

What is the Lord's Work?

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Date: 05 November 2023

[0 : 00] Let's begin our worship at this time, singing to God's praise. We're singing in Psalm 34 in the Sing Psalms version. It's on page 40 of the psalm books, Psalm 34, verse 1 to 9. The tune is Jackson.

At all times I will bless the Lord, I'll praise him with my voice, because I glory in the Lord, let troubled souls rejoice. Together, let us praise the Lord, exalt his name with me. I sought the Lord, his answer came from fears, he set me free.

We'll sing from verse 1 to 9 to God's praise. At all times I will bless the Lord, I'll praise him with my voice.

Because I glory in the Lord, let troubled souls rejoice.

Together, let us praise the Lord, exalt his name with me.

[1 : 21] I sought the Lord, his answer came from fears, he set me free.

They look to him and shine with joy. They are not put to shame.

This suffering man, cry to the Lord, from him deliverance stream.

The angel of the Lord, his answer comes from fear. The angel of the Lord surrounds, and guards for to glory.

Of those who fear and honor him, he sets his people free.

[2 : 32] Come, take and see the Lord, his good, who trust in heaven's land.

O fear and honor him, he sets his people free. You will not be oppressed. You will not be oppressed.

As united hearts together in prayer, let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we come before you as our Lord and as our God.

We come looking to you, seeking your blessing on us as a people, upon our time together, upon our worship as we offer it up to you in every way.

That we would come, Lord, humbly before you, exalting your name, and that we would come offering up all our praise to you. And that we would do so together, even as the psalm has described for us.

[3 : 46] And at all times, Lord, we may bless you. We thank you for that, that we do not need to be gathered as we are here. But we thank you for the special times we have to be gathered together.

We thank you for, as we've been hearing over these last number of weeks, the gathered church and every aspect of it. And that we are indeed a people on a journey through this world.

But we thank you that we can set at all times the Lord before us. That we look to our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who guides us, the one who helps us, the one who shows us every path to take, shows us every choice to make.

But we acknowledge, Lord, that there are times when we are not wise in our decisions. There are times when we make the wrong choices in life. But we thank you for the wonder of your grace and your love and your mercy to us.

That you are a God of great grace and forgiveness. With you there is so much forgiveness. And we thank you for that, Lord, that you are able to pardon us for all our sin, for the times we do go astray.

[4 : 57] But that you are the one who calls us back, who calls us to yourself, even as we feel the burdens of sin and guilt. Even as we feel the burdens of this world and the life that we live at times, Lord.

We know that there are so many burdens that we carry and maybe try to carry by ourselves. But we thank you for the gospel and for the great invitation that we find in it.

That you are the one who calls your people to yourself. We thank you for those precious words of our Lord Jesus as he called to his people to come.

Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. And we pray, Lord, to know that rest. We pray to know our burdens lifted.

And especially the burden of our guilt and sin. And we thank you that you are the only one who is able to take it from us. And we pray, Lord, that as we come to you and as we find our rest in you, that you will give us that freedom and liberty to serve you as we should.

[6 : 06] That as a people, as a church, we would seek to honor you in all that we do. To seek to glorify your name and to proclaim it far and wide.

Through the preaching of your word and the ministry of your people in many different ways. We thank you that you use your people, your church, to build your kingdom.

And we thank you that your kingdom is being built. That your kingdom comes in power day by day. That you are at all times calling people to yourself. And that even today, Lord, we pray and even this evening we pray that there will be rejoicing in heaven over one sinner saved.

It sounds such an insignificant number. Just one sinner in the midst of the billions in this world. But yet we thank you that everyone is precious to you.

Every name is known to you. And that there is no one who is hidden from you. We thank you that everyone is personal to you. And that you are the one who calls us each by name.

[7 : 11] So, Lord, may we have ears to hear what you are saying to us. And may you humble us before you in terms of how we live and how we move and have our being in this world.

For we thank you, Lord, that every good and perfect gift comes from you. We have so much to be thankful for. Even as we look around ourselves this evening, we thank you for one another.

We thank you for all who are here in every home and family represented. We thank you for all who tune in online as well, who join us through that means in our own community and far and wide as well.

We thank you for the way that your gospel goes into homes and families and even different parts of this world. We marvel at these things, Lord, just seeing how you are able to use these things for good and for your glory.

And so we pray that as your word goes out today and as you hear our prayers together and as you, Lord, receive our praise and thanks, that you will do us good, Lord, that you will build us up, that you will encourage us in our faith, that you will draw near to us, each one of us, as we seek to draw near to you.

[8 : 26] May you bless your word to us this evening as we read it and open it up together again as we come to see the wonder of the work that goes on in your name.

We thank you, Lord, that you are a God who gives focus and direction in every way. And may you help us to understand. May you help us to hear. May you help us to apply your word to our lives. All that we have heard this day, that we will be able to go into the week ahead with your word even echoing in our ears and ministering to us and helping us in the different challenges that we will face day after day.

That we will remember the security that we have in Christ and we remember who we serve in this world and that we will do all for his glory. We pray your blessing on our evening together, Lord, and the fellowship afterwards.

We thank you for Gordon coming to be with us this evening. We thank you for his role in our presbytery that's developed over these last few years, from focusing on the youth and the discipleship work among them to being more involved now in discipleship and development for each and every congregation throughout our presbytery.

[9 : 45] And we thank you for the opportunity he's had and for his opportunity here this evening to share with us and that we would get to know him better and the work that he's involved in and how he can support and encourage us as a congregation here.

We ask your blessing on him, his family, and indeed his own congregation in Harris as well. We thank you for the encouragements that they have had even recently over the communion season. And pray your blessing on David and Matthew and elders, deacons, and the members and adherents there together, Lord, that they will know your good hand upon them. As we pray that for all our congregations throughout our presbytery here and throughout our denomination.

We thank you for the proclamation of your word and how it goes out into so many different corners of our nation. And we pray that in cities, towns, villages where your people gather this day, that your name be praised and your people built up and your kingdom extended to all ends of the earth.

We thank you for the ministry here throughout our congregation through the week as we see even a busy week ahead in the week ahead just now, Lord.

[10:59] We pray for all the meetings to take place, the worship services, the times of prayer with Muriel and meetings to be had for the young folks and the work that goes on among them.

We pray, Lord, that your blessing will be on all that we do, that we would see your hand upon us for good, that you would remind us, Lord, why we do it and for whom we are doing it.

That we are to do it in good cheer and in a good spirit and a prayerful spirit. We pray, Lord, that above all your name would be praised in all things.

Remember our homes and our families, Lord, as we commit again all our people to you, especially again we remember those who have lost loved ones even in this past week.

And we thank you that you are a God of all comfort, a God of all grace. And we pray that those who grieve this night would know such a large measure of that comfort as they have already experienced it, that they would continue to know it day by day.

[12:06] Remember those who are unwell in our midst as well and throughout our communities. Lord, we pray your help and your grace and your mercy towards all the different needs around us.

We commit them to you as well. We ask now, Lord, that you will bless us in our time and in our worship. And all that we do, Lord, we would do it to the Lord and for his glory.

Hear us in our prayers and pardon us for all our sin as we ask all of these things in his precious name. Amen. We'll again sing to God's praise, this time in Psalm 37.

The Scottish Psalter version on page 252. Psalm 37, page 252. We'll sing from verse 1 to verse 6. The tune is Amazing Grace. Psalm 37 at verse 1. For evildoers, fret thou not thyself unquietly. Nor do thou envy, bear to those that work iniquity.

[13:09] For even like unto the grass soon be cut down shall they. And like the green and tender herb they wither shall away. Then we have this great reminder in verse 3.

Set thou thy trust upon the Lord and be thou doing good. And so thou in the land shalt dwell and verily have food. We'll sing from verse 1 to verse 6 to God's praise.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[15:07] And so thou in the land shall dwell, and there thee have food.

Delight thyself in what you give, thy heart desire to thee.

Thy reign to God, O men to God, every reign to pass shall he.

And like unto the light ye shall thy righteousness slay.

And ye thy judgment shall live forth, like who died of the day.

[16:44] Amen. Nehemiah chapter 5, reading from the beginning of the chapter.

Now 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 those who said, we are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine.

And there were those who said, we have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards. Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children as their children.

Yet we are forcing our sons and our 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.

[18:13] I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. I took counsel with myself and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials.

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. They were silent and could not find a word to say. So I said, the thing that you are doing is not good.

Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God to prevent the taunts of the nations, our enemies?

Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain.

Let us abandon this exacting of interest. Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses and the percentage of money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them.

[19 : 24] Then they said, we will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say. And I called the priests and made them swear to do as they had promised.

I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, so may God shake out every man from his house and from his labor who does not keep this promise.

So may he be shaken out and emptied. And all the assembly said, Amen. And praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised.

Moreover, from that 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 and took from them for their daily ration 40 shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people.

[20 : 31] But I did not do so because of the fear of God. I also persevered in the work on this wall and we acquired no land and all my servants were gathered there for the work.

Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. Now what was prepared at my expense for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds.

And every 10 days all kinds of wine in abundance. Yet for all this, I did not demand the food allowance of the governor because the service was too heavy on this people.

Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people. Amen. And may God bless that reading from his word.

When we turn back to look at this passage, we'll sing again to God's praise. This time in Psalm 15, in the Sing Psalms version. It's on page 16. We sing the whole of this psalm.

[21 : 41] The tune is Grafenberg, Psalm 15, a psalm that reminds us how we are to look out for others and honor the Lord in all that we do.

Lord, who may stay within your tent, your sacred dwelling place, and who upon your holy hill may live before your face. Whoever walks a blameless path, who acts in righteousness, and who will always from the heart sincerely truth express.

We'll sing the whole of this psalm to God's praise. Lord, who may stay within your tent, your sacred dwelling place, and who upon your holy hill may live before your face.

Lord, who may be speaking to your holy hill may live before your face. Who have one walks a blameless path, who acts in righteousness, and who will always from the heart sincerely truth express.

He cast no slug on anyone, or does his neighbor run.

[23 : 29] He has no spine within his heart, or stand upon his tongue.

He honors those who fear the Lord, the worthless he'll despise.

He gives the oath which he hath sworn, however I love Christ.

He lends his money at no charge, nor I can he endure.

Those who behave in life like this will always stand secure.

[24 : 42] Let's turn back to our reading in Nehemiah chapter 5.

We're going to look at the whole of this chapter together. We see at the beginning of the chapter where it says, Now 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.

And so on. One of the most common questions we can get asked in life is, What do you do? What work do you do? And I'm sure even this evening as we look around here, there'd be a variety of different answers that we would give to that question.

Some would say maybe I'm a teacher. Others may say I'm involved in working in a trade. Others may say I'm involved in postal work. I'm involved in the health service.

[25 : 47] I'm involved in admin. There'll be a whole host of answers given to that question. For others, maybe the question will be a little different. Maybe they say, Well, I'm not actually working now.

I'm retired. Or maybe I'm unemployed at the moment. Or some people may say I'm too young to work yet. There'll be a whole host of answers. But the focus when we think of that question is so often on paid work.

Paid employment. So often that's the work that we define ourselves by. And yet there's another question behind that.

What work do you do when there's much more that we do in life than just work in paid employment? And especially as you've been thinking and looking through the book of Nehemiah, we see that there's a very different kind of work that we should all be involved in.

None of us are retired from it. None of us are too young for it. Maybe some of us maybe feel we're too busy for it at times. But even that should challenge us to think, Well, I need to give more of my time to this kind of work.

[26 : 56] And it is the Lord's work. Together we come this evening as we sang together. Let us praise the Lord. We come together to worship God, to offer up our praise to him.

But even as we leave here this evening, we should go with that sense of togetherness as well, that we are involved in the work of God's kingdom. And that this work entails a variety of different kinds of aspects.

Just a quick glance of the notice sheet today will show you the variety of different works that the congregation is involved in. And that's just looking at things here.

But we have to look further beyond that as well and think how much of the work of the Lord are we involved in. And what a variety there is to the work of the Lord.

As we return to Nehemiah and chapter 5 here, we find a situation where the wall of Jerusalem is being rebuilt.

[27 : 59] And we're going to see, again, just the variety of this work and the focus that is required in this work. The wall of Jerusalem, as we've seen for Nehemiah, was so important.

It's this great burden that the Lord had placed on him when he was so far away from Jerusalem and he'd never even been there. He had this burden because his brothers, his sisters, they were his people, they were suffering because the wall was broken down.

And so in this great burden he had, he came to Jerusalem with this vision of seeing this wall restored. It was needed for the security and the safety of the people.

It was needed for the glory of God and the worship of God. It's the wall, the wall, the wall. But as we will see this evening, it wasn't to be the wall at all costs or to the detriment of the people in other ways.

And when we think of our work for the Lord here, we could ask ourselves, you know, what is the priority of the work?

[29 : 17] We think of the preaching of the word, how central that is. But as we heard even this morning, again, it was preaching is so important.

But what about our evangelism? What about our outreach? What about using our gifts and our talents? There's no point if we're preaching and there's no one to hear.

The gospel is to go out. We are to invite to say, come with me and come with us. We will do you good as we heard this morning.

So the work of the Lord, there is a whole variety to it. Every aspect of it is important. Sometimes we see some people's role as more important.

But if you think of it in the way that the scriptures describe the church, the people of God as a body, a body working together.

[30 : 17] We think of the body and if one part of the body is weak or suffering and not right, the rest is suffering too. So every aspect of the work is essential.

It goes together and for the congregation to be healthy and a congregation to be honoring God and serving God and working aright for God.

It needs to have this healthy body. Nehemiah had this vision for the wall. But even Nehemiah needed reminding at times that our vision has to go far and wide.

It's not just one priority, but looking at everything together. The vision for ministry today is to be just like that too.

Not just looking at our own individual needs and priorities, but looking beyond ourselves. And seeing that the work of the Lord is in every aspect of what we do as a people and how we live our lives.

[31 : 33] Colossians chapter 3 as Paul writes to the church there in Colossae. He speaks to them in chapter 3 about how they are to be as workers.

And he's saying not to work as people pleasers, but with sincerity of heart. Fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, he says, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men. Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. And is that how we see our work here?

Is that how we feel our work is? Are we doing it heartily as to the Lord, not just to please men? Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.

You are serving the Lord Christ. All of us together are to serve the Lord Christ.

[32 : 42] And as we look at Nehemiah here, there are lessons that we can learn. As to how we are to serve the Lord Christ. Because you see here as Nehemiah is focused on the wall, there are other concerns.

And concerns from others about injustice and suffering. And what this leads to is Nehemiah's vision broadening and developing.

And we see it develop here in a way that keeps impacting his life as it goes on day after day. There have been problems and challenges already to the work as we've seen.

There have been many different problems. In chapter 4 we were looking at the opposition to the work. But we see the work resumed at the end of chapter 4. The wall was being built.

But like we say, the danger was it would become all about the wall. When we hear terms like corporate greed, the mortgage crisis, government intervention, high lending fees.

[33 : 53] They all sound like things that are in our day today. And they are. We see it in the headlines all the time. But actually when you read through chapter 5 of Nehemiah, you see it's a summary of that chapter.

You have all these issues arising throughout this chapter. Greed. Money being charged that shouldn't be.

Government intervention. You see all of these things happening in chapter 5. And there are many lessons that Nehemiah learns here.

And there are many lessons for ourselves to learn too. But there's three things I want us to take from this chapter together this evening. First of all, it's all relating to what kind of people we are to be.

First of all, we are to be a listening people. A listening people. Secondly, we are to be a loving people. And then thirdly, we are to be a living people.

[34 : 54] So a listening people, a loving people, and a living people. Nehemiah, in order to be a good leader, and anyone who wants to be a good leader, one of the key qualities is to be able to listen.

And that's what we see first of all here. To be a listening people. It's good to be focused in whatever we are doing.

It's good to have a vision and a clear focus of what we are trying to achieve in life and in the work we're involved in. Whether it's secular or whether it's church work.

Whatever we are doing, it's good to have a focus. But there's also a danger in that as well. And we see at the end of chapter 4, there was a real focus on the work.

Between verse 21 and the end of the chapter there, We labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out. I also said to the people at that time, Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, That they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day.

[36 : 10] So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, None of us took off our clothes. Each kept his weapon at his right hand.

There was this, just the work on the wall was all that mattered. There was everything revolved around this. There was a focus, and you think to yourself, This is a great focus.

This is wonderful that they're seeing the walls being rebuilt, That they're involved in this day and night. It's going to be achieved. It's going to be accomplished. But when you come into chapter 5, What you find is there's a great outcry.

Now there arose a great outcry of the people, It says in verse 1 of chapter 5. Why? Well, it's because this focus on the wall has led to suffering in other different ways.

It's led to a crisis in the community. We see that there was a famine. And in the midst of this famine, there was greed. And there was loss of land.

[37 : 21] And family members, sons and daughters were being sold into slavery. They were trying to make ends meet. And it was a serious situation.

And in the midst of this, there arose a great outcry. The people spoke. But what's interesting is when you see who spoke, When you look at verse 1, it says, Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives.

We have here a reminder that there are many voices that are to be listened to and heard in the work of the Lord.

Men and women will see things differently. Young and old will see things differently. And they'll all have their own voice.

But the question here is, are we listening? Are we listening to these voices? Men will see problems and needs in a different way.

[38 : 31] You think even of our Kirk session here. It's made up of men. Men of different backgrounds. Different gifts. And when we discuss things, we'll have all these gifts that are able to be used to look at whatever's in front of us and discuss it through.

And everyone will bring something to the table. We'll see things differently. But we hope that together we'll be able to go on in the work of the Lord. And that's what you find here.

As the wall was being built, it was mainly the men who were involved in it. And they were working on the wall. Defending or building or using their different gifts in it.

But in the background, there was something else happened. There was another problem. There arose this need. This poverty among the people. And this is where other voices come in and need to be listened to.

The outcry of the people and of their wives. There was more than just the voices of the men being heard here. And that's, again, a reminder to us that men and women will see things differently.

[39 : 41] The issues that we see as men, women maybe don't even see them as issues. But they'll raise other issues that need to be addressed. Practical, physical, spiritual needs.

When you read here, there are people who are going hungry. There are people who are losing their homes and their fields. There are people who are losing their families. And unbeknown to Nehemiah and those working on the wall, this is going on.

And it's only when this outcry comes and Nehemiah hears that we see in verse 6 that he was very angry. And so it's important for us to think here.

What does this say to ourselves today? Nehemiah hears and he listens and that leads to change. Well, it's saying to ourselves today that there are important lessons for us.

That if we think of ourselves as a congregation, we have to listen to each other. To listen to every voice that speaks up, that has concerns when it comes to the work of the Lord.

[40 : 53] That every voice is to be listened to. And so there are two things really we could highlight here as particular lessons. We need to give people a voice.

A place to bring their concerns. Even as it was here, a great outcry arose from the people and their wives. So it is that we have to give opportunity to speak.

But if people are speaking, the second thing is we need to listen. We need to hear what these concerns are. And if anything needs to be done. And especially when the concerns are based on the word of God.

And that's what these concerns are all based on. That are brought before Nehemiah and the people here. They're all concerns based on God's word being disobeyed.

And not adhered to. And so if scripture is saying, as Nehemiah says later on in verse 9. What you are doing is not good.

[41 : 55] We have to listen. And so a healthy church is one that works together as a body all united. And that is seen that everyone has a part to play.

We heard this morning again about Hobab and the gift that Moses wanted him to use. Everyone has a gift to use. But are we allowing people to use their gifts?

Are we giving opportunities for gifts to be used? Here's a challenge from a pastor called Stuart Briscoe.

He said this. As a pastor, a husband, and a father, I have a dread of burying someone else's talents. Particularly, he says, those bestowed on women.

Accordingly, I have tried to scrutinize my views, the place of tradition, the thrust of theology, and the force of my prejudice. Repeatedly, I have come back to this fact.

[43 : 00] If the Lord has given gifts, I had better be careful about denying freedom for their exercise. More than that, I need to ensure the women in my life have every encouragement from me to be what he called and gifted them to be.

A talent is a terrible thing to waste. And he speaks about having to stand before the Lord and give account not just for what he has done himself, but what he has allowed or not allowed others to do. Something like this being said can lead to a sense of fear in our hearts. But we shouldn't be afraid. As a congregation, as a denomination, we are complementarian.

What does that mean and how do we apply that in our lives as a church? Do we know what it means? Complimentarianism is about serving together, using our different gifts, hearing one another, working for God in that way.

Are we doing that? A feeling of not being listened to is a great frustration. And given the many talented men and women, boys and girls here in our congregation, how important, how vital is it that we listen to one another, that we hear one another, that we give opportunity to raise issues, that we listen, and that our focus remains right, that together we may praise the Lord.

[45 : 02] We need to be a listening people. Had Nehemiah not listened, the people would have suffered. Many would have died as a result.

And so for ourselves, let's listen to one another. Let's give opportunity to hear one another, that we may see what's missing in our congregation, what the needs are around us.

So much happens or doesn't happen because of ignorance. We just don't know. And you see that with Nehemiah here. There was an ignorance. He didn't realize what was going on until he was told. So let's listen. The second thing we need to be is a loving people. Because what does listening lead to here?

Well, as Nehemiah hears what's going on, it leads to action. Action that leads to examining himself and what's happening around him.

[46 : 05] We see through verse 6 to 13 that issues, they're not ignored. They're not just put away as unimportant and saying the wall is what we need to focus on.

It's almost like saying the wall can go ahead. But these cannot be ignored either. There are various things that need to go on at the same time. And these things are addressed and it leads to change. It leads to renewal. As you see in verse 13, it needs the people crying out, saying, Amen. They praised the Lord and the people did as they had promised.

It's vital when we are hearing God's word, not just in the sense of coming to listen to the sermon and just going away from it and giving it no more thought, but that we come and ask, what does the word say to me?

What do I have to examine in my own heart? Am I living and working for the Lord and his people as I should? You know, as Nehemiah listens, he brings it, first of all, to himself here and he reflects on what he hears and then he brings it to the leaders.

[47 : 20] And then we see three steps in verse 6 and 7 as to how Nehemiah responded in this situation. First of all, he says, I was angry.

And it's, again, a right anger, if you like, because people are suffering. It's not right. And he was angry. But then we see, it says, he took counsel with myself, it says.

I took counsel with myself. In your anger is not the right time to respond. There needs to be a time of reflection.

And that's what we see with Nehemiah. Here's good advice. In order to love and serve the people right, we have to be in the right mind. I took counsel with myself.

And then, he says, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. I said, you are exacting interest, each from his brother. And in verse 9, he says, what you are doing is not good.

[48 : 27] The love for the people was not there. They had lost their focus. They were starting to look out for themselves, to charge interest, to gain fields, to gain homes, to gain slaves for themselves.

They were just not doing as God had commanded. They weren't loving the Lord. They weren't loving their neighbor as they should.

And chaos and strife had come their way. They had lost sight of what they were about. Take, for example, what Malachi says in chapter 6, verse 8.

What are we to do for the Lord? Malachi says, he has told you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

They had lost the fear of God. And fear isn't just a sense of dread before God. It's a sense of worship and awe before God.

[49 : 37] That we are accountable to Him. That we are responsible to Him. That it is His work that we are doing. The fear of the Lord was gone.

And when that goes, it results in chaos. So it's so important that we always keep our eyes on loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves.

The challenge is there in verse 9. What you are doing is not right. We think of this on the bigger scale. When we look around our nation and the world, how often in the last year have we heard the cost of living crisis on one hand, and yet you hear on the other hand in the same news program or the same page or the newspaper record profits for companies.

It doesn't seem to add up. It doesn't make sense. It's because people have lost a sense of the fear of the Lord. It's all about ourselves.

Our own gain. There's a story of the first governor general of Australia. He was a Scotsman who had come to Australia and was called Lord Hopeton.

[50 : 59] He became governor in Australia on the 1st of January 1901. One of the most cherished possessions that he had was a 300-year-old ledger.

That's an account book. And it was one that had been passed down to him from his ancestors. One of his ancestors had owned a business in Edinburgh and had used this account book when they had began this business.

And what caught Lord Hopeton's attention was an inscription at the very first page. It said, Oh Lord, keep me and this book honest.

Keep me and this book honest. And for ourselves as we live our lives, how easy it is to get caught up in things where we become dishonest.

Where we think of ourselves first and foremost. When we look at the situation here, the people working on the walls were spending most if not all of their time in Jerusalem.

[52 : 11] The wall was taking priority but others were suffering as well. The work on the walls was the priority but they lost focus.

What you are doing then, he says, is not good. So Nehemiah challenges and the challenge is what brings them back in order to love one another.

In order to serve one another with this right attitude. Putting others before ourselves. And it's amazing what that does.

Putting others before ourselves. There's a story told from the Second World War. It's a book called Miracle on the River Kwai.

Many of you have maybe seen the film The Bridge Across the Kwai, the River Kwai. It's a story about Scottish soldiers who were forced in labour camps to serve their Japanese captors, building a railroad through the jungles of Thailand.

[53 : 24] And during these days their behaviour had disintegrated into just chaos and anger towards each other, not just their captors.

There's a story told in the book of an incident that changed everything. They were marching back to camp, the soldiers, Scottish soldiers, the captors beside them, tired and hungry after a long day's work.

And they came to checkpoints at different points on their return to camp. And at each checkpoint they would count the shovels, the shovels, the tools that they had to use that day.

And this time they came to a checkpoint, there was a shovel missing. And the captors had no mercy for this. They wanted to know who had stolen the shovel, what they had done with it.

And they were shouting and bawling at the soldiers. Someone had to own up to this. No one was coming forward. And so one of the captors threatened with his gun to shoot them all.

[54 : 30] But one man stepped forward. He took responsibility for it. And that man was quickly put to death by the captors.

The soldiers picked up this man's body to take him back to the camp to bury him. And as they made their way back, they came to another checkpoint, and the shovels were counted again.

And they realized all the shovels were there. There had been a miscount at the first checkpoint. But yet this man had stepped forward, had taken the ultimate cost.

He gave his life so that others would live. And this changed the whole atmosphere in the camp where people, soldiers, started to treat each other like brothers and look out for one another.

It's amazing what an act of love can do. But the most amazing act of love we see is the love of Christ for his people, who lay down his life at the cross.

[55 : 39] In his innocence, he bore our sins. Does that make us love others more? To live for one another, to praise the Lord, to realize and ask ourselves, where have we gone wrong?

is what we are doing good or not? And to seek renewal, to seek to honour God, to seek as an assembly of God's people, to say amen and praise the Lord and do as the word of God has promised.

As we read there in verse 13, the word of God challenges us in our love for one another, inner love of God.

Do we love as we should? Third and final thing just briefly is we are to be a living people. What you notice about verse 14 to the end of the chapter is one of the only points in Nehemiah's writing here that we actually see further down the line.

Twelve years he speaks of here. What an impact this event has had on his life. For twelve years afterwards as he served as governor he sought to do all for the glory of God.

[57 : 09] Not just for a moment, not just for this time, but throughout his life. He sought to be an example to the people. Mark Twain, the American author, he once said, few things are harder to put up with than the annoyance of a good example.

You maybe know what that's like. You see someone who's had a real powerful influence on you. This is a good example. Everything they do, they do right and it's so powerful when that is a Christian.

And you see Christ and you can't hold anything against them. They're just such a powerful example of what it is to be a Christian. And it leads to the question, are we good examples to those around us?

Do we come and hear God's word, but do we live it as we go out? In verse 14 to verse 19, we find Nehemiah highlighting this for us.

It was life-changing. This moment of seeing the need of the people, the burden on the people, it's not just about the wall he sees.

[58 : 29] It's not just about this, although important as it is, it's about loving those around us. The wall would be complete, but you see, years after the wall was built, he's still living for the people as a good example, for the people, not wanting to burden the people in anything that he would do.

what a powerful example that is to us, not just to be hearers of the word, but doers also. Nehemiah didn't preach one thing to the people and behave differently.

He was governor and he could have taken so much for himself, but he paid a price himself. He absorbed so much himself, even though he was entitled to so much.

It wasn't right that he would gain when there's people suffering. In verse 18 it says, I did not demand the food allowance of the governor because the service was too heavy on this people.

It wasn't right that he would take. And what made this difference in his life? Well, you see it in verse 15.

[59 : 44] The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people.

But I did not do so because of the fear of the Lord. The Lord was important to him. First and foremost, there was a sacrificial serving of the Lord here.

And we may feel entitled to many things in our life as well. But are we willing to give and to give up for the Lord? So whatever we do, we work heartily as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.

You are serving the Lord Christ. I'll leave you with a story of David Livingston, missionary who went to Africa.

He said, people talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Can that be called a sacrifice which is simply acknowledging a great debt we owe to our God which we can never repay?

[61 : 00] Is that a sacrifice which brings its own reward in healthful activity and consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny?

It is emphatically no sacrifice. Rather, it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, danger, foregoing the common conveniences of this life, these may make us pause and cause the spirit to waver and the soul to sink, but let this only be for a moment.

All these are nothing compared with the glory which shall later be revealed in and through us. I never made a sacrifice. Of this we ought not to talk when we remember the great sacrifice which he made who left his father's throne on high and gave himself for us.

That that would be our spirit, that that would be our attitude, remembering the sacrifice of him who left all for us, who bore our sin on the cross.

Nehemiah and the people here give us a reminder and example to see the work of the Lord as broad and all encompassing, looking far and wider, vision being not just a building of a wall, but a loving of the people all around us, and a work that needs to have an attitude that listens, that loves, and that lives well.

[62 : 44] May the word of God go with us into this week ahead. May it strengthen us in our service for the Lord. May we go on growing and going in the Lord's strength and knowing his blessing on us through Christ.

let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we ask your blessing on your word to us. May it minister to our hearts. May it help us to hear what you are saying to us.

May it help us to honour you and serve you in all things with that sacrificial attitude of doing all as to the Lord. We pray, Lord, that you will go before us, that you will continue with us, that you will bless us in our fellowship with each other as we go next door as well and bless all the food that's been prepared for us in our time.

May again your glory be with us now and in all that we do as we ask all things in Jesus' name.

Amen. We're going to conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 106.

Psalm 106 in the Scottish Psalter, page 382. Sing from verse 44 down to the end of the psalm. Yet their affliction he beheld when he did hear their cry, and he for them his covenant did call to memory.

[64 : 14] We'll sing these verses to God's praise, 44 to 48, and the tune is St. Kilda. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. And he for them his pug've God's mercy is all tortured in every path unmade.

Let you be with me, O God, those good and good and heavenly.

O Lord, our God, our safe and guard, thy ether from above, that we thy holy name may praise, and our triumphant song.

Blessed be the people of the heavens, God, to all eternity.

[66 : 14] Let all our people say Amen. Praise to the Lord, give me.

Amen. After the benediction, I'll go to the door to my right. We'll close the benediction. Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with us all now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen.