn ourselves from this prayer this evening? How did the people learn then, and how can we learn ourselves?

Well, there's three things I want us to take from this chapter. First, we see the Lord of all. Our eyes have to be fixed on the Lord at all times.

And whatever situation, whatever part of this chapter you're looking at, it is all about you, oh Lord. You, oh Lord. And that's what's got to be at the heart of our lives.

But we also see how the people learn from past sins. And the people learn in their present need. So we have the Lord of all, the people's past sins, and the people's present need.

[38 : 59] We have they, we, and you, oh Lord. And so that's how we are to go forward ourselves as well. First of all, thinking of the Lord of all.

The joy of the Lord is your strength, they heard in chapter 8. And what we find is this flowing into chapter 9 as well. Because the joy of the Lord is not just for a moment.

The joy of the Lord is not just something for that high point of chapter 8. The joy of the Lord is what is going to keep them going in the ordinary day-to-day life as well.

And so it flows into chapter 8 as well. the days of feasting that they have enjoyed together. They've come to an end, but they still know how much they need the Lord.

And so they find themselves gathered around the word of God. In verse 1, on the 24th day of this month, the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth and with earth on their heads.

[40 : 06] So there was a sense of coming in repentance here. Mourning over their sin. Fasting they're in sackcloth and with earth on their heads.

They've separated themselves from all the foreigners. They stood and they confessed their sins. This is still a time to rejoice in the joy of the Lord as their strength.

Because it is the joy of the Lord as their strength that helps us to see our sin and to repent from them. And that is how they are going forward.

That's how the people in the past failed to go forward. And that's what they're seeking to learn from. It is the Lord who is able to keep them going.

That they need to see their dependence is on the Lord. A man called Leonard Ravenhill once wrote this. He said, the devil has two major tricks with his people.

[41 : 12] One is, you're so good you don't need to be saved. That's one of his tricks. You're so good you don't need to be saved.

The other is, you're so bad you can't be saved. That's the two tricks the devil uses. Leonard Ravenhill said, you're so good you don't need to be saved or you're so bad you can't be saved. But what he said was this, he's a liar on both counts. Because that's not the way to go forward. We can't go forward thinking we're so good we don't need to be saved.

We don't need the Lord. We do. But we can't go forward thinking we're so bad the Lord won't want us. The Lord can't save us. That's not true either.

To go forward we need the Lord. That's what Psalm 84 makes so clear for us when it speaks in that Psalm in verse 6 about passing through Baker's veil therein do dig up wells also the rain that falleth down the pools with water fills the Lord with his people and so at verse 7 goes on so they from strength unwearied go still forward unto strength until in Zion they appear before the Lord at length.

[42 : 43] So they have this strength that can only come from the Lord and that's the way for us to go forward as well. And that's what this prayer in chapter 9 is all about.

And from verse 6 onwards it's really the people crying out to God in prayer. Prayer as a result of having heard the word for three hours and then having confession and worship for three hours as well.

You see that in verse 3 where the book of the law of the Lord was read for a quarter of the day and for another quarter of the day confession and worship was made and then they went into prayer.

Can you imagine that for ourselves tonight? We've started half past six. We're going to read God's word till half past nine. Then from half past nine to half past midnight we're going to make

confession and worship God and then we'll start to pray.

Who would be with me in that? Who would stay six hours before we come to the point of actually coming to pray to God? But that's where the people were at.

[44 : 11] That's what they realized they needed. They needed the Lord and it's a challenge to us. How much are we depending on the Lord? How much are we coming before God with that sense of confession and dependence on him?

They've heard the word of God. They've worshipped and made confession and they come to him in prayer. And you wonder, well, what did they hear in the word of God that brought them to this point? Well, as you see in the prayer, it opens up what we would see as Genesis through to Deuteronomy. It's going right back to the beginning, to all that the Lord has done for his people.

In verse 7, you have, you are the Lord who chose. In verse 9, you saw the affliction of the people as they were in Egypt. In verse 11, as he was leading them out, you divided the sea.

In verse 13, we have the law given, you came down at Mount Sinai. So there's here a focus on the Lord who has done all this.

[45 : 27] A dependence on him. But when you go back to verse 6, you find there the key that holds it all together. Verse 6, you are the Lord, you alone, you have made heaven, the heavens of heaven, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, and the seas and all that is in them.

You are the Lord. And here is the key to our understanding of who he is. He has made the heavens and the earth and all that is in them.

This is the God of creation. This is the God of Genesis chapter 1. In the beginning, God made all things.

And this is the key to our relationship with God. To see him not as a small God, as a God who is there for some things, but a God who is there for all things.

As Hebrews 11, verse 3 puts it, by faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

[46 : 43] By faith we understand. By faith we go forward. And this is what their relationship is all about.

They are depending on God. Is this the God that you believe in? Is this the God that you see you need in your life?

The God who holds the heaven and the earth, the whole universe together? There's a story told about Isaac Newton and he'd made a replica of the solar system in miniature.

In the centre was the sun and all around it was all the planets and how they were revolving around the sun. This was in a study and another scientist came into his study and saw this model and marveled at it and said who made this?

And Isaac Newton replied saying nobody. And the other scientist said you must think I'm a fool. Of course somebody made it. Now tell me who made it?

[47 : 49] It must be a genius to make this model and how it works together. Isaac Newton got up of his chair and went over to his friend the other scientist and said this is just a tiny imitation of a much grander solar system whose laws and logic you and I know all about and I cannot convince you that this mere model has no designer or maker and yet you profess that the original from which this model is taken has no creator or designer or maker.

The model that was so tiny must have a maker. but the real thing the heaven the earth the moon the stars and all of these things there's no maker.

He's saying where's the logic in that? But that's what we see as we look to the word of God. You are the Lord you alone you have made heaven the heaven of heavens and all of its host everything is made by God and this is the God that the people are looking to and depending on to go forward.

The question is that our God as we seek to go forward ourselves. So there is God over all.

You oh Lord have done so much for us. But then the focus secondly here is the people's past sin.

[49 : 33] When we think of moving forward we always have to learn from the past whether that's good or bad. Nehemiah as a book as a whole is all about renewal.

The renewal of the wall. The renewal of their lives and as we will see God willing later the renewal of their relationship their covenant relationship with God.

But renewal always entails as it is with God's people repentance. We cannot go forward without repentance.

We cannot keep going without repentance. And this means a realization where things have gone wrong. And that is what God's word does for us.

as you go through this prayer, as you go through these verses, the people are confronted with two specific things.

[50 : 37] They are confronted with who God is. What we have just looked at, you O Lord, are the one who has made all things. But the second thing that they are confronted with is who they are.

And who they are in the midst of all of this. And if we read verse 30 and 31, for many years you bore with them and warned them by your spirit through your prophets, yet they would not give ear, therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for a gracious and merciful God. It's the story of the Old Testament.

So often again and again you find it the God who is pursuing his people, the God who is showing grace to his people, a people who so often aren't looking for it, a people who so often don't deserve it, a people so often resisting this grace.

And who don't appreciate what they have. And yet God is merciful and gracious and kind. You find the word they is mentioned so often in the prayer.

[52 : 08] As they are praying, they turned their back, they disobeyed. This kind of looking to the past, it's remembering the journey of their ancestors, what the Lord brought them through.

Now for us as we would come to this, we might think, well, it's a way of blame. They went wrong, not us, they went wrong. And when we think of the things we've done ourselves, is that the approach that we have?

Blame someone else. Somebody else's fault. We look for someone to blame. It's often a natural reaction.

You can think of many different things you could blame in your own life. We blame a generation that we live in that's turning away from God.

We can blame the government who are passing rules that go against the laws of God. We can blame an upbringing perhaps. We can blame a person.

[53 : 16] They they they it's their fault. But that's not what they're doing here. They're not looking to the past here and blaming somebody else.

They are looking at they as what they are too. They got it wrong and we are suffering too because we get it wrong.

Someone spoke of our generation as being persuaded by the weightlessness of God.

Weightlessness. I.e. there's nothing to him.

God cannot help. What the people here were saying was just how weighty God is. How great God is.

How he is the God, the only God who can help. Alistair Begg recently put sin like this. He said our sins are simply the outward manifestation of our personal decision to suppress the truth about God and thereby pursue whatever it is that we have decided to put in the place of God.

[54 : 36] That's what the people are experiencing here. They may be saying they got wrong in the past but they're also saying it's our sins. Our sins, our personal decisions have landed us in this too.

In verse 26 where it speaks about they put the law behind their back. It's exactly the same as what they were doing as well.

But they are beginning to realize that the God who was able to help in the past is the God who is able to help now if they will confess their sins and turn from them.

And that is for us too. The God who has helped his people in the past is the same God today. The same God who is gracious and merciful, who is able to pardon all our sins.

But we must confess our sins. The things that we have done that we shouldn't. But even the things that we haven't done that we should, we need to confess them all.

[55 : 53] There's a book called Why Prayers Are Unanswered. And in this book there's a story told about a boy who found a big cigar in his father's house.

I'm sure maybe many of us have been in this situation ourselves in the past. He took the cigar, slipped outside down an alley, and decided to light it up.

It didn't taste good, but it made him feel like a man. It made him feel grown up, and so he carried on puffing away on it until he saw his father coming.

And then it was panic stations. And he quickly hid the cigar behind his back. And his father was coming towards him, and he was just trying to act casual.

But he thought, I've got to divert my father's attention away from what's happening here to something else. And across the street there was a billboard advertising a circus. And so he said quickly to his father, Can I go, Dad?

[56 : 58] Can I go to the circus? When it comes to town, we should both go. Well, he learned a lesson that day by his father's reply.

He said, Son, never make a request at the same time you're trying to hide a smoldering disobedience.

The father knew what was going on. He couldn't hide it from his father. But his father knew too the request that he wanted.

But he had to deal with the disobedience first. And that's the way our father in heaven is too. We cannot come to him hiding sin behind our back.

We cannot keep on sinning and make a request to God. We need to confess our sin, to bring them to God in order to move forward.

[58 : 03] The people here were confessing their sins, learning from the past sins of the people and coming to the God who was able to help.

So the final thing we want to take from this chapter is the people's present need. And it's our need too. You see the story of the people of God in the past that so much is said of in Nehemiah chapter 9 speaking of beginning of creation, Abraham and the covenant, children of Israel and the exodus going into the promised land, to the people present in Nehemiah's day.

It's the same need as for our day. It's our need too because we are all part of this ongoing story.

The ongoing story of God's people who reject God one minute but then cry for help the next.

Throughout this prayer and throughout the scriptures you find it's this back and forth. Faithfulness to God one minute putting his law behind her back the next.

what we need to see is who God is. You have made heaven and earth. You have kept your promise.

[59 : 33] You are the God who is ready to forgive, to hear these words that would bring us out of hiding and bring us to him. Because this language is familiar to us all.

Because we are all a people of rebellion. We can all say God you have been faithful. I have been unfaithful.

You have been loving. I have been lukewarm towards you. You have been committed to me and I have been fickle towards you.

That's the story of our life. It's a language that is probably familiar with every one of us. Myself too. How God is good and yet we don't listen. We don't deserve his mercy. And it all becomes very personal.

[60 : 39] And that's because that is exactly what the gospel is. It is personal. it is between you and God.

It is between me and God. Have you and have I have we been a people that have put the law of God behind our back?

Have you have I been a people who have sought to try and hide our sins behind our back? Have you have I been a people who have thought God is just weightless?

God is not powerful. God cannot deal with my sin. What do we think of when we think of rebuilding and renewal?

What do we need? this is pointing us towards what we all need a redeemer a savior one who can take us out of this situation and into a place where we know salvation with him.

[61 : 57] We need Jesus. we need him as lord and redeemer. We need him as the one who is able to renew our lives, to make the difference in our lives, to know his great salvation.

That is what the people needed. That is why they come to the point in verse 38, well, the end of verse 37, we are in great distress.

That is where they are brought to. That's where we should be brought to as well. We are in great distress. Because of all this, we make a firm covenant in writing.

They return to God, to the God who is merciful, the God who is gracious, and we can come to God too.

we can come to him who came to give us life, the one who is the answer to all our troubles.

[63 : 11] Somebody once put Jesus' life like this, and how he is able to help us in all our different needs. It says, he began his ministry by being hungry, thirsty, yet he is the bread of life.

Jesus ended his earthly ministry by being thirsty, yet he is the living water. Jesus was weary, yet he is a rest.

Jesus wept, yet he wipes away our tears. sinners. Jesus was sold for 30 pieces of silver, yet he redeemed the world.

Jesus was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, yet he is the good shepherd. Jesus died, yet by his death, he destroyed the power of death and gives us life.

We have sin past, we have sin present, we have a great need, but we have a great God, for you are a gracious and a merciful God, and that's the God who we want to go forward with, to be renewed with.

[64 : 38] Nehemiah wasn't just about walls, it was about people and their relationship with God, that they would have a fresh start with their faithful God.

Is that our longing tonight? Is that our longing day by day, a fresh start, to begin again, because we all need renewal, on a daily basis, and it's available to us, through this God.

So let's end today, as we began this morning. Let's not just be hearers of the word, but let us be doers.

Let us hear what God is saying to us, to come, to confess our sin, to plead with him who is alone, God, who made the heaven and the earth and all that is in him, who sees our sin, and yet who is a God who is gracious and merciful.

And may we be renewed in him. Let us pray. our Father in heaven, we rejoice in the gospel for it is a story for us all to hear.

[66 : 06] It's a very personal story that speaks to each one of us. It's not just about us collectively, but individually, for you know us all by name. We cannot stand before you hiding anything behind our backs, for you already see it and know it.

but help us to come confessing our sin and ready to come to you in order to receive the blessing that it brings, to know you as a gracious and merciful God.

So hear our prayers and continue with us as we ask all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're going to conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 104.

Psalm 104, we sing from verse 31 to 36 in the Singed Psalms version, page 138.

May the Lord's majestic glory always last and never fade. May the Lord rejoice and triumph in the works that he has made. When he gazes on creation, earth begins to shake in fear.

[67 : 21] At his touch, the mountains tremble, smoke and flames of fire appear. We'll sing these last four stanzas to God's praise.

praise. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. May the Lord's majestic glory always last and never fade.

May the Lord rejoice joy and triumph in the works that he has made.

When he gives his own creation, earth begins to shake in fear.

At his touch, the mountains tremble, smoke and flames of fire appear.

[68 : 33] To the Lord throughout my lifetime, to my God, I will sing praise.

May my meditation please him, as to him my song I raise.

But may sinners flee before him, and the wicked be no more.

Praise be to the Lord Almighty, O my soul the Lord adore.

After the benediction, I'll go to the door to my left. We'll close with a benediction. Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all now and forever more.

[69 : 43] Amen. Amen. Amen.