

Overcoming the Lethal Power of a Hidden Enemy

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Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

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I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to the fifth chapter of Nehemiah, Nehemiah 5. Our text, we are going to be focusing again on verses 14 to 19, the last six verses of the fifth chapter of Nehemiah. We want to look at this morning is how we overcome, how we overcome our hidden enemy. You know, we've seen that this chapter, the narrative is talking about the return of the people of God from exile back to Judah and Jerusalem in the fifth century BC, and in this particular part of the book of Nehemiah, they are working on the wall, rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and as they rebuild, they are encountering opposition. They are surrounded by enemies. They find themselves opposed at every stage of the work. They are living each day under the threat of imminent attack. They are building with one hand, they're using the implements to build, in the other hand they are holding a weapon.

So there's this intense situation in which they find themselves and we see in the book and the big picture that God is bringing about is they are rebuilding Jerusalem, they are rebuilding the place of worship, the temple, they are rebuilding the walls, they are restoring the word of God to the people of God, and so the application to us in the big picture is that the people of God are always to be putting worship at the center. That's what it means to rebuild the temple, to put worship at the center of your life. To do that, you have to have the word of God restored as it should be at the center of your life. You can't worship God rightly without the word of God being the very life breath of your faith, and we need to help one another to put worship at the center of our lives and to put the word of God at the center, and then we rebuild the walls and rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem really is about holiness, it's about separation from the world. It's about separating ourselves from the world unto God that we might worship him.

So this is what's happening. We're all called to build, as it were, the walls of Jerusalem, the spiritual walls, to build the spiritual house, the temple, to restore the law, and so that we are to be about these things and we are to understand we are going to be opposed and we live in times of opposition surrounded by enemies, and one of the things that's really interesting about this particular chapter that we've seen is that the enemy that strikes in chapter 5 is completely unexpected. It's not the enemy that we were expecting. Remember, they are surrounded by people groups that hate the Jews and that don't want the temple to be built, don't want the city walls to be built, and you know, the Ammonites

to the east, the Samaritans to the north, the Ashdodites to the west, the Arabs to the south all want to stop the work, and as I said, the warning has gone forth, they are all planning an attack, and so the people are living in fear of that and yet what happens in chapter 5 is a great outcry and we saw that it was a surprising stunning source of that outcry we looked at the last two weeks. It wasn't an attack from the outside, it was an attack from within and we titled the last two messages "The Lethal Power of a Hidden Enemy." The lethal power of a hidden enemy. So today the message title is "Overcoming the Lethal Power of a Hidden Enemy." We want to see how do we overcome and I think the text gives us a window into that that gives us great clarity how we are to ourselves continue to build and to put worship at the center and to help one another to pursue holiness and to avoid being tripped up, because what happened to them is they were on the verge of losing the war, I mean, the battle they were trying to do to rebuild the people of God, the worship of God, they were in danger of losing everything because of this hidden enemy. Remember, we saw the last few weeks, the last two Sundays that it was basically careless self-interest was the hidden enemy, that their own actions taken with some sense of reasonableness, some sense of propriety, that they were though reasonable yet deadly. They were looking out for themselves and they were not looking out for the kingdom and they were destroying one another and they were destroying the work.

So the idea is that we can do the same thing if we are not carefully aware of the power of the hidden enemy, and the hidden enemy for us we're going to see is essentially our own selfish hearts, the flesh, the enemy within, and so that our efforts to build a life and to build a body, it's not just personal atomistical view, not to think just individualistically as we apply these things, we're to think about the community. As we try to do this to help one another to make everything about worship, to help one another to really build our lives on the word of God, to help one another to pursue holiness and separation from the world not in a sense of physically separating, of course, we've got to be in the world every day but in the world but not of the world, to be set apart unto God. As we help one another do this, we have to beware of this enemy within in our own hearts, and so how do we overcome this? I think there's a really interesting application of the last six verses of this chapter that I want to put before you today and under the question, though, how do we overcome this hidden enemy?

So we're going to read, I'm going to read the entire chapter again so you can hear the flow and be reminded of the context and I want to ask you a question as we're reading, I want you to note this, that what's happening in Nehemiah is he's basically recounting a historical narrative. Nehemiah is narrating for us the events of history that happened in his life. He's telling you the story and the narrative is interrupted in verse 14 by a sidebar. It's like an aside. He turns aside for a moment. He's telling the story, he stops telling the story and says, "Wait a minute, let me tell you something," and then he turns aside and he tells us the author inserts himself into the narrative in the present time as he's writing. He's writing years after it happens but he's telling the story and you're caught up in the story but the story is interrupted for this insertion. So part of what I want to ask you to think about is why does he break into the narrative? Why does he insert this into the text? Why does he interrupt the story? Why does he interrupt the historical narrative and say what he says in verses 14 to 19 because you're going to see that the narrative flows from

verse 13 directly to chapter 6, verse 1. That's the unbroken narrative, you go straight from verse 13 to chapter 6, verse 1, but he inserts these six verses, and what we're going to see essentially Nehemiah is, in a sense, vindicating himself. He's vindicating himself but he's not doing it in a selfish way.

This vindication of himself and his ministry is reminiscent of Paul in 2 Corinthians. Paul wrote the entire epistle of 2 Corinthians to vindicate his ministry. There is a place for defending oneself. Listen, we rush to it far too quickly. That's why the Bible says be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger. When are you fast to speak and fast to anger? When someone is doing something that you perceive as a slight. So he says be quick to listen, listen more carefully, be slow to speak, slow to anger, hear them out. We normally need to restrain ourselves and stop defending ourselves and lay down our rights. We're going to see that's exactly what he's telling us. Ironically, the example he gives us is of that kind of humility but it's an interesting thing that he's putting in here this vindication of himself in verses 14 to 19. As I said, it's like Paul in 2 Corinthians because Paul basically is dealing with false teachers who are charging him with all kinds of baseless things. They are saying things about him that are not true and for the purpose of the kingdom of God and the gospel, he defends himself, and if you read 2 Corinthians you understand that, you understand the flow of thought as you read through the book as he's basically dealing with charges that have been made that are false. He's proving the error of them but it's not for his own sake, it's for the sake of the gospel he preaches because the false teachers are preaching another gospel, and there's a sense in which Nehemiah is vindicating himself for the same purpose. He's vindicating himself to make the people that he's writing to hear his message.

So why break into the narrative? Think about that as we read and listen to it. Verse 1, Nehemiah 5.

1 Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. 2 For there were those who said, "We, our sons and our daughters are many; therefore let us get grain that we may eat and live." 3 There were others who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses that we might get grain because of the famine." 4 Also there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards. 5 Now our flesh is like the flesh of our brothers, our children like their children. Yet behold, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters are forced into bondage already, and we are helpless because our fields and vineyards belong to others."

That's the outcry. The outcry is not against the enemies outside, it's against the enemies within. Their Jewish brothers are oppressing them. It's happening from the inside, from people who are pursuing their own selfish interests. Nehemiah is angry. Verse 6,

6 Then I was very angry when I had heard their outcry and these words. 7 I consulted with myself and contended with the nobles and the rulers and

said to them, "You are exacting usury, each from his brother!" Therefore, I held a great assembly against them. 8 I said to them, "We according to our ability have redeemed our Jewish brothers who were sold to the nations; now would you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us?" Then they were silent and could not find a word to say. 9 Again I said, "The thing which you are doing is not good; should you not walk in the fear of our God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies? 10 And likewise I, my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Please, let us leave off this usury. 11 Please, give back to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money and of the grain, the new wine and the oil that you are exacting from them." [And their response,] 12 Then they said, "We will give it back and will require nothing from them; we will do exactly as you say." So I called the priests and took an oath from them that they would do according to this promise. 13 I also shook out the front of my garment and said, "Thus may God shake out every man from his house and from his possessions who does not fulfill this promise; even thus may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen!" And they praised the LORD. Then the people did according to this promise.

Problem solved. Terrible problem but the problem has been solved and the narrative should jump to 6:1.

1 Now when it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah, to Geshem the Arab and to the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall, and that no breach remained in it, although at that time I had not set up the doors in the gates, 2 then Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to me, saying, "Come, let us meet together at Chephirim in the plain of Ono." But they were planning to harm me.

Then he's going to talk about this plot to kill him, to assassinate him. But he interjects at verse 13 a personal aside, verse 14 to 19, and here the author steps back and he tells you about fuller picture of what was going on, and we see that he's actually writing this from at least 12 years after the events that we just read in verses 1 to 13 because he says this, "Moreover," verse 14, Nehemiah 5:14,

14 Moreover, from the day that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of King Artaxerxes, for twelve years, neither I nor my kinsmen have eaten the governor's food allowance. 15 But the former governors who were before me laid burdens on the people and took from them bread and wine besides forty shekels of silver; even their servants domineered the people. But I did not do so because of the fear of God. 16 I also applied myself to the work on this wall; we did not buy any land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work. 17 Moreover, there were at my table one

hundred and fifty Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us. 18 Now that which was prepared for each day was one ox and six choice sheep, also birds were prepared for me; and once in ten days all sorts of wine were furnished in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the governor's food allowance, because the servitude was heavy on this people. 19 Remember me, O my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people.

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask that You might grant us by Your Spirit insight into Your word, that You might take this passage and sift our hearts, search our hearts and produce fruit for Your glory, fruit of repentance, fruit of faith and love for Christ. We pray this in His name. Amen.

Why break into the narrative? Why break into the narrative? What he's doing is he's telling us, he's vindicating himself so that we will listen to his message, we'll follow his example and we will anticipate his Messiah. That's what we're going to see this morning, three points. The reason he vindicates himself, three points and we're going to spend most of our time on the third. The first reason he vindicates himself is by this statement in verses 14 to 19, the fact that he didn't take the regular governor's food allowance which he was entitled to. It was his salary. He worked without a salary, is what he's saying. Not only did he not take the governor's food allowance, but he himself out of his own wealth fed the people, 150 of them a day. He spent his wealth. He points out, "Did you hear we did not buy any land." Did you hear that? He's saying, "Listen, in tough economic times, people with money tend to buy up the land because it's going to be worth a whole lot more when the economy turns up. We didn't buy any land. We were not there enriching ourselves; we were there spending ourselves," is what he's saying.

Now why is he telling us that? He's defending himself for the same reason Paul did for the sake of his message. And this first point, the reason that he takes this aside, the reason that he turns aside and has this sidebar discussion about the 12 years, basically he's presenting his character and his conduct over those 12 years, and the first point is he presents his character and his conduct to authenticate his message. That's the first point, to authenticate his message. It's basically telling them, "Everything I'm telling you in this book, the point of what I'm telling you in the book Ezra-Nehemiah about putting worship at the center, putting the word at the center, pursuing separation from the world, being different for the sake of the glory of God, all that I'm telling you is absolutely trustworthy." It authenticates his message. It has the force of saying, "Listen to this instruction. Listen to what I'm saying."

How is that? What did Jesus say is the test of a prophet? Remember in Matthew 7 when he says, "I tell you there will be many false prophets will arise." How does he tell you to test the prophets? "You shall know them by their fruits. You know true teaching by the fruit of the teacher. You know true teaching from the fruit that it produces in the lives of the people hearing it, but especially by the teacher himself." And Nehemiah is saying,

"Look at my character and my conduct and trust my message." It sounds just like what Jesus would have said about how you know the true apostle from a false apostle, the true prophet from a false prophet, the true pastor from a false pastor, it is the fruit of their life. And we see here in his selflessness, his incredible, you know, determination to get the work done, his fear of God, his compassion for the people, that we should listen to his message and his message is essentially in this part of the book particularly, is value holiness.

"So hear my message," he's saying. "Place great value on holiness. Build the walls. Separate from the world, in that sense. Be different. Be distinct. Be holy for I am holy, says the Lord." And that's personal holiness, that we are all called to be personally like Jesus. We are all called, if you belong to Christ, you are called to be holy because he is holy. You are to be different from the world. You are to be different from who you were. You are to become more and more different. That's the call. And Nehemiah in the fifth century BC is calling the people of Israel who now, when he's writing the walls are built, the temple is built, the walls are built but he's basically saying to them, "Keep following the message of this book. Keep following the message of all the books up to this point." At that point this is actually the end, this is interesting, Nehemiah is the end of Old Testament narrative. Now think about that. It's the last Old Testament narrative in the Bible, historically chronologically. Remember it goes Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther. You go Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, and we tend to say, we tend to call Joshua to Esther the historical books, you call that the law, first five books of the Bible, then you have Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles. I like how he did the first and second right in a row. It makes it a little easier to memorize, right? I don't think that's why it happened that way but that's convenient. In the providence of God, I guess, maybe it did happen that way for us. But anyway so it goes all the way down, though. 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, but Esther actually takes place chronologically before Nehemiah and Ezra, it's the part of Ezra about Ezra and Nehemiah comes after Esther. The first part of the book Ezra-Nehemiah, though, was before. Anyway, those of you who are with me on the numbers think it through. It makes sense. Those of you that don't care about the numbers, don't worry about it.

But anyway, the Old Testament narrative ends with Nehemiah, and in the same way there's a sense in which the New Testament narrative, where does the New Testament narrative end? Basically the gospels and Acts in the New Testament narrative. The New Testament ends in Acts 28 with Paul in Rome and you have the epistles after that, you have Revelations. But there's a sense in which the end of the Old Testament narrative, the end of the New Testament narrative have a way of pointing forward and saying, "Carry on until He comes." And so what is the message, "Carry on until he comes, keep worship at the center, keep the word at the center. Keep being different from the world. Keep pursuing holiness."

And so personal holiness is a key part of that. We can't help that process unless we're willing ourselves to be holy, but it's not merely personal holiness, it's also corporate holiness. We're to have a much more corporate mindset if we want to be true to the word of God. The Bible calls us to think of ourselves not atomistically, individualistically but

as a part of the body. You know, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12, he placed us, the Holy Spirit placed us in the body as he willed and he made us interdependent, needing one another, this is 1 Corinthians 12:12 to 26. He made us need the other parts of the church in the same way that each part of the body needs every other part of the body. I love that image. Just think about it, if a finger just wants to hang out on his own. That's a dead finger, isn't it? Cut that finger off, "I want to be on my own. I don't need the church. It's me and the Lord." Clip. How is that working out for you? The New Testament cannot imagine that kind of thought process.

It's a corporate body, that's all the "one anothers" there. I mentioned last week Hebrews 3:12 and 13 where the apostle that writes Hebrews says, "See to it that there be in none of you an evil unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another while it is 'Today' lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." The idea is not just we hear about it and we think don't let it be in me, and that's part of the answer but it's don't let it be in any of us. In Hebrews 12:12 to 16, he says, he talks about binding up the weak, helping the feeble, and then he says, "See to it that there be in none of you a root of bitterness spring up and by it many be defiled." And we tend to think of that because we're Americans and we think so individualistically, that a root of bitterness is in our own heart, we have bitterness and it's a root, don't let that happen. He's not saying that. He's saying that there can be bitter roots in the church and that's a person who is characterized by bitterness who doesn't love God and who can defile many people. So he's saying, "Look out among you and don't let a bitter root take effect and distort the body." You have a corporate responsibility to be looking around you, not in the way of putting down one another. No, in building one another up, in serving one another, in loving one another enough, though, to confront each other when we need to be confronted. So this is what, his message is pursue holiness, build the walls of Jerusalem, build the holiness of the church, do it corporately as well as individualistically. Actually, if you do it corporately and you work together, that's how you're going to really make progress in your own life.

So it authenticates his message. He tells us this, "Look at my character, look at my conduct. You can trust my message. You can listen to my instruction." The second thing it does is it validates his ministry. The second point, validates his ministry. He shares this personal side to validate his ministry, his ministry as the leader of God's people, the governor of Judah, we find out in this passage. We didn't know he was governor until he tells us right here. It validates his ministry. In the same way, the New Testament tells us that you need to check the message of the prophet by his character, you need to check the validity of your leaders by their character and he basically is laying out for us that his motives are pure. "I didn't do this for money. I didn't do this to acquire wealth but in reality I did this because I fear God and I cared about the people of God. I did it out of a motivation." I mean, his motives are on display in verses 14 to 19 and they are pure motives.

Think about what the New Testament says about how you know who you should follow. 1 Peter 5:1 to 4 in the qualifications for elders, that it lays down, it's really an exhortation to elders. Peter says, "I, an elder, fellow elder, exhort you," and he basically says, he talks

about the motives for which elders lead and the right motives are essential to right leadership. So Nehemiah is saying, "Look, I have right motives and you can trust my leadership." Or the motives that Peter talks about. He says, "An elder should not be in that position out of compulsion but should do so voluntarily." He should lead voluntarily. He should want to do it from the heart, not because people are constraining you and you're doing it against your will, kind of being dragged along in the position. That's not right. He says not for sordid gain, not to obtain wealth or to obtain reputation. It's not out of self-interest, it's out of love, and not lording it over those allotted to your charge. It's not out of a power thing. It's not out of a desire for position or influence. It's out of a concern for God's glory and the good of God's people and Nehemiah is basically saying, "This is who I am. I've done this not out of a desire for position or power or money. I've done this for the people of God and most of all out of the fear of God."

So essentially by validating his ministry, this second point you could actually, in fact, you could put all three points in a way, you could say authenticate his message and here's the imperative or the application for us, listen to his instruction. The second point validated his ministry, you could add this imperative, follow my example. Not just listen to what I'm saying, follow what I did. And he laid down his rights. He didn't take the governor's food allowance. It was a salary he was entitled to. He didn't take any taxation from the people. Now it doesn't mean that it's evil for someone to take the taxation or the appropriate, no, it would have been okay but in this circumstance he laid down his legitimate rights.

So there's a sense in which he does two things, I think, that in his ministry that we should follow the example. He lays down his rights and he lays down his life. He lays down his rights. He doesn't take advantage of his position, his legitimate right as a governor. He doesn't take advantage of that. He lays it down. He goes beyond that, he doesn't just forgo the positive benefit, he actually sacrificially gives. He lays down his life. Let's think about this, how the New Testament calls us to lay down your rights and lay down your life. Well, the way he lays down his life is he gives up his wealth, he gives up his time, 12 years. You know, in a sense you could also say he lays down his rights in this way, Nehemiah was a man of incredible position and influence before he came to Judah. To be the cupbearer in the Persian court was to have one of the highest offices in the land. It was also an office that was accompanied by great wealth. Usually it was a wealthy person that would be placed in that but someone the king had great trust in because the cupbearer to the king was the one who oversaw everything that the king put in his mouth. He tasted the wine, made sure the food was prepared properly because there were always, the kings in ancient times lived in imminent fear of assassination through poisoning. Many kings were assassinated that way in the history of Persia, Egypt, all the major kingdoms, you see this happening. So Nehemiah as a cupbearer was like, I mean, it's hard, we don't have a cupbearer today in America, right, it's not like President or Vice President but he's up there in the cabinet. He's like the Chief of Staff almost. So think about being the Chief of Staff for the world superpower, Persia. That is position, power and influence and he takes a step down, he is demoted. He asks for the demotion. "I want to go and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and become governor of a tiny little postage stamp province called Judah."

So he lays down his rights, he lays down his position, and then he lays down his life. He not only does he do that but he doesn't do it for any return. Not only has he laid down that, he spends his wealth to bless the people and support the project. He spends 12 years of his life instead of being in the Persian court in the lap of luxury, in the place of power, he's on the backside of the wilderness, as it were, relatively speaking. Now of course, as a Jew, a faithful Jew, he knows it's the center of the universe but do you see how the world sees that, and do you see how we can sometimes think like the world, and we can think that it would be better to be the Chief of Staff of the United States than it would be to build the kingdom of God in the local church, and what does this text say? If you want to take a step down, take the Chief of Staff position. That's what God believes and so what that says to you and me is the work that we are called to do is of such great importance. The work that you do in building the walls of Jerusalem, the church, the work that you do in worshiping and cultivating worship in the hearts of your brothers and sisters and watching over one another so that an evil unbelieving heart doesn't spring up among us and bitterness doesn't grow up, the work that we do in that is of the highest order in the universe. The angels look on it. They know it's the most important. The world looks on it and despises it and says it's nothing, but what does the world know? So elevate in our minds what God has called us to.

So it validates his ministry and it says, "Follow my example. Lay down your rights, lay down your life, lay down your wealth, lay down your time. Lay it all at the disposal of Jesus." It doesn't mean you have to give it away necessarily. I mean, you need to be willing to and to do whatever Jesus wants with our time and our lives, it all belongs to him, but lay down your rights. Philippians 2:3 and 4, "Do nothing from selfishness." Paul is saying, he's talking in Philippians 2, it's clear that he's concerned about disagreement and disharmony in the body. It's going to become even clearer in chapter 4 that there are some real division in the body of Christ at Philippi, but he begins to even deal with it here in Philippians 2:1 when he says, "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there's any consolation of love." He's saying, "Listen, do you find any encouragement in the fact that Jesus died for you? Do you find any at all?" I mean, he's arguing in a hyperbolic way. If there's any encouragement. I mean, we have all the encouragement in Christ but he says if you have just any encouragement in Christ right now, if you have any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection, if any compassion, then make my joy complete by being of the same mind. Pursue oneness of mind with all of your brothers and sisters. Maintain the same love united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Then he says how do you do that? He's basically saying build the body, pursue this oneness, and it's not just separation from sin, you see, it's also oneness in love and affection for Jesus and one another. That's how we're pursuing holiness. It's not just about, it is about putting off sin, it is about putting sin to death, yes, yes, but not merely that. It is about loving God and loving one another, in fact, that's the essence of how you put off sin is you love God and you love others. Jesus said if you get those two things right, what do you do? You keep the whole law.

So it goes together and Paul goes on to say in verse 3, "Do nothing," how do you do this, how do you become one purpose, intent on one purpose, same love, united in spirit? "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind regard one another

as more important than yourselves." Make a decisive determination that you're going to consider others in the body as more important than myself. That's the calling. That is a high calling. That's an impossible calling apart from the power of God.

Verse 4, "Do not merely look out for your own personal interests but also for the interests of others." Do you see how, remember complacency and we saw in Nehemiah, what was their problem? Careless self-interest. They were doing what made sense in the way, and remember they're transacting their business, we talked about this the last couple of weeks. If you weren't here, I encourage you to listen to those. But anyway, they were transacting their business the way that was customary, the way that was appropriate, even the way that was biblically allowable in some ways to transact debts and that kind of thing, but they weren't really thinking about others the way God would have them to and Nehemiah is basically calling them to a total reordering of that. He's basically calling for a year of Jubilee, say, "Let everybody's stuff go back to them." God had put this in the law, every 49 years, every 50 years this would happen. But what they were missing was they were thinking merely from their selfish interests and Paul says do nothing from selfishness. Don't let anything be motivated out of merely concern for self, my life, even my family. We should be thinking in terms of the body at large. Lay down your wealth, lay down your time, lay down your life. That's what we're called to do.

Now it authenticates his message, it validates his ministry, so it says authenticating his message, "Listen to my instruction." Validating his ministry it says, "Follow my example." That's what Nehemiah says. And then third point is that it anticipates the Messiah. It anticipates the Messiah. I'm going to preach a message sometime soon about some of the ways that hermeneutics and particularly typology. Let me just explain a little bit, take a moment to explain why I think this, I think Nehemiah is in this sense like so many of the Old Testament heroes, I mean, they're not perfect in themselves and they are marred heroes, and yet in some sense they're types of Christ. They're shadows of Jesus and if you think about it, the way the Bible is written, it's this way, Jesus, it's all about Jesus but we don't see Jesus until he comes on the scene at the Incarnation. But it's all about him and there's a sense in which, if you imagine the light of Christ blazing brilliantly in the future and the light shining back into the Old Testament, you see shadows, you see his shadow time and time and time again in different ways so that you see the brilliance and beauty and glory of Christ, it's coming and there's this building momentum in the Old Testament, and a building sense of anticipation. The Messiah is coming. And you have it, this whole idea starts in Genesis 3:15 when the Lord tells Satan, he's judging Satan and he says, "Your seed and the woman's seed, I'm going to put enmity between them and you will bruise His heel and He will bruise your head." That was a prophecy of the Messiah. The seed of the woman, even I think the virgin birth is there. But then they were looking for that Messiah, the faithful were looking for the Messiah to come and end the curse.

You see this in Genesis 5:29 when Lamech, one of the descendants of Seth in the godly line of Seth, has a son and he names him Noah, and in Genesis 5:29 you have Lamech quoted as saying, "This one will give us rest from the curse." He's basically saying, "This is the Messiah. I'm praying that my son is the one that was promised by God in Genesis

3:15." Now they didn't have the Bible written, they were just passing it down at this point. It's not going to be written until Moses comes along, but they are receiving the traditions being passed down verbally and Lamech gives testimony to the fact he thinks his son is the Messiah. Now his son is Noah and Noah's name means rest, and Noah was, in a sense, a great savior, wasn't he? He was used by God. Lamech was expressing faith in the coming Messiah and yet God gave a type, a shadow showed up in Noah. Noah is a righteous man. Noah lives for God. Noah is a type in the sense that he is going to give rest in the same way Jesus said, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest." And what does Noah do? He delivers humanity from God's wrath in an amazing, extraordinary way. He's a type. He's a shadow of one to come.

You see this again and again and again. It would be a fun thing to do some time, I mean, a wonderful, glorious thing to do, fun in the holiest sense of the word, to work and just sit around and talk through all the typology of the Old Testament. But just to give you a couple others. Joseph in Genesis also, I mean, think about Joseph. It's not explicit, it doesn't say, "Here's the Messiah. Here's the Messiah." But there are associations that happen there that then are picked up later in scripture and you see there are these patterns being worked out, there are these streams of thought being put together that start in Genesis, like streams, you know, a headwater of a river starts as a little tiny spring that turns into a brook, then turns into a creek, and then turns into a river. That's what's happening in Genesis and one of those is in Joseph's life. Here is a man loved by his father, rejected by his brothers, sent into slavery, and yet through that rejection, he brings about the salvation of the whole people. Do you see that? These are themes that are clear and evident and it just gets richer and richer as you go through the Bible. The Exodus, but anyway, David, the man after God's own heart that will finally bring in his reign and his righteous reign, his rule, he's the king, and then Jesus is the son of David. All of that, all of these things come together.

Well, I think the same thing is happening in Nehemiah. I think this is a shadow of Christ because Nehemiah is the governor of Judah. In a sense, he is the ruler of God's people at this point in history and what we see here is extraordinary character that looks a lot like Jesus. I mean, think about this, Nehemiah, how did Nehemiah, the book of Nehemiah begin? It began with Nehemiah weeping over Jerusalem. He wept and fasted and mourned for days when he got the report of how bad things were in Jerusalem. He took decisive and costly action to remedy the problem. He left the position of great power and influence at the right hand of the Emperor and he took the lowly estate of going down into Judah. He went to God's people and he entered into their circumstances fully. He worked alongside them. He was surrounded by enemies, opposition on all sides, a plot to assassinate him, and yet look at his character. As he says here, he laid down every right. He didn't come to get anything from us. Jesus said in Matthew 20:28 after he exhorted the disciples don't be like the rulers of the Gentiles who lord it over one another, but if you want to be great, become servant of all, and he said, "For the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many."

So he lays down his rights, every right. He doesn't buy any land. "The Son of man has no place to lie His head. You want to follow Me? The Son of man has no place to lay His

head." He enters into our sorrow. He carries our sorrows. He carries our griefs. He bears our sin. He spends himself. He lays down his wealth. 2 Corinthians 8:9, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be made rich." He laid down his life. He went farther than Nehemiah. He not only risked his life, he laid it down. John 10:18, "No one takes My life from Me, I lay it down freely." This is how we know what love is, 1 John 3:16, "This is how we know what love is, Jesus Christ lay down His life for us."

So I think he's anticipating the Messiah even here, and there's a sense in which Nehemiah was a wonderful man but he was like David, David was a wonderful man but he wasn't Jesus and that's what you have. Noah was a wonderful man but he wasn't Jesus. Moses was a wonderful man but he wasn't Jesus. David was a wonderful man but he wasn't Jesus. Solomon, the same, wasn't Jesus. Nehemiah, the end of the Old Testament narrative ending with a wonderful man just like Ezra wasn't Jesus, Zerubbabel wasn't Jesus, Nehemiah is not Jesus. We need Jesus. That's the sense in which this is all heading and what this does, though, this is a wonderful application for us. There's a sense in which it's anticipate the Messiah could be to trust in the coming King. That would have been the application for the people in Nehemiah's day. When they realized Nehemiah came and he was wonderful and yet look here, salvation is still not here but continue to put God at the center and continue to look forward. We keep being faithful but keep trusting in the coming King.

Trust in the coming King. What's the message for you and me, though? The King has come. The application here is we listen to this instruction, we follow this example but we trust in the living King, we trust in our living King, you could say our reigning King. We are to trust in him, actively trust in him now to help us do what he's called us to do. How do you overcome the hidden enemy? How do you overcome your own sin nature, your selfishness? How do I overcome my propensity to think about myself rather than others? How do I do that? There's only one way for sinners like you and me to overcome our own hidden enemy, the enemy within, and that is by trusting in the King who is reigning in our hearts. You have to actively put your trust in Jesus and I mean actively trusting in all that he is.

It's union with Christ. Anticipating the Messiah here and looking back and trusting, look, Nehemiah is reminding us of Jesus. He's saying, "Follow my example. Do what I did but the only way you can do it is by trusting in the King." You can't do it in your own strength. He didn't either. He was looking ahead to the King. Everything that David did that was good, everything that Moses did that was good, everything that Noah did that was good, they were looking ahead and trusting somehow in the King to come and that future grace came back into their lives and gave them the strength through God's justifying power of the cross, they came to see that the sanctifying power of the cross also must be relied upon.

Turn with me to Colossians 2 for a moment. Colossians 2. I want to work this out and what this looks like in our lives. We're studying a book on Friday mornings, the Friday morning Bible study, "The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification," written in 1689 or 1690 by

a man named Walter Marshall, and what he's talking about is the gospel mystery of sanctification is that sanctification, now sanctification is how a Christian grows in holiness, that's what we mean, how does a person grow in holiness, how do you put sin to death, how do you live more obediently, how do you become more holy, and how do you help others to become more holy, how do we all become holy. That's sanctification and the idea of the gospel mystery is that he's basically articulating that the way God has done it is in a sense what appears to be a mystery, not the way we use the word mystery like you can't figure it out. No, that which was hidden. This is how the Bible uses the word mystery, formerly was hidden, now made clear. Formerly hidden, now made clear, and the mystery of sanctification is this, that the way that you grow in holiness is by realizing that Jesus is not only your justification, he is your sanctification.

1 Corinthians 1 says, "He was made to us wisdom from God and sanctification." Our holiness happens as we rest in Jesus, we trust in him, we actively trust in him. We obey him trusting in his power. Colossians 2, you see this and it's very practical and the way you see this and I encourage you as you read the New Testament to look for this phrase and as we read these verses, look for this phrase, the phrase is "in Him." In him or with him. Union with Christ is the gospel mystery of sanctification. The way that you become holy is understanding who you are in union with Christ through faith. That's how you become holy. You believe what Jesus has done for you. You believe that his death is your death, that his resurrection is your resurrection. You actively believe that. That's the way that you become holy. Colossians 2:6, "Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude."

So as you receive Christ, when you received him and you were justified by faith at the moment you placed your faith savingly in Jesus, you were declared righteous. That's justification declared righteous forever on the basis of Jesus taking your sins and being punished for them. He took the full weight of God's wrath for the sins of everyone who would ever believe and he took it out of the way. He paid the debt in full, and not only that, he gives righteousness, not just a not guilty verdict. No, he gives a perfect righteousness in exchange to everyone who believes so that you go from being a guilty sinner under the wrath of God to being a beloved child perfectly righteous in the sight of God, that when God looks at you, he delights in you the same way he did every time he looked at Jesus. That's justification. That is a wonder that that happens but that's not the end of the glorious salvation that we have in Christ. It just begins there. It even gets better. Isn't that amazing, and it's this, that your sanctification is also by faith, that in Christ's death and resurrection what he's going to explain and this is really clear in Romans 6, that in his death we died, in his life we live, and so that you believe that what's happened to you in him is true.

Look what he does. He's really practical. He says, verse 8, Colossians 2:8, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." Listen, you can be taken captive by all these different ways of thinking about life and these are supposed Christians that are messing with the Colossians

and trying to get them to follow their way of teaching and Paul's saying, "Listen, you're missing out. You're missing my gospel. Don't let someone take you captive that way."

Look at verse 9. Why do you not need to be taken captive? "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." Verse 13, "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions." What he's basically saying is that in Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, every believer who places their faith in him comes to be so united to Jesus spiritually that his death becomes your death, his burial becomes your burial, his resurrection becomes your resurrection so that you have died to the reign of sin.

Now let's apply this. This means that when I'm thinking about myself because I still have the remnant of sin in me, right? You're going to have that until you die, the flesh, and so we're trying now on a daily basis to build the temple, to build the walls of Jerusalem, to build one another up in our holy faith, to help one another pursue holiness. And it's hard, isn't it? Wearying. We're so easily distracted by the cares of the world and we find ourselves in situations where we know what we ought to do but we don't have the power to do it. We know we ought to care when somebody is telling us something that's really deep in their hearts and we know in our own hearts as we're listening to it, "I'm not caring like I should care. I don't have anything to say. I don't have anything to give." But in Jesus, you have been made complete. You don't need anything else than what you have in him, not in yourself. In him. You have in Christ, he's a Savior who sticks closer than a brother. He's a friend who sticks closer than a brother. He is gentle and lowly so that he can invite anyone to come to him. "Come unto Me you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." He's so sensitive and tender that the most weighed down person, the most discouraged person in the world, he says, "You can't be too lowly for Me for I am lowly, I am approachable. Come to Me."

So I have a Savior like that, you have a Savior like that. When you don't have anything in your heart, you feel the deadness of the world pressing in around you, the flesh has distracted you, you don't have anything, what do you do? You run to Jesus in the moment and you trust in, "All that You are for me, I'm asking you to give me now, Lord. I don't even want what I should want. Help me want what I should want. You always wanted the right things and You are my Savior, You are my righteousness. You wanted to please the Lord, You didn't want to please Yourself. You said, Jesus, Your will was to do the will of Your Father. Your meat and Your drink was to do the will of the Father who sent You. Make me like that." And not only to want to do, now to actually do it, to put away sin, to turn away that word of anger that might want to come out as we see a need in front of us and we want, maybe somebody, they've said something unkind, they've sinned against you and you want to return, your flesh wants to return that reviling insult one for another, and you feel it welling up inside of you. "Wait a minute, in Christ I don't have to do that."

I died to the reign and rule of sin, I don't feel dead to the reign and rule of sin. I don't care how you feel. Your feelings are irrelevant. If they contradict the word of God, what is true, your feeling or the word of God? The word of God is true. I don't feel dead but I am dead, that means that I don't have to yield to this, and if I look to Jesus, his death is my death and not only that, his resurrection is my resurrection. His life can be lived out in me and instead of speaking that unkind word, "Lord Jesus, You can bless them. You when You were reviled, You did not revile again but You returned a blessing. You prayed for those who persecuted You. I can do that just because of who You are."

And as we rest in him and we then speak the word, sometimes we don't feel it, sometimes it has to start with something, I mean, we're not going to feel it. It starts with I feel like I want to respond in anger but be quick to listen and slow to speak, slow to anger. I mean, listen to what this person is saying. "Lord, help me hold my tongue. Help me listen. Help me really understand what's going on in their hearts. Help me be like You because You care about the soul of the other person more than I do." And as we do that, then, "Lord, give me wisdom. Help me respond lovingly. I don't know what to say. Help me." It's a learning process but basically clinging to Jesus is 99 percent of the battle, and then the word of God instructing us. Maybe it's not 99 percent but it's 95 percent. But the word of God then instructs you on how to do it. If you don't get that part right, the other part is not going to matter. It's Jesus living through us.

This is what Paul says in Galatians 2:20 when he says, "I am crucified with Christ nevertheless I live." On a daily basis Paul is saying, "Listen, this is how I live. I am crucified with Jesus but I still live, but the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." I'm clinging to Jesus in all that he is and all that he has done and all that he can do in me, and by that faith God blesses faith. It's dependent, humble faith that the Lord blesses. There's no good in us and our flesh but there is all good in Christ.

So we are called to heed this instruction. We are called to not be consumed with ourselves. We are called in a day when everybody is consumed with themselves increasingly, amazingly, it's amazing how selfish people are getting. I mean, people are selfish but the culture is creating a whole other ability for that self-focus just to continue to get smaller and smaller and smaller. People think they are having relationships online and all they're really doing is pretending things and then looking for "likes" to come back to them, and they think that's relationship and that's not. That's not relationship, it's completely empty.

We have an opportunity to show genuine love. We have an opportunity to show real relationship, to love people and to get into the nitty-gritty and dirt of life together and to understand that we have to pursue holiness as a group, we've got to help one another, we've got to get involved in each other's lives, we've got to touch one another, to listen to one another, to care for one another, to admonish one another, to confess our sins to one another, to serve one another. And we're to follow the example that's been laid down before us, we are to lay down our rights, lay down our lives, but we can only do that as we cling to Christ by faith. God calls you to do everyday things that you cannot do. If you

think you can do it, you don't understand what he calls you to do. The only way we can do it is through his power but he is a great Savior. He can make you if you're a spouse struggling to love your spouse, he can make you a loving wife, a loving husband. He can do it if you'll just cling to him with his word but clinging to Jesus, he will transform your heart. It will take some time for it to really begin to change and for people to see it but moment by moment you will make real kingdom-advancing, sin-shattering progress because in him you have been made complete, in him you have been circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in him you have been raised up and seated at the right hand of God. May the Lord give us faith to walk in the victory that we have in Christ.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for the glory of our salvation. We pray that You would help us to walk in it, to as we receive Christ Jesus, to so walk ye in Him. We pray for those that are here that have not repented and not truly placed their faith in Jesus, that You would grant grace today, today would be the day of salvation. We pray that You would make all of us, all of our hearts beat with Your heart. Help us love what You love and hate what You hate and help us to be holy for the glory of our glorious Savior. We pray in His name. Amen.