

Always Reforming

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, church. Our sermon text today is from Nehemiah, chapter 13, verses 4 through 30.

That's page 380 in the Pew Bible. Let me encourage you to turn there with me. So we've come to the end of our sermon series this summer on the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

And these books have told the story of how God rebuilt the ruins of his rebellious people, this people that he loves. It tells how he brought them home from exile and how he reestablished them in their land.

The end of chapter 12 and the first four verses of chapter 13, they show how the people after the rededication ceremony of the rebuilt wall around Jerusalem responded with great enthusiasm to the word of God.

And now we're going to see how Nehemiah's account ends. What is the final word to us from these powerful books?

[1 : 0 6] So let me pray for us, and then we'll begin reading at verse 4. God, we have just sung that you would speak to us, that you would open up the eyes of our hearts, that you would open up our spiritual ears, so that we might hear what your spirit is saying to us, your church.

God, would you do that now as we come to this final chapter of the book of Nehemiah? Lord, help us to really hear the message for us that you have. Help us to see Christ more clearly this morning, Father.

Help us to love him and be renewed in our desire to serve him and enjoy him. We pray this in the name of Christ.

Amen. Nehemiah 13, starting with verse 4. Now, before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God and who was related to Tobiah, prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests.

While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes, king of Babylon, I went to the king. And after some time, I asked leave of the king and came to Jerusalem.

[2 : 3 5] And I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. And I was very angry, and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber.

Then I gave orders, and they cleansed the chambers, and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God with the grain offering and the frankincense. I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers who did the work had fled each to his field.

So I confronted the officials and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses, and I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses Shalamiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Padaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan, the son of Zachor, son of Mataniah, for they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers.

Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service. In those days, I saw in Judah people treading wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day.

And I warned them on the day when they sold food. Tyrians also who lived in the city brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah in Jerusalem itself.

[4 : 09] Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, what is this evil thing that you are doing profaning the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers act in this way? And did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city?

Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath. As soon as it began to grow dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath.

And I stationed some of my servants at the gates that no load might be brought in on the Sabbath day. Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. But I warned them and said to them, why do you lodge outside the wall?

If you do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time on, they did not come on the Sabbath. Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates to keep the Sabbath day holy.

Remember this also in my favor, O my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love. In those days, I also saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab.

[5 : 13] And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair.

And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, you shall not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin on account of such women?

And among the many nations, there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?

And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib, the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. Therefore, I chased him from me. Remember them, O my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

Thus, I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and the Levites, each in his work, and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times for the firstfruits.

[6 : 18] Remember me, O my God, for good. Semper reformanda. It's a Latin phrase that means always reforming or always being reformed.

Apparently, the origin of the phrase comes from 1674 from a Dutch pastor named Jockadus van Lodenstein. Not a name you hear much today, but a pretty great name, Jockadus van Lodenstein.

And what Lodenstein saw in the church of his day was that after the great spiritual advances and victories of the Reformation of the 16th century and after the ongoing work of the early 17th century in purifying doctrine and worship in church government according to God's word, what van Lodenstein saw was that there was still a need for reform.

But not a change in doctrine or in biblical ethics as some would later use the slogan. No, *semper reformanda* originally meant the need for ongoing reformation of the heart.

That is, vital and true faith must be constantly cultivated. All the externals can be in place, but the human heart must always be reformed and renewed.

[7 : 42] *Semper reformanda*. In fact, perhaps you've seen this in your own life. After a season of great spiritual growth, of zeal and energy for the Lord, after seeing God do great things in your life or in the life of those around you, after feeling his close presence, after seeing his active hand at work, there comes a time when the fire dies down and some of those old patterns start to creep back in and we start to settle down into what one commentator called another comfortable compromise with the world.

This is true of many periods in church history. This is true of many local churches and denominations. And this is true of many of our own lives. *Semper reformanda*, the need for ongoing spiritual reform.

But how is it done? What sort of work needs to take place so that we can maintain our spiritual zeal and fire? What are some of the means for this ongoing work of renewal?

Well, this is what Nehemiah 13 is all about. Remember what we've seen so far in the story of Ezra and Nehemiah. These books have described almost 100 years of spiritual reformation and renewal.

There have been ups and downs, yes, but consider the whole. In Ezra 1 through 6, the temple has been rebuilt. In Ezra 7 through 10, the people are brought back to the law of God.

[9 : 22] And here in the book of Nehemiah, the city of Jerusalem is rebuilt and repopulated and rededicated to God and to God's word. In other words, at the beginning of this story, the people are in exile and in shame and at the end, the people are home, worshiping God, feasting on his word, celebrating his goodness, watching the kingdom of God advance.

That sounds a lot like a revival to me. Doesn't it to you? But the book doesn't end there. And oh, how good for our souls that the book doesn't end there.

The verses that we read from chapter 13 recount actually three episodes that take place sometime after the completion and the dedication of the city walls.

You see, in 433 BC, that's about 12 years after Nehemiah's arrival in Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the walls, in 433 BC, Nehemiah is called back to the Persian king, Artaxerxes.

We see that in verse 6 of chapter 13. Now remember, Nehemiah held an official position in the imperial court, so he's called back at this time to check in. Then sometime after that check in, the exact amount of times not to mention, Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem sometime after 433 BC.

[10 : 45] And what does Nehemiah find? He finds that the people are still in need of reform. After all the spiritual advances of the previous generations, after all the spiritual advances of just a few years ago, the people have settled down into a comfortable compromise with the world.

The house of God is being neglected and even polluted in verses 4 through 14. The Sabbath is being ignored and profaned in verses 15 through 22. And the people, even the priests themselves, are again intermarrying with their non-Jewish neighbors in verses 23 through 29.

Notice how each of these three sections ends with one of Nehemiah's prayer. That's a sort of clear literary marker showing us that there are sort of three sections in this part of the chapter. But what's worse as we look at chapter 13 is that Nehemiah's old enemies, Sanballat and Tobiah, if you've been here this summer, you'll recognize those names.

They're the very ones who oppose the rebuilding of the walls who threatened and mocked the people and here they are implicated in the very backsliding of the people. Tobiah's been given his own very large chamber right in the courts of the house of God, a chamber that's meant to store offerings and other supplies for the ongoing temple worship.

And on top of that, one of the high priest's grandsons is married to the daughter of Sanballat, Nehemiah's arch enemy and the primary antagonist during the reconstruction project.

[12 : 15] Nehemiah's enemies gotten the last laugh after all. You have to admit, it is a strange ending to the book.

But it's the ending our hearts actually need. We need to know that the work of reform doesn't end. Even after great spiritual advances, the church must always be reformed in heart.

So what are the means of this ongoing reform that we need? There are three that we see here in Nehemiah 13. The first means of ongoing reform that we see here is the need for ongoing correction.

Ongoing correction. In each of these three episodes in chapter 13, Nehemiah has to do a work of confrontation. Notice that word repeated in verse 11 and in verse 17 and again in verse 25.

You see, our hearts are kind of like ships out on the water and when we stop rowing, what happens? We don't stay in one place. No, we drift. But the funny thing is we never seem to drift in the right direction, do we?

[13 : 31] We always drift towards the rocks and we always drift toward the shoals that threaten to sink us. But godly correction you see is like a coast guard boat coming alongside us for our own good with an air horn or a megaphone to wake us up and to show us the danger we're in.

Now, no one likes being corrected, of course. It's uncomfortable. Sometimes it's embarrassing. It hurts our pride. But ultimately, we need it. We need a spiritual megaphone every once in a while to wake us up and get us out of our drift.

Now, consider the three areas where Nehemiah's contemporaries needed ongoing correction. First, when it came to the house of God. That's verses 4 through 14. Now, not only has Tobiah, a non-Jewish official from one of the surrounding nations, one of the surrounding territories, been given his own room right in the temple complex, but the Levites, the ones who carried out the daily tasks of maintaining the temple, they're forced to leave their posts of ministry to go out into the fields to farm and defend for themselves because the tithes and the offerings aren't being administered properly.

In other words, the officials and the people have become so careless when it came to maintaining the right worship of God that the temple is being given over to godless men and the ministers are forced to fend for themselves.

What about us? I wonder, friend, for the sake of ongoing renewal, for the sake of maintaining your spiritual fire, are you willing to be confronted, to be corrected in how you treat and maintain the worship of God today?

[15 : 18] Think about the issues with Tobiah in verses 4 through 9. Now, giving Tobiah a spare chamber in the temple was probably justified in the minds of people like Eliashib and the other priests because, after all, Tobiah was a powerful person in local politics.

He was a local neighboring official, someone who could pull some strings if need be. He was already intermarried to some important families. He had connections. He had influence. And it's always good to have someone like that in your corner, right?

Why not let him set up shop in the temple? Sadly, many Christians can think similarly today. Why not let a public official come and promote his or her campaign in the church?

It's good to have someone like that in your corner, right? Or maybe another way we do this, we say, let's just look the other way when it comes to so-and-so church member.

Yes, his or her life isn't really that Christ-like, but they do give a lot of money to the church and they are pretty powerful in the community, so we don't want to offend them. They might go somewhere else.

[16 : 35] But woe to us, friends, if we think the God of the universe, the Lord of hosts, needs a Tobiah to sit in his house, no matter how powerful they might be in the world's eyes, in order to protect and preserve and advance his kingdom in the world.

But what about the issue of administering the tithes in verses 10 through 13? This is perhaps even more unnerving for us today. Are we willing to have someone confront us on how we use our finances for kingdom work?

Are you willing to be corrected when it comes to your money? Ouch. Now, let me say that the pastors and elders at Trinity don't see how much individual members give.

But if a friend were to confront you on how much you gave to the local church, the kingdom work, to supporting the poor, how would you respond? Jesus says that where your treasure is, there your heart will be.

It's very interesting. We often look at that verse and say, where your heart is, there your treasure goes. Not what Jesus says. He says, where your treasure is, that's where your heart goes. Would you welcome this kind of correction?

[18 : 00] Now, I will say that God has always provided financially for what this church needs. and God has consistently raised up deacons and staff who can administer those finances faithfully.

So let me say, I am thankful for those of you who collect and count on Sundays and those of you who budget and plan and do our accounting and keep our records up to date and pay our bills on time.

It may not feel like spiritual work, but it is and we are grateful for you. Thank you for the work that you do. Pastor Matt may be able to farm and fend for himself. I'm not sure I could do that.

I'm just kidding. Actually, I'm not kidding. I kill most of the things I plant. Thank you for your labors for the kingdom of God, deacons, ushers, all of you who care for the finances, those of you who give faithfully.

We are grateful for you. The kingdom of God is advancing because of you. But may all of us be open to correction in how we provide financially for kingdom work.

[19 : 01] Let us be open to being corrected on how we treat and maintain the worship of God. That's Nehemiah's first correction. But second, in verses 15 through 22, he corrects them with regard to the Sabbath.

Now, in the Old Testament, God commanded the people of Israel to stop working on the seventh day of the week so that they could remember God alone as their creator and their redeemer. So that they could know and experience that it wasn't their own hands that made them or their own hands that would save them, but it was God's hands that had made them and it saves them.

You see, stopping on the Sabbath day was a gift to help them remember and live into that reality. But, come on, not work for a whole day?

Doesn't that make us one-seventh less productive and profitable? Who wants to take a 14% pay cut? Right? But how we use our time is incredibly important to God.

Now, the Old Testament Sabbath observance doesn't apply in the same exact way today now that we live in the New Testament era, now that Christ has come who is our true Sabbath rest.

[20 : 22] However, it has become increasingly clear to me on a personal level that stopping for one day a week and letting God be God over our time and over our labor is a radically important spiritual discipline.

God cares how we use our time. Are you willing to be corrected in how you use your time for God and for others? You know, our time is not our own.

It is all a gift from God. So, for the sake of ongoing renewal, are you open to being corrected on how you use that gift of God's time to you?

Lastly, Nehemiah corrects the people when it comes to marriage. Now, let's be clear. The issue with these marriages in verses 23 through 29 is not an ethnic or racial issue.

It is a religious or spiritual issue. In other words, the reason God told his people in the Old Testament not to intermarry with the surrounding nations was not because they were different racially, but because they were different spiritually, because they didn't worship the Lord, the one true God.

[21 : 41] In fact, if anyone from among those nations became a worshiper of the Lord, if they joined the covenant community, they were considered full members. Consider Ruth. She was a Moabite.

And she took the Lord as her God. And so Boaz, a faithful Israelite, was free to marry her. So at the end of the day, God does not forbid what we would call interracial marriage today.

That's not what these verses are about. God is fine with that. God created us in all of our diversity and he celebrates it. But what God does not desire is marriage between a believer and a non-believer.

That's what verses 23 through 29 are all about. Now, why is God so adamant that believers not marry a non-believer? Well, consider the spiritual effect on the couple.

Believers are meant to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. But imagine being married to a person who cannot look into your heart, into your very self, and love what you love.

[22 : 47] Isn't that the very thing we're looking for in marriage at the end of the day? For someone to be able to look into us and to love what we love, and in so doing, to love us.

Inevitably, such a marriage between a believer and a non-believer, in such a marriage either the believing spouse will drift away from Jesus, or the couple will drift away from each other, there are exceptions, yes, but they are very few and very far between.

Nehemiah says, consider the example of Solomon. If Solomon, God's chosen and beloved king, had his heart pulled away from God in this way, what makes you think you are the exception?

But in Nehemiah, it's not just the effect on the couple, but also on the children that is highlighted. In verse 24, half of the children born to these families cannot speak the language of Judah. In other words, they're losing their spiritual heritage.

All that the people had gained spiritually in their return from the exile and in their reestablishment in the land was now threatened to be lost in a single generation, a generation who could no longer take up the praise of God and the prayer of God and the word of God.

[24 : 11] Nehemiah confronts them. How about it, friend? Are you willing to be confronted when it comes to who you marry, to who you date?

For the sake of spiritual renewal, for spiritual survival, are you open to that kind of loving correction when it comes to your relationships? And so, taking a step back now, we see that we need ongoing correction.

In our approach to worship and finances, in our approach to work and our use of time, in our approach to marriage and relationships, in each of these areas, Nehemiah's contemporaries had lost their God centeredness.

You see, money and time and sex and marriage, these are not separated from our spiritual life. All of our life is worship. God wants our whole life to bring him praise.

Even the seemingly non-spiritual or ordinary parts of our lives are meant to be lived for him, for his praise. So, in light of that, are you open to ongoing correction for the sake of maintaining your spiritual zeal, for the sake of waking up from your drift?

[25 : 29] Jesus says that spiritual correction is a community project in Matthew 18. And it takes a spirit of gentleness, Paul says in Galatians 6. And some of us, yes, have seen the work of correction done very poorly, but even so, are you open to good, rightful, ongoing correction?

Because you need it, and I need it. The people in Nehemiah's day needed it. After our great spiritual advances, the watchword still has to be *semper reformanda*, always reforming, always renewing the heart.

But it's not just ongoing correction that we need. The second means of ongoing reform that we see here is the need for courageous leaders.

Now, we won't spend as much time here as on the first point, but it's hard to read this chapter and not be struck by Nehemiah's bold actions and his honest prayers. Of course, on first reading, his actions maybe seem a little too bold.

In verse 25, he's slapping them and pulling out their hair. I've never seen that in a how-to pastoral manual. I'll just let you know. But remember, not everything described in the Bible is meant to be an example for us to imitate.

[26 : 51] Those actions would not be appropriate for us today. However, given Nehemiah's context, maybe a few ears needed to be twisted and a few hairs pulled out, as it were, to wake up the drifting ship and keep it from crashing ashore.

Again, I'm not advocating that we take the exact same measures, but are we willing to be bold, to be courageous? The church needs leaders who have a God-centered love, who are willing to swim against the tide and confront when necessary.

But it's not just bold action, it's also honest prayer. This chapter is punctuated by Nehemiah's prayer life, verse 14, verse 22, verse 29, and then it all rounds off in verse 30.

And now, much like his bold actions, his honest prayers can strike us on the first reading as a bit odd, maybe even a bit self-righteous. But actually, on closer inspection, these prayers are just the opposite.

Yes, Nehemiah prays for God to remember him. But, this prayer springs not from a sense of self-importance or self-accomplishment, but from a sense of humility.

[28 : 18] In fact, it's an appeal for help. After all, in the Bible, God's remembering always implies his intervention, his action, his help.

God's remembering is not just his recollection or his recognition. In other words, Nehemiah in these prayers is committing himself and his cause to the only safe hands, the hands of God.

And so, you see, what drives Nehemiah at the end of the day is not what his contemporaries think of him or how they might remember him, but what God thinks of him and how God might remember him.

Nehemiah longs at the end of the day to hear God say, well done, good and faithful servant. And living for God's approval rather than the approval of people is part of what real spirituality looks like.

So, in the work of ongoing reformation, we need not just correction but courageous leaders. So, church family, will you commit to praying for the leaders here at Trinity and for the elders especially?

[29 : 39] For our own spiritual good, for our own ongoing renewal, we need bold and prayerful pastors and elders. leaders, would you pray for them in that work? But also pray for the deacons and for the small group leaders and for the ministry leaders and volunteers that they too would be bold and prayerful in their work.

But also consider your own life. Are you willing to be this kind of courageous leader in your own spiritual context, in the midst of your family, parents, in the midst of your Christian friendships, in the context of your small group?

You know, each of us, when we think about it, has a role of influence no matter where we are placed. And sometimes God will call us to bold action. That doesn't mean nitpicking on every little thing, but lovingly addressing real issues as they arise.

it's not going to be easy. It will take a thick skin and a soft heart, but again, prayer is the key. Dependence and humility before God.

Living for God's approval more than for the approval of others. So then the need for ongoing reform takes ongoing correction and courageous leadership, but that's not all.

[31 : 13] We actually need more than just correction and godly leaders. Because, you know, if we stopped there, we'd be merely talking about outside-in chains, trying to continue to go from the outside to the in.

And we need more than just an outside-in kind of change. We need a change, we need a renewal that can happen from the inside out. We need a way to stoke the fire from the inside.

inside. And what Nehemiah 13 ultimately shows us is just that. What this chapter points us to is a need for nothing less than a new covenant and a new heart.

Now, here's what you have to see. These three areas that Nehemiah corrects in chapter 13, they are the very three areas that in chapter 10, the people took a solemn oath to uphold as they renewed their covenant with God.

The covenant, that is the terms of the relationship that God established at Sinai. In chapter 10, they said, we're going to do it. And you remember, just a few chapters ago, just two weeks ago, what were the principal things they promised to uphold from that covenant?

[32 : 27] Who they married, observing the Sabbath, and taking care of God's house. We're going to do it, they say. But despite their best intentions, the people cannot keep their end of the covenant.

In a little over a decade, the same generation who was vowing their utmost obedience will be breaking the very commands that they swore to uphold. After all, what are the failures of chapter 13?

Who they marry, observing the Sabbath, and taking care of God's house. we need ongoing correction, yes. We need courageous leaders who will provide it, yes.

But above all, we need a new covenant, and we need a new heart. And you see, Nehemiah 13 is like this beacon pulsing at the end of Old Testament history.

This is the last piece of history written in the Old Testament. This is how the story ends, right here. And here it is, just beaming out, crying out for God to remember, and to remember not just Nehemiah, but for God to remember his own promise to do something that his people couldn't do.

[33 : 44] Do you remember Jeremiah in those years leading up to the exile, the prophet Jeremiah? We actually read his words earlier in the service. What did he talk about? He'd talk about a new covenant where God would write his law, not on tablets anymore, but he'd write them on the very hearts of his people.

And in doing that, what would be the condition of that writing on their hearts? He would forgive their sins once and for all. And then Ezekiel, the prophet Ezekiel, in the midst of the exile, spoke about a time to come when God would actually take out our hearts of stone and give us a heart of flesh that actually beat and pulsed with the love of God rather than the love of ourselves.

And here's Nehemiah at the end of Old Testament history saying, God, remember for our good. And in the New Testament, we see that God makes good on his promises.

God sends his son Jesus to do what Nehemiah could never do. Nehemiah could confront and he could correct and he could cleanse temple chambers, but he could not cleanse the human heart.

And yet Jesus, fully God and fully human, takes our fallen human nature upon himself and he obeys the terms of God's covenant perfectly. And he dies on a cross to pay the penalty for our covenant breaking in our place so that now the terms of our relationship with God, the covenant can be new.

[35 : 15] There can be new terms between us and God. Terms that depend not on my righteousness or my obedience or my love, but on Christ's righteousness and on his obedience and on his love.

And through faith in Christ, through coming into union with him, we come into his new covenant. And like Jeremiah and Ezekiel said, and like Nehemiah prayed and longed for, God remembers and gives us forgiveness and a new heart.

What keeps the fire burning in our hearts? What is the real, vital basis for this work of ongoing reform?

Semper reformanda. Correction will help. Courageous leaders will be needed. But at the end of the day, it's the reality of the new covenant, sealed by the blood of Jesus, ratified in his resurrection from the dead, imparted to our hearts by the pouring out of his spirit, received by faith.

above all, we must seek ongoing intimacy with our living Lord Jesus and his abundant grace.

[36 : 32] That is renewal. Revivals are good. We pray for them. We pray that our city will experience a great turning to God.

Healthy church growth is good. We want to see our church and all the churches of New Haven grow in breadth and in depth, and we want to plant more churches that will do the same. Personal seasons of spiritual zeal and energy for God are good.

We thank God for them, and we want more of them. But as this chapter shows us, there will also be seasons of drift, and we have to be ready for them. And there, in those moments when we're tempted to settle down into a comfortable compromise, it's the new covenant.

that we have to grasp once again, that Jesus died so that we might live, that he rose again so that we might know we're forgiven and accepted, that Jesus ascended as king, and that Jesus will come again and make all things new, and that we, friends, are his people on earth bearing the salt and light of his kingdom.

So may the Lord Jesus be always reforming us, always renewing our hearts, and may he always be exalted among us. *Semper reformanda*.

[37 : 57] Let's pray. Oh, Father, how much we need your Holy Spirit to come down into our hearts and rekindle our first love for you and for our Lord Jesus.

God, as we take just a moment in silence before you, would you come and would you meet with us as we prepare to come to your table? Amen.

Well, friends, it's fitting that after considering Nehemiah 13, we'd celebrate the Lord's Supper. Nehemiah 13 shows us we need a new covenant that is a relationship with God based not on our obedience but on Jesus' faithful obedience in our place.

And here at the Lord's Supper, we celebrate just that, that Jesus established this new covenant. So we eat bread and we remember his body broken for us and we drink a cup and we remember his blood shed for us.

And by the Holy Spirit, Jesus promises to be present here and to fan the flames of faith in our hearts. You know, this act that we do, do you remember, it goes all the way back to Jesus himself.

[39 : 25] So as we sit here around this table, it's like we're sitting in that original upper room with Jesus as the host and he's saying to us, here it is, beloved, the new covenant in my blood.

Do this in remembrance of me. So if you've turned from sin and you placed your trust in Christ, eat with us. If you're a believer in Jesus and you haven't been baptized, don't delay.

Get baptized. Identify publicly with your Savior and with his people. If you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, if you're not sure kind of where you're at spiritually, we're glad you're here, but just pass the trays by as they come around.

If you need help on your spiritual journey, there are prayers in the bulletin that are there just as sort of tools or means for you to pray as you seek God. You see, rather than taking the bread and taking the cup, this is a time for you to take hold of Christ himself.

And there are prayers there that can help you to do that, to come into a living relationship with the living Lord who loves you. So I wonder if those who are helping to serve would come forward.

[40 : 38] The way we do this at Trinity is that we're going to pray and we're going to ask God his blessing as we eat the bread together and we'll pass it out and then we'll eat it together. And then we're going to pray again before we take the cup and we're going to pass the cup out and we're going to drink it together.

James, would you pray for the bread for us? All right, let's pray together. Father, we are grateful for the new covenant that has done for us what we could not do for ourselves.

It has done for us what no other human could do for us. Thank you for this regular reminder of the price of our redemption and the power of it for we are forgetful people.

We pray that as we take this bread that you would imprint in our hearts and you the power of your salvation and that you would cause us to be bold in acting in accordance to your will, to your glory.

We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.