

Fact or Fiction?

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Date: 10 December 2023

[0 : 0 0] We'll begin our worship this evening. We're going to sing to God's praise. We're singing in Psalm 119 in the Scottish Psalter version, page 413.

We're going to sing from verse 153. Psalm 119, the 20th section of the psalm, at verse 153. Psalm 119 is a psalm that speaks about the centrality, the importance of God's Word, how when we turn away from it, we go astray, but the blessing of always seeking to listen to the Word of God and live out the Word of God.

So Psalm 119 at verse 153. Consider mine affliction. In safety do me set. Deliver me, O Lord, for I thy law do not forget. After thy word, revive thou me. Save me and plead my cause.

Salvation is from sinners far, for they seek not thy laws. We'll sing this section down to verse 160, and the tune is Martyrdom.

Consider mine affliction. Consider mine affliction.

[1 : 17] Salvation is from sinners far, for they seek not thy law do not forget. For they seek not thy law do not forget.

God forbid. After thy word they hide thou me.

Save me and lead my cause. Salvation is of sinners by our ways seek not thy love.

O Lord, bold and magnified thy tender ne'er she's be.

According to thy judgment just be my and will be.

[2 : 53] be. By persecutors many are and fools shall do do do do do do do do do do and love.

God do Your
righteous God, is there the one forevermore endure?

Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer. Let us pray. Amen.

The regular routines of the rest of the week, whether it be the busyness of work or just generally life, or the many other things that go on around us from a day-to-day basis, we thank you that there is a day where the purpose is to rest and to refresh ourselves in your presence and with your people.

And we thank you that the activity of worship, as it is aware, is to be something that is alive and something that blesses us in our hearts.

[5 : 52] for we come to meet with you as our Lord and as our God. We come to see that you are one who is alive, one whose words are alive, one who gives life and who gives life abundantly.

And we thank you for every blessing that is ours. We have them all around us, Lord. We have them within us. We have the ones that we see around us, but we have so many that are even unseen to us.

But as your word reminds us that there are blessings that are ours through Christ. And we thank you that he is the cornerstone for all our hope, that he is the one who we look to, the one who we long for, to know him more, to serve him more, to honour him more.

For he has done all for us. As we remembered even last weekend, as we gathered around the Lord's table, as we took part in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, as we were around your word, we were reminded of what has been done for us by him, that you sent your son into this world to seek and to save sinners.

We were reminded of his coming this morning, as we heard of the name that was given. You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

[7 : 13] And so we thank you for your great purpose in sending your son. And even as he gave, and gave ultimately his life, we thank you too that this is a day that reminds us that he is risen.

And that even as we pray, we pray in his name and for his sake, that we come knowing that he ever lives, as your word says, and that he will return to take his people to himself.

We thank you too for the promise of your Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the one who was promised in your word that would come alongside, and the one who is still that promise to us all today, that we have one who is not just alongside, but within, that we can know the power of the Holy Spirit leading us into your word and into your truth, showing us ourselves, but above all, showing us you, as the God who is a God of great compassion and a great love towards his people.

And we thank you that we have your word to show us just how precious it is, the word we have before us in a world that seeks after its own truth, even makes up its own truth.

We thank you that your word is truth, that we have sung of it even in this psalm. We are reminded of the dangers of not keeping your word, but we thank you too that there is power in your word, and we pray that for every one of us we may be able to say, as the psalmist said, see how I love thy law, see how I love your word and how rich it is to us, and we pray that we will always be hungry for your word, to learn more from it, and not just learn it, but to apply it to our lives, to live the truths that we find in it, that we would live them out.

[9 : 09] As we see your promises, as we see your challenges to us, Lord, help us to have listening ears to understand what you are saying to us. But we thank you that your word does indeed endure forever, that from the beginning all your word has been most true and sure, as we have sung, and that we can come to it anew this evening, and that your people all over the world today, and whatever hour of day it is where your people meet even now, that your people hear your word, that it is true and sure in a world that is so often filled with so much chaos.

And we pray that throughout the world your word will bear much fruit, that people will hear it and rejoice in it, that it will be the salvation of sinners throughout all ends of the earth.

And that for ourselves here tonight and for all who are at home and listening and for all who may be tuning in at a later point, O Lord, that your word will be blessed to each of us, that as we read it and share from it, your voice will be truly heard, that you would speak into our hearts, reminding us, Lord, that you are the God of truth and a God of hope.

So bless us together, we pray, Lord, and remember us in our different needs, in our homes, in our families, in our communities at this time. We know for so many, O Lord, that going through different trials in life just now is hard for so many, that there are people who are struggling in different ways.

And we pray, Lord, that you will always help us to have our eyes open, not to be like those who walked past the one who had been robbed on the way as Jesus spoke the parable of the good Samaritan.

[11 : 03] They rushed by the one who was beaten and bruised at the side of the road because they had other things that were seemingly more important, but help us to have the heart of the good neighbor, the good Samaritan.

although he saw one who was perhaps foreign to him, yet he showed compassion and he loved him. And we pray, Lord, that that's how we would see people all around us as well, that we would see them as those made in your image, those who are made by you and who all have the need, everyone does, the need of a Savior, Christ Jesus.

And so, Lord, give us that heart to reach out, to reach out with the good news, to reach out in compassion, to reach out in love, and to share with all around us the hope that is Jesus Christ.

We pray, Lord, that in every endeavor we have, even in this coming week, that we will be seeking to do just that, to share a hope like no other, to share the one who is a friend that stays closer than any brother, to share the good news of the gospel.

And so we pray that as we join together, even in different times throughout this week, whether it's in times of prayer and worship, whether it's at the 55 plus on Friday, whether it's through the work among our young people at Explorers or Toddlers or the Christmas Club, that in every endeavor, Lord, we would seek to share the gospel, the good news, with all we see around us.

[12 : 46] But may you bless us, Lord, in all of these things, that as we prayerfully prepare for the week ahead, that you would go before us in it, that you would give strength, that you would help us in every task, in every duty, to do all as unto the Lord.

That everywhere we go and whatever place we represent you, whether it's before brothers and sisters in Christ or whether it's before people in our workplaces or homes or even the strangers we see around us, that we would seek to reflect the beauty of Christ and to show him.

So, Lord, we pray all these things, acknowledging our dependence upon you and our need of you. We pray, too, Lord, for the seminary in Edinburgh at this time as well and all the students.

Remember this period of exams just now in our seminary. We pray that all the students who are sitting exams and finishing coursework just now for this session, that they will be upheld by you and strengthened by you in it.

We pray for Scott as he will go away tomorrow for the week. We pray for safety and travel. We pray for him as he sits his exams in this coming week, that you will give him clarity of thought and mind, that you would uphold him and strengthen him for it, that you would guide him throughout this week to know that you are with him, that you will uphold him, that you will keep him.

[14 : 12] We pray for Fiona and the girls, too, in the busyness of a week without him at home. We pray, Lord, that you will bless them and all the family together at this time, Lord, that you will be near to them. And as we pray that for them, we pray it for ourselves as families, too, Lord, that together we would encourage one another, strengthen one another, and remember one another.

Remember those who are grieving at this time, too, Lord. We know that throughout our communities, week by week and even sometimes day by day, the pain of grief comes into our midst and it's a pain like no other.

It is unnatural for us because it is an enemy in this world. And yet we pray for you to comfort, for you to give help, and as your word says that you will bind up the brokenhearted, we pray that many people will know the real truth of that, that you are a God who is able to comfort, to strengthen, and to uphold.

So surround us, Lord, we pray, and go before us tonight and in all the days ahead. We commit ourselves into your hands asking for your help, for your blessing, for your peace to be with us, asking forgiveness for all our sins as we confess them anew.

In the name of our Lord and Savior, we ask all these things and for his glory. Amen. Well, let's sing again to God's praise.

[15 : 37] This time in the Sing Psalms version of Psalm 14. We'll find this on page 15 of the Psalm books. Psalm 14.

We'll sing the whole of this Psalm on page 15. Psalm 14. This is a Psalm that speaks about the one who says in his heart that there is no God and the Word describes this person as the fool and we do want to be foolish to say there is no God because the Word of God, the truth of God makes it clear that he has made all things and that we are accountable to him.

So the fool speaks in his heart. There is no God, he says. They are corrupt, but their deeds are vile, none walk in godly ways. But then we sing at the end of the Psalm, may help from Sion come, the Lord his captive spring, and then let Jacob's tribes rejoice, let Israel gladly sing.

We'll sing the whole of this Psalm the tune of Selma and we sing to God's praise. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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

[17 : 03] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. O heaven, of all the human race, to see him may he understand if may he see all things.

We all have turned aside, all of them have become.

Not one of them does any good, no, not a single one.

Will sinners never learn, my people get deeper, as if they were once to be laid, they may not seek the Lord.

[18 : 49] Strong doubt they are with them, our God is without us.

Purely, the loomer, in the blue, but in the Lord they trust.

We have from Zion come, the Lord is now dead free, and let let the hope's right rejoice, let Israel have we sing.

We'll turn to read together now in the book of Nehemiah and the Old Testament. The book of Nehemiah, we're reading in chapter 6 together this evening. You'll find it around page 479 in the church Bibles.

Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job. So Nehemiah chapter 6, as we continue our study in this book, where we've seen it's not just about the work of building the wall of Jerusalem, that's going on, but that's not really the major lesson that we're taking from it, because it's a reminder to us that in the work of the Lord that there are many challenges for us, as Nehemiah faced up to so many challenges along the way.

[20 : 39] And we see again more challenges that he faces here in chapter 6, and just how he deals with these challenges is really what we want to focus on. So we'll read together in Nehemiah chapter 6 from the beginning of the chapter, reading down into chapter 7.

Now when Simballat and Tobiah and Geshem, the Arab and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had built the wall and that there was no breach left in it, although up to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates.

Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, Come, and let us meet together at HaKephrah in the plain of Ono. But they intended to do me harm, and I sent messengers to them, saying, I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down.

Why should the work stop while I have it, while I leave it, and come down to you? And they sent to me four times in the same manner. In the same way, Simballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand.

In it was written, it is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel.

[21 : 58] That is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports, you wish to become their king. And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, there is a king in Judah.

And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together. Then I sent to him, saying, No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind.

For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done. But now, O God, strengthen my hands.

Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah, the son of Deliah, son of Methabal, who was confined to his home, he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple.

Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night. But I said, Should such a man as I run away, and what man such as I could go into the temple and live?

[23 : 14] I will not go in. And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me, because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.

For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me.

Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Nadiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.

So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty-two days. And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

Moreover, in those days, the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shekariah, the son of Ara.

[24 : 31] And his son Jehonanan had taken the daughter of Mesushalim, the son of Berchiah, as his wife. Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him.

And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid. Now when the wall had been built and I had set up the doors and the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites had been appointed, I gave my brother Hanani and Hananiah, the governor of the castle, charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many.

And I said to them, let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. And while they are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors.

Appoint the guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts and some in front of their own homes. The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few and no houses had been rebuilt.

And so on. And may God bless that reading from his word. Before we turn back to look at this passage, we'll again sing together to God's praise. Again in Psalm 119, but this time in the Sing Psalms version, page 157.

[25 : 56] We're singing the section from verse 9 down to verse 16. Four stanzas. The tune is Head and Gate. Again, this psalm, as I said, reminds us of the importance of God's word.

And here this section speaks of the young ones, really. How can the young keep their life pure? So as we think of this, we see the word of God is for everyone, young and old alike.

And the command is there for us, even from our young days, to keep the word of God by listening to what the word does and not to be led astray, as it were, by so many of the lies and temptations of this world.

So we'll sing this section, verse 9 to 16, to God's praise. Amen. Amen. How can the young keep their life pure?

By doing what you're working must, I see you with my heart and soul, let me not stray from your command.

[27 : 21] Your word I've laid in my heart To keep me from hope and in you Praise be to you, O Lord my God, teach me your Sagittarius, learn my truth, each love proceeding from your heart, I gladly with my lips have told, I love to follow you from us, as others love to count their gold.

I meditate upon your ways, And all your precepts I repay, I take delight in your decrees, Your word I never will be paid.

Amen. Let's turn back to our reading in Nehemiah chapter 6 and study this passage together for a time this evening.

We can read again at verse 8 and 9. Nehemiah chapter 6 at verse 8. At this point, the reports have been sent to Nehemiah from Geshem and Tobiah and Sambalat, these three men who came into his life in this way, and they're bringing false accusations against him, and then Nehemiah's response to them is this in verse 8, Then I sent to him saying, No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind, for they all wanted to frighten us, thinking their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.

But now, O God, strengthen my hands. Well, as we've been going through this book of Nehemiah, we've seen how Nehemiah was given this real burden and vision for the work that needed to be done in Jerusalem.

[30 : 27] Nehemiah was a Jew who had been living in a land many miles away from Jerusalem. He'd never even been in Jerusalem. His parents had been taken captive, there, many years prior to this and been taken into captivity in Persia and Babylon.

But Nehemiah had come to be in an important role there. He was a cupbearer of the king in Persia, a very important job. But God came to him through his brother with a word that gave him a real sense of burden for Jerusalem and especially for God's people, that they were suffering, that the walls had been burnt down, that the city was in ruin and God gave him this vision to rebuild.

And so he traveled back to the city and began this great work of restoring the wall of Jerusalem. But it was more than just restoring the walls.

It was about restoring the people, restoring them to a right worship of God, restoring them in their faith and their desire to serve the Lord.

And what we've seen up to this point is how faithful Nehemiah was to this call. He had encountered, yes, many problems and oppositions. Every corner seemed to have someone or something that would challenge this work and seek to stop this work.

[31 : 56] But the work has gone on. He's leading the people with this vision and this sense of this is what God has for us to do. His kingdom is so important.

His people are so important. And what we saw the last time was that in chapter 5 Nehemiah's work was going on he had to be open to just everything that was taking place all around.

And the point really was that we can become so consumed in just one aspect of the work that we fail to see suffering that is going on in other places and other ways.

What happened with Nehemiah in his day was a famine had come that was affecting the people who were still living outside Jerusalem in villages and towns around it. They were suffering because many or nearly all of the men were involved in the building work of the wall.

But those who were still left in the villages and towns were suffering. They were in great debt. They were in famine. They were starving. And so Nehemiah was challenged by men and women from these towns to remember them.

[33 : 09] And we saw how every aspect of the work was covered. Nehemiah was again challenged and burdened by the word of God to him at that point and led by example.

He didn't take things that he had the right to but he made sure that everyone was looked out for and looked after. Nehemiah was a wise leader, a good leader.

And in leading the people he made sure that everyone was looked after and cared for and that everyone was going in the same direction. But as with any good leader they're always going to face opposition.

And for Nehemiah it just seemed to come again and again. As with any good work that's happening in the work of the kingdom of God there's always going to be challenges.

And we're always going to see that there is one who wants to spoil and to hinder. So when there's something good happening there's another one who wants to come in and spoil.

[34 : 14] and this one will use any means possible. We are of course talking about the devil and how he will come in and seek to spoil so many things.

And as we come into chapter 6 we see another challenge arise for Nehemiah. We see a familiar foe return and this time they've got a different kind of attack to bring to Nehemiah.

They're going to start telling lies about Nehemiah about the work about what he's doing. They're going to try and disgrace him to make him stop the work that he has been involved in.

Lies are central to what they're going to do. Have you ever told a lie? Have you ever been lied to?

I'm sure if we had a show of hands for both these questions pretty much every hand would go up. Lying can almost become second nature to us and if we're telling lies we know there'll be others around us who are telling lies as well.

[35 : 27] And as we look around us it's so difficult for us sometimes to tell what is a lie and what is truth. truth. There's a program on television called Would I Lie to You?

In many ways it's a funny program to watch. You have two different teams two different panels and each team has to try and convince or not the other team whether what they're saying is a truth or a lie.

And it can be very amusing at times. They can be so convincing whether it's delivering something that is a lie and trying to make it out as truth or something that is true. And they're trying to make people think it is a lie.

And it's so hard sometimes just to tell the difference. But there's a serious side to that kind of thing as well because of the kind of world that we live in.

Where we're trying to work out well who is telling the truth and who is lying. It's a challenge for us on a daily basis when we're hearing from others, when we're reading things, when we're listening to the news, what is truth and what is a lie?

[36 : 41] And how do we tell the difference? We can so easily get pulled in by what we believe is truth but it's actually a lie and vice versa. Is it fact or is it fiction?

It's a challenge to us. And that was a challenge in Nehemiah. his day as well and for his people there as well. Samballet, Tobiah and Geshem came on the attack to try and bring fear among them because that is so often what trying to suss out what is lie and truth does for us.

It leaves us confused. It leaves us afraid. And so we need to try and work out what is truth. Truth is what we should be seek but our world has turned away from truth because we've turned away from the word of God.

Therefore truth is so difficult to find. But this is not new. In Romans chapter 1 verse 24 it tells us there, therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity.

to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie.

[38 : 05] And that's the recurring problem of a sinful heart, a sinful people. We replace the truth about God for a lie.

And therefore it's so hard for us then to see what is truth and what is a lie. Wouldn't it be great to have somewhere to go to find truth?

Well we do. We have God's word. Jesus himself as he prayed for his people in John 17 he said this, sanctify them in the truth.

Your word is truth. We have truth. And what we have to do is replace a lie for the truth about God.

We need to reverse the situation that we read of in Romans, the situation that is so common in every generation and every people. exchanging the truth about God for a lie.

[39 : 13] We need to replace the lies of this world for the truth about God and his word is truth. truth. We have it but do we believe it and do we live it?

That is a challenge that Nehemiah faced. That is a challenge that he stood up to in a world full of lies. He shows us how to respond by standing on truth and surrounding ourselves with it.

So tonight I want us to take three lessons again from Nehemiah's life and experience so we can apply to ourselves. Three things that we see here are first of all fear or faith.

What is our dependence in? How are we living in that sense? Are we living in fear or are we living in faith? And secondly we will see here the false friends that can so often lead us astray.

And then thirdly we are going to think about what is our defense in the midst of all of this. faith. So the first thing we want to consider is fear or faith.

[40 : 26] How are we going to live? What kind of people are we going to be? How important is truth to you? Does every word that come out of your mouth do you make sure I want that word to be truth?

truth? I want every word that I say to be truth. Do you listen to every word and think I want to hear every word that is truth?

Or are there times where you twist the truth or twist what you hear or enjoy hearing something that maybe is only a half truth? It's so hard for us at times.

But truth should be essential to us. Truth should be what we live by. If we live by God's word we are to live by truth because his word is truth.

But what is true? That is so often the challenge. One group of musicians, one band, they wrote an album and the title of the album was This is my truth, now tell me yours.

[41 : 39] Can we all have a different truth? Can we all believe something that's different in every part of our life or society or our world and think that's okay, we can all have our different truth?

No, because everything cannot be true. That is not possible. There are things that are fact and there are things that are fiction.

And if we listen to the lies of this world, listening to lies is what so often leaves us in a state of fear because we're not leaning upon truth.

We're not depending upon truth. And so this is a very challenge that Nehemiah faced here when these three familiar people came into his experience again.

We'd seen them before in chapter 2, how they had come to try and stop the work. They had come on the attack and here they are returning again in chapter 6 just before the work of building the wall is nearly complete.

[42 : 47] So you maybe think to yourself, the reappearance of Sanballat, Tobiah and Gershom, they're going to maybe come and apologize for their poor behavior previous. They're going to look around and see actually, Nehemiah, you were right in what you've done in rebuilding this wall.

they've come to congratulate him in this work. No. Even though the work is nearly complete in terms of the outside of the wall of Jerusalem, they come to intimidate Nehemiah, attempting to make him fear.

And attempting to make him fear in order that the work will come to a standstill once again. And fear is central to their plans.

You see this as you go through this chapter, verse 9, 11, 13, 14, 19. Each of these verses, it says, they wanted him to be afraid.

In verse 9, it says, for they wanted to frighten us. In verse 11, he said, a false prophet was hired to make him afraid. Again, he reiterates that.

[44 : 00] In verse 13, he was hired that I should be afraid. Verse 14, he prays and asks God to remember these people, Tobiah, Sambalat, and these prophets, who wanted to make me afraid.

In verse 19, Tobiah sent letters to make Nehemiah afraid. Fear. They're trying to plant this fear in Nehemiah and the people so that the work will stop.

Because fear paralyzes. And especially when it comes to doing the work of the Lord, so often it is fear that will paralyze and stop the work of the Lord going on.

But how are they going to implement this plan? How are they going to get this to work? Well, first, they're going to use flattery. In verse 4, well, between verse 2 and verse 4, they start to invite Nehemiah to meet together in this place called Olo.

Four times they invited him. They're trying to flatter him. Come, let us come together and let's talk about this. Surely we can come to some kind of compromise.

[45 : 19] But you read in verse 3, he knows that their intention was not right. it says in the end of verse 2 and into verse 3, he said, but they intended to do me harm.

You see, he knew them too well. He knew their intentions, but he knew God better. And when you look at it, what they were trying to do is take him away from the work.

But he says in verse 3, I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?

Now, he's not saying that his work is what he's proud of, his own handwork. What he's saying is the work that he is involved in, God's work, is a great work.

It's the most important work. To him, this is the chief work. To be involved in doing what God is wanting him to do and giving him a vision to do.

[46 : 31] So their flattery isn't going to work. He puts them off. He puts them away. But then there's another plan. This doesn't work, so they have another plan.

This is when the lies come in. In verse 6, they sent him a letter, that. And in it is said, it is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says that you and the Jews intend to rebel.

So this is their new plan. It is reported. This is their way to get him. Lies.

Let's just make up stories about. Fake news is something that seems to be a new phenomenon, especially over the years of President Trump when it seemed to just come to the fore.

Fake news was spoken about every week. Everything that was said against certain people, that's just fake news. And again, it just adds to the confusion. What do we believe?

[47 : 37] And it's based around really what we read here. It is reported. Let's just make up something that's going to get Nehemiah in trouble and disgrace him.

This still goes on. The intention behind these lies is to disgrace and to bring a leader down. And well, it's nothing new.

Telling lies is not a new thing. When was the first lie told? All you have to do is go back to Genesis and there you see it. Did God actually say?

Satan comes into the garden and it's almost like he's saying, well, it is reported that God has said, but did he really say, you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?

What did it lead to? It led to fear because you read just further on that they're trying to hide then in the garden and they're trying to defend themselves before God saying, I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid.

[48 : 40] So they hid from God. And that is what lies seeks to lead us to. We end up replacing fact for fiction and it only leaves us afraid and hiding from God.

That's the intention of Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem here to get Nehemiah away from the work of God and get him hiding from God.

And it's still the tactic of Satan to this day. You read of Jesus in the New Testament in the Gospel of John. There he's speaking in chapter 8 to Jews who are, some are believing, some aren't.

But what he says is as he speaks in chapter 8 verse 44, he's speaking about the father of lies, the devil. He says he was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with the truth because there is no truth in him.

When he lies he speaks out of his own character for he is a liar and the father of lies. This is the enemy that prowls, this is the enemy that's at work in Tobiah and Sanballat and Geshem.

[49 : 55] He's at work in them to disgrace Nehemiah, the father of lies. And he's still at work to this day to discourage all of God's children, all of God's people, away from the work of the Lord, of trusting the Lord.

This is his tactic. Replace the truth for a lie. Make them afraid and hide from God. But as somebody once said, we were not made for fear, we were made for faith.

Fear is not my native land, faith is. I am so made that worry and anxiety are sand in the machinery of life. Faith is oil.

Sand will destroy machinery, oil will keep it going. I live better by faith and confidence and by fear, doubt and anxiety.

And so he went on to say that this is what we are made for. To live by worry is to live against reality, but to live by the way God made us is to live by faith.

[51 : 12] Fear or faith, how are we living? They came to make Nehemiah afraid, discouraged, fall away from the work.

But Nehemiah was a man of faith. He trusted God, he listened to him, and so should we. The second thing we see here is the false friends that we can see around him.

They tried to get him with fake news, they tried to get at him with lies, but the second thing we see here is they tried to come at him through a prophet in verse 10.

Now when I went into the house of Shemiah, the son of Deliah, son of Methabel, who was confined to his home, he said, let us meet together in the house of God within the temple.

So again, there's this subtle way where this man, Shemiah, was a prophet who was one who should be able to trust and to listen to.

[52 : 14] And if he is saying something, Nehemiah should listen to him because a prophet should speak from the Lord. So it should be a safe place, a secure place.

But Shemiah, he falsely led Nehemiah to think that people were going to kill him. And he encouraged Nehemiah to flee. And not only to flee, but to run into the place, the temple.

And you see it in verse 10, the house of God within the temple. And it is, close the doors within the temple so that you can be safe. But notice how Nehemiah responds.

But I said, should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in. What's he saying here?

How could he go into the temple and live? Well, if this prophet, this message from God is saying this is the place you are to go and live, why wouldn't you listen? But Nehemiah is close to God and he knows God's law, he knows God's word, and he knows that he has no right to go into the heart of the temple.

[53 : 27] Because when you look in the Old Testament, the inner sanctuary of the temple was the Holy of Holies. And that was a place where only the high priest could go.

And so Nehemiah had no right to go in there. And if he did go in there, he was likely to be put to death. But what he begins to see is this is not of God.

this is further lies. In verse 12, I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and son Ballant had hired him.

Again, you're just buying lies for a price. And how difficult it is sometimes to understand, well, what is truth and what is lies?

one commentator said of Nehemiah here, had he tried to save himself in such a way, that is going into the temple, he would have lost possibly his life, certainly his honor, and would have jeopardized the very cause, the very work that he had at heart.

[54 : 43] It would have brought disgrace. And that is what they were trying to achieve. And this is beginning to sound a familiar picture.

telling lies against someone, seeking for him to break God's law. Who else did they do this with? The Lord Jesus in the New Testament.

They sought to get at him in these ways, to make up stories about him, to tell lies about him, to try and get him to break the law of God as they saw it.

but he stood firm in the truth of God, his father. And Nehemiah too is strong in the Lord.

And it's a reminder for us not to be afraid to have confidence in the word of God, not to be embarrassed or ashamed about the word of God, but to see it as truth and to surround ourselves with people who see it as truth.

[55 : 48] the book of Proverbs speaks about surrounding ourselves with people who are wise. Proverbs 13 verse 20, whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

Surround ourselves with people who love the Lord, who trust the Lord, who keep us right in the Lord. We live in a world where so many friendships, as it were, can be superficial.

They're just on the surface, especially in a world of social media. We have to be careful what we believe and who we listen to. When you look at social media today, Facebook, TikTok, all these things is about friends and followers, listening to what they have to say, but can we believe everything?

Even when it's intended for good sometimes, we have to ask questions about it. For example, just now in these days, there's been a story going around Facebook about the Lord's Prayer being banned on Facebook, that the CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, has put this down as something that is not allowed, that it goes against their policy.

They're not allowed to post the Lord's Prayer. And so many people are posting this and saying this is wrong, and they post the Lord's Prayer up just to make that point. They think to themselves, this is good, this is right, we should stand up on the Lord's side here.

[57 : 28] It's not a bad thing, and of course there is a time for it, but it's not true. The Lord's Prayer has not been banned from Facebook.

Mark Zuckerberg has not banned it. So it's just a reminder to us that we should be looking into everything that we're hearing and seeing and reading and asking, is it true?

And especially when it comes to dealing with people, are we dealing with facts or fiction? Are we listening to what is true or what is a lie?

When it comes to speaking about people, how do we speak about them? Do we hear something and just pass it on? Well, we've heard it, it must be true. Or do we check, do we listen and do we think, is that actually right?

Is what I'm saying to my neighbor or my friend true about that person? Young and old alike, we need to think about these things. As Christians, we should set an example for truth and not for lies in everything that we do, in every aspect of our lives when we're dealing with people.

[58 : 38] Let us deal with truth. And let us surround ourselves with people who will be truthful to us and tell us truth.

Not superficial friends, but deep friendships. People we can trust. Like one person said, a friend is the first person who comes in when the whole world has gone out.

friends. What kind of friends do we surround ourselves with? Nehemiah had enemies, but he also had people he could trust.

It says in verse 2 of chapter 7, I gave my brother Hananiah and Hananiah the governor of the castle, charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many.

He had people he could trust around him. I'm not saying here we abandon all our friends just because they don't believe in God's word. We are to be witnesses to our friends and our families and our neighbors about God's word.

[59 : 51] But what we don't allow to happen is to let them take us away from the truth, misrepresent the truth of God, but to see for ourselves especially the friend who is our Lord Jesus Christ, the friend that the book of Proverbs describes as a friend who stays closer than any brother, that we stay close to the Lord.

Because that's our final thing we see here, our defense. What could Nehemiah do? What can we do? When we live in a world where truth and lies are so intertwined and so difficult to separate at times, what can we do?

Well, the answer is found in verse 9. For they all wanted to frighten us thinking their hands will drop from the work and it will not be done.

So this is what they wanted, but look at Nehemiah's response. But now, O God, strengthen my hands. That is the answer for us too.

Now, O God, strengthen our hands. Strengthen our hands that the work will go on. Strengthen our hands so we will know the difference between truth and lie.

[61 : 21] That we will stand firm in the truth because God is sufficient for all things. He is the one who strengthens. You know, as Christians, there are those who will cast stories claiming everything we believe is fiction.

It will be one big joke to so many in this world. There is no truth in God's word, it is just fairy tales. That's what we hear so regularly, just fairy tales.

And yet God's word says this is truth. Who do you believe? Who will you listen to?

Do you just listen to your friends or those who claim this is just fairy tales without any real knowledge of the word or God or God himself? Or will you believe the living word of God?

The one who says, I have made the heavens and the earth. I have formed you in my image. I have breathed into your life. I am the one who keeps you.

[62 : 26] I am the one who has sent my son that you will have life and have it abundantly. I am the one who will take you through life and through death into eternity if you will believe in me.

Who do we believe in? Nehemiah was feeling the pressure of attack but he knows where to go. He says, but now O God strengthen my hands.

Isn't it a blessing to us to be able to have one to call upon, to have the Lord himself? Nehemiah and the wall could have crumbled here but instead what you read is in verse 15 the wall was finished.

The work was complete on the walls. And look at the change that this brings. In verse 16, when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem.

For they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. The tide is turned. the nations are afraid because they see that God has been at work.

[63 : 44] A day will come when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. But today is the day to find our defense in him.

God is the only help we need for life and for eternity. he is not fiction. He is fact. And as we heard this morning, he is the only one who can save.

You know, when Jesus was speaking to the Jews in John chapter 8, there were those who were just putting him away, but he was saying, my word is truth.

You have to believe it. And he says to them in verse 31 and 32, if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

He was speaking because there was one, the devil, who was the father of lies. But he is saying, you will know the truth in me, and the truth will set you free.

[64 : 57] Do you have that freedom? Do you doubt, or do you have faith? Well, let me leave you with these words, a little verse that speaks about doubt and faith and the difference between them.

It says, doubt sees the obstacles, faith sees the way. Doubt sees the darkest night, faith sees the day.

Doubt dreads to take a step, faith soars on high. Doubt questions, who believes?

Faith answers, I. are you a man or woman of doubt, or are you a man or woman of faith?

The lies of the devil will make us fear and turn away from God. But thank God we have his word, his truth, to lead us to the rock, to lead us to Christ.

[66 : 01] And may we cry with Nehemiah, but now, O God, strengthen my hands, strengthen our faith, that we will go on in your strength and in your work.

May God bless his word to us. We'll conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 86, in the Scottish Psalter, page 341.

Psalm 86, on page 341. We'll sing from verse 10 down to verse 12, three stanzas, and the tune is St.

David. Because thou art exceeding great, and works by thee are done, which are to be admired, and thou art God thyself alone, teach me thy way and in thy truth.

O Lord, then walk will I, unite my heart, that I thy name may fear continually. We'll sing from verse 10 to 12, to God's praise. Amen.

[67 : 33] and the heart of thyself alone. Teach me thine ring and in thy truth.

O Lord, then all will I, unite my heart, thou thy name, may hear of genuinely.

O Lord, my God, with all my heart, to thee I will give praise.

and thy love, glory, will ask thy unto thy name, o praise.

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.

[69 : 00] No one forevermore. Amen.