

Cracks appear in the rebuilding

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Preacher: Malcolm Hazell

[0 : 0 0] It is well, it is well with my soul It is well, it is well with my soul It is well, it is well with my soul Good morning everybody, welcome to Union Baptist Church It's so good to see you all on this Sunday morning We've come to worship God, to meet with Him And it's great to be together I'd like to welcome you especially if it's your first time with us today For those that don't know me, my name's Andrew I'm Associate Pastor of this church Our Senior Pastor Malcolm is going to be sharing with us later

From Nehemiah Chapter 13 as we continue our series Through Ezra and Nehemiah We're looking forward to that But I want us to take some time to prepare ourselves for worship now I'd like to invite you to stand And we're going to read some words from Psalm 34 And I'll read the words that come up in normal type And if you can join together with me In the words which come up in bold type As we come to God in worship I will extol the Lord at all times His praise will always be on my lips I will glory in the Lord Let the afflicted hear and rejoice Glorify the Lord with me Let us exalt His name together I sought the Lord and He answered me He delivered me from all my fears Those who look to Him are radiant Their faces are never covered with shame This poor man called And the Lord heard him

He saved him out of all his troubles The angel of the Lord encamps Around those who fear Him And He delivers them Taste and see that the Lord is good Blessed is the one who takes refuge in Him The righteous cry out And the Lord hears them He delivers them from all their troubles The Lord is close to the broken hearted And saves those who are crushed in spirit Lord we come to you this morning And we thank you that you are the God Who saves us However we feel And whatever circumstances We're going through You do not change Lord And we can come to you As the God who loves and saves Saves those who feel crushed And those who feel joyful Lord I pray that you would give us A sense of joy this morning As we come to you in worship Open our hearts and our voices To praise you Lord And I pray that our worship In this place this morning Will be pleasing to you We come to you with our worship Amen Amen Well please join me as we sing together Praises Rising Eyes are setting to see We're time to hear We're time to hear All this stirring Of the yearning For years We're not for years As when we see you Bring my strength to face the day

And in your presence All our fears Are washed away They're washed away Hosanna Hosanna You are the God Who saves us You worthy of all our praises Hosanna Hosanna Hosanna Hosanna Hosanna Come on your way Among us We welcome you Lord Jesus Hear the sound of hearts Returning to you We return to you We return to you We return to you In your kingdom Broken lives are made near In your kingdom

[5 : 0 9] Broken lives are made near Broken lives are made near Broken lives are made near You make us near You make us near Cause when we see you We find strength to face the day In your presence All our fears Are washed away Are washed away Are washed away Hosanna Hosanna Hosanna Hosanna You are the God Who saves us You worthy of all our praises Hosanna Hosanna Hosanna Hosanna Come every way Hosanna Come every way Your heart We welcome you Jesus Hosanna Hosanna

Hosanna Hosanna Hosanna Hosanna Hosanna Hosanna Yes, we do praise you, Lord.

You are the God who saves us. And in your presence, you transform things, Lord. And I thank you that our situations seem different in the light of your glory and in the light of your presence and in the light of your love.

And we thank you for what you've done for us. We thank you for what you've done for us in Jesus. And we have so many reasons to praise you this morning. We continue to worship you now. Amen. Sing like murder before.

Hold my soul and worship your heart in heaven. The sun comes up.

[7 : 46] It's a new day, darling. It's time to sing your song again. Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me.

And Eve is saying when the evening comes. Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul.

Worship His holy name. Sing like murder before. Sing like murder before.

O my soul, I'll worship your holy name. You're rich in love.

And you're slow to anger. Your name is great. And your heart is kind. For all your goodness I will keep on singing.

[9 : 06] Ten thousand reasons for my heart to know. And your heart is great. Amen. You're rich in love. Amen.

Amen. Bless the Lord, O my Son, O my Son, who worship His holy name.

Sing my reverence, Lord, O my Son, I worship Your holy name.

And on that day when my strength is failing, the end draws near and my time has come.

Still my soul will sing Your praise, God and me. Ten thousand years and then forever.

[10 : 18] Bless the Lord, O my Son, O my Son, who worship His holy name.

Sing my reverence, Lord, O my Son, I worship Your holy name.

Yes, I worship Your holy name. Yes, I worship Your holy name.

Amen. Praise God to sit down. We're going to spend some time in prayer now. And often when we pray, we close our eyes, don't we, to help us to focus on God.

But this time when we pray, I'm going to ask you to keep your eyes open. Because one really helpful way we can pray is to look at what we see around us and to pray into that. And we're going to have some pictures that come up on the screen that are going to guide our prayers this morning.

[11 : 27] So with our eyes open, let's come to God in prayer. We thank you, Lord, for this beautiful world that you have given us. Thank you for the grandeur of the mountains and the serenity of the lakes, for the green pastures and the blue waters, for the fun and pleasure we experience when we see, hear, smell, taste and touch your wonderful creation.

Thank you that you made it all and declared it good. May we cherish what you have made and see you as the creator behind the creation. Thank you, God, for times of celebration and community.

Thank you that we can come together and enjoy one another's company, whether we're marking big occasions or just enjoying a simple meal at the table. Please help us to appreciate afresh the privilege that it is to share our lives with one another.

Thank you for our Christian community and the freedom we have to gather together to celebrate all that Jesus has done for us. Lord, it is so easy to reach out to other things when we should turn to you.

Forgive us when we are tempted to put other things ahead of you and help us to prioritise our worship of you. Father God, help us to find our contentment in you and not in the pleasures of this world.

[12 : 53] We thank you, God, for the promises that you have made to us, that you love us and that you will never leave us or forsake us. Please help us to keep the promises we make to one another, to be trustworthy, to be faithful and true to our word.

Lord, where we find this challenging or difficult, please give us the grace and humility and strength that we need. Please help us, God, to use our mouths and our ears wisely.

May we build one another up and not tear one another down. May we remember how you love us when we are left questioning the love of others. Lord, we ask for your help in how we use our time and money.

Thank you for blessing us so abundantly, both as individuals and as a church. Please help us to give back to you what you have so graciously given to us.

Please grow a harvest bigger than we could ask or imagine. Today, as we conclude our series in Nehemiah, we read of the people of Judah bringing tithes of offerings of grain, new wine and olive oil.

[14 : 10] A new wall has been built and now reforms are introduced and established among the people, coming back to your ways of doing things. As we reflect on the commitments the people made, may we pause to think about what God might be asking us to do today.

We ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I'd just like to tell you about a few things coming up. Actually, I'm just going to tell you about one thing coming up, because everything else is

in the This Week sheet, which is emailed out to everyone.

You should receive that. If you don't, then do please speak to one of us at the end or contact us. But one exciting thing which is coming up at the end of the month is the I Search Light Party. We've been talking about celebration.

Last week, we were learning about the importance of celebrating things. And we're going to have a celebration on Saturday the 30th from 3 to 6 p.m. This is for all children in school years 1 to 6.

So in our church groups, that is the Navigators and Trailblazers groups. I'm getting a nod from Susanna, so I'm glad I got that right. If you're in the Navigators and Trailblazers groups, then you're most welcome to come along to this light party and bring your friends.

[15:13] It's going to be lots of fun. There's going to be music, games, some food, crafts, a time to celebrate God's goodness and to celebrate God's light and the love that he has shown us. So we look forward to seeing you all there.

Now, in a moment, the children and young people are going to go out to their groups that are behind us. If you haven't already registered your child or young person, if you can make your way through the information room here, and lovely Jane here will get you registered and then point you in the right direction of where you need to go.

So let me say a prayer for the children and young people and their leaders before they go out.

Father God, we thank you for the gift of children and young people, and we thank you for the groups we have here at Union Baptist Church, where we can meet with people of a similar age and learn together, have fun together and draw close to you, Lord.

And I pray for all the children and young people as they go out to their groups and pray for their leaders, that you'll help them to teach and to connect. And I pray that you'll bless the time that they spend out in the hub this morning.

We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, I invite you to sit, and we're going to continue our worship as we watch this worship video. Please do join in singing from where you are.

[16:27] And when the music starts, children and young people, you can go off to your groups as we continue in worship. Let's do it.

All creation holds together by the power of your voice. Let the skies declare your glory.

Let the land and seas rejoice. You're the author of creation. You're the Lord of every man.

And your cry of love rings out across the land. Let the skies are now.

Let the skies are now. Let the skies are now. And exchange the joy of heaven for the anguish of the cross.

[17:51] With the prayer you fed the hungry. With the word you still will see. Yet how solemnly you suffer that the guilty may go free.

You're the author of creation. You're the Lord of every man. And your cry of love rings out across the land.

For the skies are now. You're the author of creation.

You're the author of creation You're the Lord of every man And your cry of love rings out across the line You're the author of creation You're the Lord of every man And your cry of love rings out across the line And your cry of love rings out across the line And your cry of love rings out across the line And your cry of love rings out across the line As I mentioned earlier, many of you know we've been working through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah in the Old Testament in recent weeks.

And today is the final message in that series. And as we kind of look back, we're going to do a little bit of a summary using the video that we're about to watch Which kind of sums up how these two books fit together And what the overall message is as we prepare ourselves to hear from Nehemiah chapter 13 later on in our service.

[20:11] So let's watch this video. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah In most modern Bibles, these books are separate But that division happened long after it was written It was originally a unified work written by a single author The story is set after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and its temple And took many of the people into exile And this book picks up about 50 years later And tells the return of some Israelites to Jerusalem And then what happened when they rebuilt the city and their lives there Specifically, the book focuses on three key leaders who led the rebuilding efforts You have Zeruvahel, then Ezra, and then Nehemiah And the book's design focuses on the efforts of each leader Zeruvahel leads a large group of people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple Then about 60 years later, Ezra arrives in Jerusalem to teach the Torah and rebuild the community And then he's followed by Nehemiah who leads the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls And these three

stories are designed to be parallel

Each begins with the king of Persia prompted by God to send the leader to Jerusalem And he offers resources and support And then each leader encounters opposition in their efforts Which they then overcome But in a way that leads to a strange anti-climax in each of the three parts Let's back up and see how it fits together So the story begins with a decree from Cyrus, the king of Persia And he's moved by God to allow the exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple And the author says this fulfills a promise made by the prophet Jeremiah That the exiles would one day return to Jerusalem Now this fulfillment should trigger our hopes in the many other prophetic promises that exile was not the end of the story We have hope for a future messianic king from the line of David We have hope for a rebuilt temple where God's presence will dwell with his people Hope for God's kingdom to come over all the nations and bring his blessing Just like he promised Abraham And so it's with all these hopes in mind that we read on into the story of Zeruvavel

His name means planted in Babylon He represents the generation born in Babylonian captivity And he leads a wave of Israelites returning to Jerusalem After they settle there they rebuild the altar for offering sacrifices and later the temple itself The foundation laying ceremony and then the temple's final dedication These are key moments The past stories of the tabernacle and temples dedication should be in our minds This is when the fiery cloud of God's presence is supposed to descend He's dwelling with his people and it doesn't happen And so while some people are happy about this new temple The elders who had seen the previous temple of Solomon They cry out in grief It is nothing like their glorious past or their hopes for the future And it's right here that we get the first story of opposition And it's very odd So the grandchildren of the Israelites who were not taken into exile They had been living in Jerusalem all along They come to offer help with the temple rebuilding And Zeruvavel refuses He says you have no part in our temple

And this of course generates a conflict which Zeruvavel overcomes But it's very strange Because the prophets had envisioned that the tribes of Israel would all come together Along with all of the nations to participate in the worship of the God of Israel When the kingdom finally comes So this is an anti-climactic moment to say the least In the next section we zoom forward about 60 years and we're introduced to Ezra He's a leader among the exiled Israelites in Babylon And he's a Torah scholar and a teacher And so he gets appointed by Artaxerxes, king of Persia To lead another wave of people back to Jerusalem And Ezra wants to bring about spiritual and social renewal among the people Our hopes are high And again we come to another anti-climactic moment in the story Ezra learns that many of the exiled Israelites that had come back They had married non-exiles who had been living around Jerusalem Some of them were non-Israelites And almost certainly some of them were Ezra then appeals to the commands of the Torah That Israel was supposed to be holy and separate from the ancient Canaanites

And he then says that the people living around Jerusalem are like the Canaanites They're going to corrupt the exiles So Ezra offers a prayer of repentance And it's very heartfelt But then he rallies all the leaders and enacts this divorce decree That says all these marriages should be annulled The women and children sent away And then the decree is only partially carried out We're given a list of some of the men who divorced their wives The story is very strange for a number of reasons First of all God never commanded Ezra to do any of this It was the leaders of Jerusalem who led Ezra to make the decree Second, the contemporary prophet Malachi He did say that the exiles should care about purity But he also said that God was opposed to divorce And so the mixed results of the decree This all fits into this pattern of a strange concluding anticlimax Which leads us to the next section about Nehemiah He's an Israelite official serving in the Persian government And when he hears about the ruined state of Jerusalem's walls He prays and then gets permission from the Persian king Artaxerxes

[25 : 24] To go and rebuild the walls The king even gives them an armed escort and all these resources So after arriving in Jerusalem he begins the building project And he too faces opposition from the people who had already been living around Jerusalem Once again we face a tension in the story The contemporary prophet Zechariah said that the new Jerusalem of God's kingdom Would be a city without walls That God's presence would surround it That people from all nations would come and join the covenant people But Nehemiah seems to operate with the opposite vision He informs the people surrounding Jerusalem that they have no part in Jerusalem And this of course provokes them to hostility And so while Nehemiah carries out his vision for the city with integrity and courage They have to build the city with armed guards to protect them We keep wondering could

this whole conflict have been handled differently?

And this all leads to the conclusion of the book In two movements, first positive and then negative Ezra and Nehemiah combine forces to bring about a spiritual renewal among the people They gather all the exiles together for a festival They read and teach the Torah to all the people for seven days And then they celebrate the ancient feast of Tabernacles To remember God's faithfulness from the Exodus and the wilderness journeys Then they offer a confession of their sins They vow themselves to renew the covenant Follow all the commands of the Torah And they finish with a great celebration over the temple, the walls of Jerusalem And we're thinking this could be the turning point But it's not The book ends on a huge downer Nehemiah tours around the city And he finds that the people have not been fulfilling their covenant vows So, Zeruvah's work is undone As he finds the temple being neglected And staffed by all these unqualified people He then discovers that Ezra's work is being compromised He finds everyone violating the Torah People are working on the Sabbath

And even his own work on the walls is involved Because people are setting up markets around the walls of Jerusalem And working on the Sabbath So, Nehemiah, he goes on a rampage He's beating people up He's pulling out their hair And he's yelling Obey the commands of the Torah And his final words are a prayer That God would remember him That at least he tried And the book ends I mean, it's very strange But we've been prepared for it, right?

These anticlimactic moments Have been woven into the book's design intentionally And so it raises the question What on earth does this book contribute to the storyline of the Bible?

Well, remember, the book started by raising our hopes In the prophetic promises about the Messiah The temple, the kingdom of God And then none of it happens So even though Israel is now back in the land Their spiritual state seems unchanged from before the exile And while Ezra and Nehemiah, they do their best But their political and social reforms among the people Don't address the core issues of their heart So what the book is pointing out Is the same need highlighted by the prophets Jeremiah And Ezekiel What God's people need is a holistic transformation of their hearts If they're ever going to love and obey their God And so the book ends on a downer, yes But it forces you to keep reading on into the wisdom and prophetic books To find out what is God going to do to fulfill his great covenant promises But for now, that's the book of Ezra and Nehemiah Brilliant. Well, there is a lot to take in there But I hope in some ways that's a helpful recap of what we have been doing over the last few weeks

[28 : 59] And just a reminder that if you have missed previous services You can catch up on our website and on our YouTube channel Either listening or watching the videos of those messages So after we've sung our next song Brigitte is going to bring us our Bible reading from Nehemiah chapter 13 But now we're going to spend time worshipping God As we sing together All hail the power of Jesus' names Let's stand and we'll sing before our Bible reading Now we're going to do that Here we're going to enjoy To be able, pray for our Bible reading So after we've sung this here

Bring forth the royal diadem and crown him, crown him, crown him.

Crown him, Lord, our home. When he marches on your God, live from his altar's call, And saw the stem of justice run and crown him, crown him, crown him, crown him, Lord, our home.

We sing on Israel's chosen prince, and rites of twelfth old.

Hail him who saves you by his grace, and crown him, crown him, crown him, crown him, Lord, our home.

[31 : 25] And every king and every tribe of this serous, Lord, To him all touch his spirit, crown him, crown him, crown him, crown him, Lord, our home.

Hail him who saves you by his grace, and crown him, crown him, crown him, crown him, crown him, And crown him, crown him, crown him, crown him, crown him, Lord, our home.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. The reading is taken from Nehemiah chapter 13 verses 4 to 30.

Before this, Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles and also the tithes of grain, new wine and olive oil prescribed for the Levites, musicians and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests.

But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes, king of Babylon, I had returned to the king.

[33 : 47] Sometime later, I asked his permission and came back to Jerusalem. Here I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts of the house of God.

I was greatly displeased and threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room. I gave orders to purify the rooms and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God with the grain offerings and the incense.

I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them and that all the Levites and musicians responsible for the service had gone back to their own fields.

So I rebuked the officials and asked them, Why is the house of God neglected? Then I called them together and stationed them at their posts.

All Judah bought the tithes of grain, new wine and olive oil into the storerooms. I put Shalamiah the priest, Zadok the scribe and a Levite named Padiah in charge of the storerooms and made Hanan son of Zacca, the son of Mataniah, their assistant, because they were considered trustworthy.

[35 : 07] They were made responsible for distributing the supplies to their fellow Levites.

Remember me for this, my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services.

In those days I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads.

And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day. People from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah.

I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to them, What is this wicked thing you are doing desecrating the Sabbath day? Didn't your ancestors do the same things so that our God brought all this calamity on us and on this city?

Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath. When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over.

[36 : 36] I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day. Once or twice the merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem.

But I warned them and said, Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will arrest you. From that time on, they no longer came on the Sabbath.

Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember me for this also, my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love.

Moreover, in those days, I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples and did not know how to speak the language of Judah.

I rebuked them and called curses down on them. I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God's name and said, You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves.

[38 : 07] Was it not because of marriages like these that Solomon, king of Israel, sinned? Among the many nations there was no king like him. He was loved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was led into sin by foreign women.

Must we hear now that you too are doing all this terrible wickedness and are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women? One of the sons of Joadah, son of Eliashib the high priest, was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite, and I drove him away from me.

Remember them, my God, because they defiled the priestly office and the covenant of the priesthood and of the Levites. So, I purified the priests and the Levites of everything foreign and assigned them duties, each to his own task.

I also made provision for contributions of wood at designated times and for the first fruits.

Remember me with favour, my God.

It's great to see you all, and welcome to anybody who's visiting for the first time. You're really welcome amongst us. Let's ask the Lord to speak to us through his word. Let's pray.

[39 : 41] Father, our lives are full of words, words that come through social media, newspapers, television. It's a babble of noise, and it's hard sometimes to hear your voice.

Help us in this time to be still and to hear what you're saying to us. Thank you, Holy Spirit, that you come and help us in our need.

Amen. I don't know about you, but I love books and narratives with happy endings. Who else likes that? Just sort of get a bit past it.

And how about those dramas of crime scenes that don't get solved? I mean, what's that about? I like the villain to be put away and justice to be done.

And I guess that's why, when I read the book of Nehemiah, so much of it, certainly up to chapter 12, I feel encouraged. I'm happy. The people of Israel have, again, devoted themselves to the Lord.

[40 : 47] They've said that they're going to make their tithes, they're going to observe the Sabbath, and they're going to be faithful in their relationships. It's so good. Until, that is, you get to chapter 13, which we've just had read to us.

Golly, what an anti-climax. What a sad and sorry state of affairs. It seems like the people of Israel are just sliding back into disobedience.

It's strange, isn't it, that no one ever drifted into holiness. No one ever just found themselves loving the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength by accident.

You see, we all too easily compromise and say that it's in the name of tolerance. We disobey God's law and call it freedom.

We abandon self-control and say we're liberated and we become careless in holy habits that are meant for our good, like Bible reading and prayer and Sunday worship.

[41 : 53] And we say to ourselves, oh, we're getting a bit relaxed. Isn't that nice? You see, friends, conformity to this world is a constant snare to the church.

Our verse for this year, my wife said to me, we haven't mentioned this enough, so here it comes. Do not be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

And our vision statement as a church is not to go with the flow, but to see High Wycombe transformed by God, by his loving, serving, and worshipping church.

You see, the church is not to be like this picture in front of us. It's to be a lifeboat that saves. But how can it possibly save if it is filled with filthy sea water?

It's impossible. Now, chapter 13 comes, and we see Nehemiah returning to Jerusalem for his second tour. And he goes around the city, and he frankly can't believe his eyes.

[43 : 06] He could try to sort of turn a blind eye, but when he sees that all those promises that they've made are just being forgotten, they're not tithing, they're not keeping the Sabbath holy, and they're continuing to enter into relationships which draw them away from God.

He could be nice, but nice is not the medicine that is needed in these circumstances. The consequences of this slide will be disastrous, not only for Israel, but Israel was to be a light to the nations, the hope for the world.

It was crucial that they came back. And so we hear Nehemiah doing things which are frankly politically incorrect these days, don't you think? Verse 8, have a look.

I threw out Tobiah and all his goods from that chamber. Verse 9, I gave orders. Verse 11, I rebuked. Verse 15, I warned. Verse 22, I commanded. And then it takes the biscuit. Verse 25, have a look at that. I called down curses, beat them, and pulled out their hair.

[44 : 16] Wow. He really went for it, didn't he? Now it doesn't, the Bible doesn't say that all these things were really, really good, pulling out hair, for example. But you see the man who is passionate for the honour of God.

Crown him, crown him, Lord of all. You get the feeling he had on his heart. And don't forget that we follow a saviour, Jesus Christ, who did something quite interesting.

Do you remember when he saw the temple being used as a marketplace? Matthew 21, verses 12 and 13. Let me remind you. Jesus entered the temple courts and he drove out all those who were buying and selling there.

He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. And he said, it is written, my house will be called a house of prayer, but you're making it a den of robbers.

Wow. Let's now look at these three areas we see in Nehemiah 13 where we see the subsidence of the people of God and let's see what we can learn from their mistakes.

[45 : 27] Verses 4 to 14, first of all. And we're just going to read and remind ourselves of these verses in Nehemiah. Let me read them to you.

This is the first one which is looking at verses 4 and 5. Eliashib, the priest, had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah.

Do you remember Tobiah who tried to stop them rebuilding the walls? This is the enemy of Israel. So he's closely associated with Tobiah and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings, the incense, the temple articles and all the tithes and grain and new wine and olive oil prescribed for the Levites, musicians, gatekeepers, as well as the contributors for the priests.

We read that and we say, well, that's an interesting bit of narrative. It's not an interesting bit of narrative. It's outrageous what he's done. Completely outrageous. Eliashib, the high priest, the one who's supposed to make sure that worship continues has put the enemy of Israel in the storerooms meant for all the offerings to be given to God.

Isn't it terrible? And because of that, what's happened is there's no money, no resources to pay the priests, to pay the musicians and so you go into the temple now and it's silent.

[46 : 54] There's no worship being offered to God because Tobiah has taken the place in the storerooms for where the offerings would have been given.

Terrible. And with, no wonder, Nehemiah throws Tobiah out and throws all of his goods out. Quite right. Friends, during this pandemic, many of you have continued making your offerings and tithes to this church.

It's enabled us to continue the ministries of this church. It seems very fitting and in line with this particular narrative. Can I, on behalf of the leaders of this church, can I thank you?

Thank you so much. But let's all check that we haven't fallen into the mistake of God's people in Nehemiah. Has anything got in the way of you bringing your tithes and offerings?

It's just been difficult to get here for many of us, hasn't it? Are there any Tobiahs Tobiahs that have got in the way of our worship and of releasing resources for worship?

[47 : 59] May the Lord guide us in this. And if you need help in knowing how to do that, then do have a look at our website, talk to our administrators or Ian Manctelow here, our trusty treasurer.

Secondly, there's another barrier that's been put in place to worship. This comes in verses 15 to 22. The Sabbath. And let's just read verse 15.

In those days, I saw people in Judah treading wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs, and other kinds of loads.

And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore, I warned them against selling food on that day. You see, the Sabbath for the people of Israel was a gift to them.

Do you remember they'd been taken out of Egypt where they were slaves, had to work seven days a week, and God said, I'm going to give you a Sabbath, a day of rest where you can worship me and rest your body.

[49 : 02] And here we see the people of Israel acting like slaves again, buying and selling on the Sabbath, working on the Sabbath.

I wonder whether over this lockdown period, the primacy of an hour of worship or an hour and a half of worship on a Sunday has been lost.

Perhaps other things have been put in its place. God bless you if you've carried on making a priority of worship. It is so important.

Crown him Lord of all, Lord of the Sabbath, Lord of our diaries. As your pastor, I invite you to make Sunday special again.

Give gathered worship on a Sunday the very highest priority. What would it say if someone put going to football or shopping before worship?

[50 : 02] What would that say? I think Nehemiah would rebuke us if worship on a Sunday was not our highest priority. I want you to listen to a couple of examples which I just thought were so inspiring.

I heard of one of our young people here who wanted to earn money with a paper round. I remember doing a paper round. He told the news agent that he could do a round but not on a Sunday because that would stop him or inhibit them being able to come to worship.

I heard this was going to happen and I wondered what the news agent would say. What do you think he'd say? You're not sure, are you? I wasn't sure either.

Well, they said that's fine. So that young person is able to come and worship on a Sunday without any encumbrance, without having to rush around beforehand in order to worship God. Isn't that wonderful?

When my son Rob played football, we located a football team that played on a Sunday afternoon to ensure he was able to get to worship God.

[51 : 10] It seemed like a small thing in many ways. It wasn't easy to achieve but it has had big impacts in his life and we give thanks to God for helping us to take that stand.

I know things are probably more difficult now. I'm thrilled when I hear of the efforts that brothers and sisters make in prioritizing worship.

Sometimes it's not easy to get physically present here on a Sunday and I do understand that. God bless you as you set this as a priority. So, tithes, Sunday worship and then in verses 23 to 30, relationships.

Let's have a look at these verses together. In those days I saw the men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab, half of their children spoke language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples and did not know how to speak the language of Judah.

Now, what's happening here is you've got intermarrying as we've seen earlier in the text we've been looking at and you helpfully went through that in detail but these are relationships that the people of Israel have entered into which are hampering their worship.

[52 : 30] They're stopping them being able to even understand their holy scriptures because their children are not able to speak Hebrew which the Torah was written in. And he's saying this is an outrage.

How can you possibly within a generation or two there will not be a people who can hold up the light of Christ or hold up Yahweh as their Lord. It was about the survival of the nation the nation which was to be the hope for the world.

Now, our devotions in our relationships are not quite so crucial in the sense of a whole nation being assigned to the world but our relationships also can either be hampered or helped by those we associate with.

I was so thrilled when, where's Joel? There he is over there. When Joel told me he was marrying Joanna. This is very exciting. Both Joel and Joanna believe and follow Jesus and as they come together in marriage next year we can hope and pray that their devotion for Jesus will rub off and encourage one another in the faith and if God blesses them with children and subsequently that they can train up those children in the way of the Lord.

This is what we want to see don't we? And this is what we encourage. I know it's not always that easy but we give thanks to God when we see this. Now friends, these three areas I think are really helpful remind us about how not to slide with the world but let's just focus again on Jesus.

[54 : 02] Through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus a beautiful rebuilding work has taken place in our lives in many of your lives. Let's not squander that precious gift through carelessness through a lack of holy habits which are for our good and let's place the highest priority on gathered worship as we are doing gathered here today.

Let's put aside anything that is stopping us supporting the work of God in this place and in other places. Let's make sure that there's no Tobias in the way and let's choose carefully those we have in closest relationship with us such that we'll be devoted to the Lord rather than being drawn away by other loves.

these basic Christian disciplines will go a long way in avoiding conformity to the patterns of this world that slide us into disobedience but this side of heaven we too will find it hard to perfectly offer worship to perfectly offer our our gifts our talents and our treasure to the Lord and sometimes we'll be discouraged by our own devotion sometimes we'll look at others or look at church leaders and find it discouraging I guess that's what happened to Nehemiah wasn't it?

He looked around and was discouraged frustrated what did he do? Did you notice what he did? Three times in our text let me remind you verse 14 remember me oh my God verse 22 he says again remember me oh my God and finally verse 30 or 31 remember me with favour oh my God it's a great short prayer isn't it?

I don't know whether you've ever said that prayer yourself remember me don't forget me Lord do you remember there was somebody else in the Bible who said exactly those words in the book of Judges there was a man called Sanson he was a strong man and he foolishly listened to Delilah affected by that relationship he told her the secret of his strength was in his hair and his hair was

shaved off and the Philistines got him and they did a horrible thing they gouged out his eyes he was about to die and he said these words remember me oh my God give me strength and then what happened was he put his arm against the pillars and pushed them and the whole building fell down and the enemies of God the Philistines many many of those Philistines were killed and honour was given to the God of Israel remember me is a very powerful prayer isn't it?

[57 : 19] we can see that in Sansom but you may have drifted your mind may have drifted to another remember me let me remind you of it Luke 23 verses 40 to 43 hear these words as Jesus is on the cross but the other criminal rebuked him don't you fear God he said since you are under the same sentence we are punished justly for we are getting what we deserve but this man Jesus has done nothing wrong then he said and looked at Jesus Jesus he said remember me when you come into your kingdom and Jesus answered him I tell you the truth today you will be with me in paradise the criminal on the cross I'm sure failed in his worship of God I suspect rather than tithing or giving offerings to God he stole from other people in his relationships

I may I suspect he may well have led people astray from the Lord yet he called out and said to the Lord remember me remember me and God's nature is to have mercy to come to our aid and to strengthen us to walk with him friends even with our best efforts and good spiritual disciplines for our good we too will fail in our worship of God we may foolishly set other things before coming to worship or making offerings to the Lord our relationships I'm sure each of us you'll know that your relationships fall short of the perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ we too deserve God's judgment what what are we to do well let's respond like Nehemiah let's respond like the thief on the cross and let us say to Jesus remember me my

Lord my God in your mercy remember me when you come into your kingdom and and you know what with that prayer he will he will remember us the blood of Jesus washes the guiltiest the most guilty clean it's the most important prayer that we might pray this morning remember me in our final moments of our life like Samson what a brilliant prayer remember me oh Lord my God the gospel is good news because we have a savior who remembers us though our sins are as like scarlet they will be as wool so let us devote ourselves to him with holy habits crowning him

Lord of all shall we turn to him in prayer now let us worship and pray our loving heavenly father thank you for showing us the path to life in Jesus Christ thank you for the joy of giving and that it's impossible to out give you thank you for the rest and joy of Sunday worship thank you for restoring our relationships in Christ and we look Lord for you to continue that transforming work in our lives help us to resist the temptation to become lazy in our holy habits when we fail Lord please remember us when others fail help us not to become discouraged or give up but always to come back to you Jesus remember me

Jesus remember us for your glory and for the coming of your kingdom we pray Amen thank you very much Malcolm as we reflect on that the Bible often very often reminds us of our own shortcomings but points us to Jesus and our need of him to put us back into right relationship with God where we have failed and where we will always fail and we're going to remind ourselves of that now as we sing our final song who alone could save themselves you alone can rescue let's stand and let's worship the Lord Jesus who alone can rescue us forwards our song energizes mystique coming for us into our soul could AMen see and when

[62 : 51] Gud Lord, Lord, heal. Our shame was deeper than the sea, your grace is deeper still.

Who, O Lord, could save themselves there on so? Lord, heal.

Our shame was deeper than the sea, your grace is deeper still.

Who, O Lord, can rescue, you alone can save. You alone can lift us from the grave.

You came down to find us, let us up to death. To you, O Lord, belongs the highest praise.

[63 : 57] You, O Lord, have made a way the great divide you heal.

But when our hearts were far away, your love went further still.

To you, O Lord, shall not close for the sky. You alone can rescue, you alone can save.

You alone can lift us from the grave. You came down to find us, let us up to death.

To you, O Lord, belongs the highest praise. To you, O Lord, belongs the highest praise.

[65 : 01] To you, O Lord, belongs the highest praise. We lift up our eyes, lift up our eyes, lift up our eyes, you're the giver of life.

To you, O Lord, belongs the highest praise. To you, O Lord, belongs the highest praise. To you, O Lord, belongs the highest praise.

Amen. Let's remain standing as we pray. To you, O Lord, belongs the highest praise. To you, O Lord, belongs the highest praise.

To you, O Lord, belongs the highest praise. Amen.

Amen. Let's remain standing as we pray. Father God, we come to you, the promise keeper, as people who often have not kept our own promises.

[66 : 31] We recognize our repeated sin and failure to honor you. And that creates a gulf between us. And we put things that create a gulf between us. We put things in the way of worshiping you.

There's nothing that we can do to cross that gulf, to rescue ourselves. But you have done for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. You have rescued us because of your great love.

So may we respond to what you've done for us. May we not squander the wonderful gift that you've given us, but may we honor it. May we honor you with our days, with our time, with our resources, in our relationships.

Bless us, we pray, Lord, as we follow your ways. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Do sit down. Thank you for joining us.