

2023-05-07

Nehemiah: God Restores the Lives of His People

READING OF THE WORD

Nehemiah 9:30-33

Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. 31 Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

32 “Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. 33 Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly.

PRAYER

WARMING UP

Good morning my name is Eric Mattie. I'm a member here at LEFC where I serve on a Prayer team with my wife, Melanie. And at times teach and preach God's word. I want to thank the Elders for the opportunity and privilege to bring the word of God to you this morning.

If you are new here, welcome and thank you for joining us.

We are in a series of messages that we are calling Route 66. Taking each book of the Bible and seeing the one full redemptive message and how each of the 66 books fit together.

Because of this dynamic of 66 books telling one big story I think it is helpful to liken the Bible as a large picture puzzle.

- Each puzzle piece having a unique shape and designed to fit together and is needed for the picture to be whole.
- And when the whole image is completed, it provides the context, that helps us make sense of a certain book as part of the bigger picture.

A few weeks ago Melanie and I went to St Louis on a quick getaway for her birthday. We booked ourselves in an English-themed hotel that had a small fashioned pub that was packed for St Patrick's Day celebration. So instead of trying to get in for fish and chips that night we lounged in an open concept living room down the hall. It had a conference room with books to read and a table for chess and sofas with coffee tables with very difficult puzzles. Small uniquely cut 500 piece puzzles. When we grabbed one of them the box had a disclaimer stating, "this puzzle is missing 34 pieces". well that made it even closer to impossible for us to guess some sections let alone to match the box picture.

I share this story because it is important to have all the pieces of the Bible's picture in our reading schedule and our spiritual journey and study of God's word. Sometimes in the Old Testament we feel like well if I miss 19 books of the Bible, that's ok.

But God as the Author of Scripture has these books in here for a reason and they all contribute to the singular redemptive message that help us in our spiritual walk.

Taking the Testaments on their own...

We understand that the Old Testament is proclaiming the gospel promised.

- It is the gospel promised not only because it predicts Jesus coming and He being seed of the first woman sent to crush the serpent and save humanity but also because He is the offspring of King David that the Old Testament looks for as the promised coming King.
- While going through the various Covenants, and Events and People and Institutions in the Old Testament, we see **this progressive narrative that is unfolding God's kingdom plan**

INTRODUCTION

Now Today we are in Nehemiah and I've titled the message **Nehemiah: God Restoring the Lives of His People**

Now if you are like me and you tried to find ways to remember who all the characters of the Bible are. Don't confuse Nehemiah. For the longest time I thought Nehemiah was like the rest of the "iah" books. We know Isaiah. Jeremiah, Obadiah, Zechariah, Zephaniah. And these are all Prophets. And one could think because Nehemiah rhymes with all the rest of these prophets that he too is a prophet. But Nehemiah is not a prophet

Now in the book of Nehemiah we are at the end of the historical narrative. If you recall where we are at in the Old Testament world... the books are divided in our English Bible in the following sequence. 5-12-5-5-12

5 books of the law

12 historical narrative

5 books of poetry

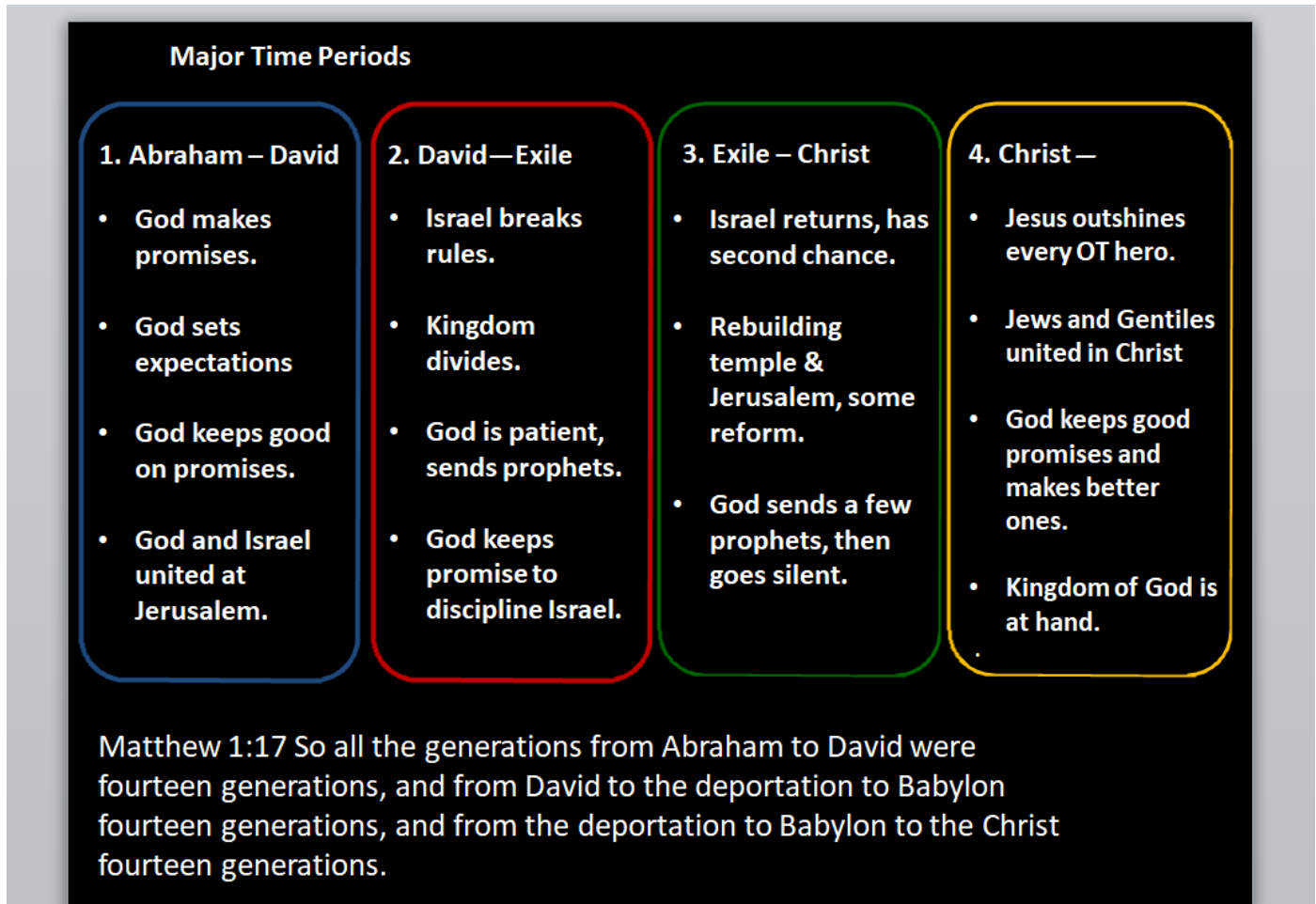
5 major prophetic books

12 minor prophetic books

So Nehemiah is found in the first grouping of the 12 historical narratives. The placement of this book is important. You see the placement of any book of the Bible is important in how we understand that book

So as we open up the book of Nehemiah let me first answer the question: **Where are we at in the progressive narrative .**

Let me reintroduce you to this chart giving us a history



In biblical history for the People of God : Matthew 1:17 recaps, that up to birth of Jesus Christ there are three major time periods.

Overview **Abraham-David David-Exile Exile-Christ & Christ-**

And our opening verse in the reading of Scripture today says it well.

Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. 31 Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

Nehemiah 9:30-31

So where we are at is the third major time period from exile to Christ. and in that God is beginning to display his great mercies as their punishment and discipline is lifting

- ***Israel is return to the land and city of Jerusalem they, have second chance***
- ***Rebuilding temple and Jerusalem, some reform***

This is the context of Nehemiah.

Transition:

So you may be asking yourself, **why would a born again believer read the book of Nehemiah today?**

I mean these people are in this time after their exile.

- How does this relate to Christian's today where we are called the Temple of the Holy Spirit?
- And we as the people of God are scattered and settled around the earth called to evangelize the lost everywhere and to display God's glory everywhere and not just one city?

Here is why...

In The foreshadowing event of the exodus of Egypt we are reminded of how God saves us from the slavery of our sin. In Nehemiah there is a foreshadowing of Jesus ministry and work as well how God restores the lives of His People.

Do you need restoring this morning? If you have lived long enough, you know what it is like to be in world that is broken. You know what it is like to be discouraged and even under the consequences of disobedience and in need of restoring, and renewing. Maybe even feeling the need to be rescued and redeemed

While Nehemiah is the main character of the book. The main figure, the one who is moving and doing a work in Nehemiah and the people of Israel in restoring their lives, it is actually God himself.

So As the author of the book of Nehemiah, God is showing us 4 things. Follow along in this outline

In Nehemiah, we see that God...

1. Sent Nehemiah from Persia

Let me tell you something about Nehemiah, himself. The more I paid attention to his account the more I felt "man I need to get my act together as a Christian."

Nehemiah was man of passion, a man of prayer, a practical man and had a godly perspective on life and living

In Chapter 1 we see Nehemiah as a man of passion, prayer and of position.

Nehemiah 1:2-4

Hanani, one of my brothers, came with certain men from Judah. And I asked them concerning the Jews who escaped, who had survived the exile, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said to me, "The remnant there in the province who had survived the exile is in great trouble and shame. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire."

4 As soon as I heard these words I sat down and **wept and mourned for days**, and I continued **fasting and praying before the God of heaven**

- This report has so burdened him, he fasted and prayed and was affected for days.
- Nehemiah associates himself with his own people, in saying “we have sinned ”Israel’s sin and unfaithfulness.

Nehemiah’s prayer vigil and ultimately this burden deeply affected him well beyond just a couple of days. It went into 4 months. This prayer vigil so burden him that once we learn that he is the cupbearer to the king of Persia, living 1300 miles away from Jerusalem in a palace living a good life- this burden it affect his job.

Listen to Nehemiah’s account:

Nehemiah 2: 1b-6

Now I had not been **sad in his presence**. 2 And the king said to me, “**Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart.**” Then I was very much afraid. 3 I said to the king, “Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” 4 Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” **So I prayed to the God of heaven**. 5 And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ graves, that I may rebuild it.” 6 And the king said to me (the queen sitting beside him), “How long will you be gone, and when will you return?” So it pleased the king to send me when I had given him a time.

- Nehemiah’s sadness is noted by the king as he is bringing wine to him and the queen in this private affair. Nehemiah as a servant in the court was never to let his negative emotions show before the king. For such negative emotions may be construed as being dissatisfied or maybe even plotting against the king. It could jeopardize his position or even his life.
- What I appreciate is that he answers honestly why he is sad.
- But then the king responds and asks what are you requesting? Look at the next sentence- **so I prayed to God of heaven** Isn’t that great. Nehemiah was a man with the habit of extended praying but also exhibited the lifestyle of praying without ceasing.
- This is not the only time we see momentary breath prayers for Nehemiah. As he was recalling other events, he penned his quick prayers.

1. Nehemiah chapter 4 when people were opposing and ridiculing the work of rebuilding the wall, he prayed...

Neh 4:4,5

Hear, O our God, for we are despised. Turn back their taunt on their own heads and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. 5 Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from your sight, for they have provoked you to anger in the presence of the builders.

2. Chapter 6 when those who opposed the wall building began to spread rumors to make them stop working ,Nehemiah's account said:

Neh 6:9

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

Nehemiah was man of passion and prayer

PREACH

When it comes to prayer God hears your prayers, because you are his blood bought children. Not because you are eloquent speakers.

- Charles Spurgeon said: True prayer is measured by weight, and not by length."

PRACTICE:

I encourage you. Learn to adopt breath prayers into your daily activities. Breath prayers are the answer to all of us who have the excuse that we are too busy to pray. Start with the well know ones and adopt them for a day. I'll give you 7, one for each day of this week.

Your will be done.

Search my heart Oh God

I am weak, therefore I acknowledge you are strong for me

Give me wisdom.

Be exalted above all things

This is the day you've made let me rejoice and be glad in it

Lead me not to temptation

Nehemiah is a great example of breath praying

The other attributes of Nehemiah are seen in our upcoming points so I'll do my best to point it out. But moving forward ...in Nehemiah...

In Nehemiah, we see God...

2. Set New Walls for Protection

When Nehemiah gets to Jerusalem, he speaks to the remnant of people in the city

Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision."

- Derision- the people of God living there were being mocked and jeered. Disgraced and laughed at because of the state of the city walls
- The walls of Jerusalem, were broken down and the gates were destroyed by fire. This happened when the Babylonians came and captured the people of God. In the ancient Near East, a city like this was vulnerable to thieves, weather and wild animals. Vulnerable to attackers from all sides. It laid abandoned for nearly 70 years
- Symbolically, it showed a city in weakness, shame and ruins. The testimony it displayed to the enemies of Israel was that it was unprotected by the Lord God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob.

So Nehemiah was rallying the people of God.

Here is where we see his skill with people.

And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me.

Nehemiah 2:18a

- Undoubtedly, Nehemiah was sharing with the people in Jerusalem how God's hand of Burden led him to weeping and fasting and praying for this opportunity to rebuild the walls all while serving in the midst of the glorious new rising empire of the Persian king. 1300 miles away. 1300 miles from Persia to Jerusalem is about the same distance as La Crosse is from Salt Lake City Utah.
- Undoubtedly, Nehemiah was sharing not only the **permission** from the king to go. But also the **passes** he would receive so his journey would be unabated by foreign governors. And also the **provision** to get timber from the kings forest to rebuild the gates.
- These are all things Nehemiah practically looked for after four months of prayer and planning. He was ready to ask the king.

Yet Nehemiah testified and I fully believe he told the people of Jerusalem as well:

“And the king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me.”

Nehemiah 2:8

There's that Godly perspective the world view all Christians should strive and pray to develop. He gave credit where credit was due. Nehemiah, sees God's hand in everything. That's another reason why we should read Nehemiah.. When we grow in seeing God's work and message here in this Bible, it will help us see God's work in our lives as well. We will grow to have a Biblical worldview.

Why we as born again believers should read the book of Nehemiah is to enjoy seeing the wonder and awe of this testimony of God's sovereign work through responsible human being in accomplishing his plan.

And we see the result of Nehemiah's talk:

And they [the people in Jerusalem] said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work."

Nehemiah 2:18b

Time does not permit me to recount the full building of the wall and the opposition and challenges they encountered and how it was God who frustrated the plans of the opposition and enemies of Israel. That's chapter 4.

But I want you to read it for yourself. Get back into reading the Bible and seeing these things for yourself.

But the concluding verses about finishing the wall are vital for us to consider-

- The miracle is not just the 52 days it was accomplished in.
- The miracle is the opening of the eyes of the enemies of Israel to see that God had helped them.
- This was not, "Boy those people in Jerusalem were hard workers" or "Man the people in Jerusalem sure are naturals at building and good with their hands."
- No. It was "Oh no the great and mighty and awesome God of Israel is at work and is up to something.
- They became afraid and insecure, after seeing the work of the Lord Restoring the walls

The Walls provided protection and dignity to the people of God. The Rebuilding was sign of God's returning blessing to His people. The Rebuilding of the wall in 52 days, showed that God had not abandoned them, in fact He was always with them. The walls were a physical statement about the restoring and reestablishment of God's people in the land God promised

So in Nehemiah we see God set new walls for protection

In Nehemiah we see God...

3. Strengthen His Broken People

While the rebuilding of the temple and the city walls are important themes, what God gets across in His word more than anything is the importance of rebuilding, restoring and renewing his people. We see this by the sheer volume of time spent recording those events in detail.

- The Book of Nehemiah is designed to help broken people of God to know and remember that God is with them.
- As a book Nehemiah presents the life of God's people as they return from the exile.

But the returning people of God were not the same after 70 years out of the community of God. God has orchestrated this new exodus out of Babylon physically, but he still needed to get Babylon out of the people hearts.

- He is more interested in restoring hearts that are willing to worship God
- He is more interested in building walls around the heart and to guard them from evil.

The discouraged, disheartened, faithless people need to have their hope restored. That hope is found in God's living and active Word. Which is why in his restoring acts, God strengthen His broken people by renewing the covenant in three steps

Their Identity as God's People was Established

Then my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy. And I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first, and I found written in it

6 These were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried into exile. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his town.

Nehemiah 7:5-6

- Note again, God moving and speaking to Nehemiah giving him the plan and Nehemiah recognizing this divine leading and being obedient

So you're probably saying "Wait a minute. God actually orchestrate this gather and reading of this boring list of names?" and these names are similar to the list in Ezra. Why would he do this?"

- Those who were going to live inside these walls of Jerusalem, were not going to be non-Jews. In reading the names it was to validate who among the returnees were true people of God so that Jerusalem as a city could be purified and the people would be truly set apart, holy people of God. A remnant of faithful covenant keeping people
- But just imagine for a moment, your name called out in this time. How encouraging that would be when you have been despondent and discourage in your overall faith and psyche.
- Psalm 112:6 says:” **For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever.** If you are one of God's children who are made righteous by Jesus Christ, you are remembered by God. He hasn't forgot you. Such a list of God people is showing us that God knows them by name and the Lord wants us to see that he knows them. Just as he know us. By name!

While the returnees may have forgotten who they are as God's people. God's hasn't forgotten them as his chosen ones. It was them who he was going to renew the covenant with.

That was the first step establishing their identity as God's people through reading the genealogies

Next step.

The Book of the Law was Exclaimed and Explained

They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. Nehemiah 8:8

- Ezra the priest, brought the book. Yet there were also other Priests there to help the people listening to gain understanding and for the reading to make sense for them.

What I want for us to focus on in this account is the result of God's people taking the better part of a full day to hear the Word read and explained.

And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law...

...And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

Nehemiah 8:9 & 12

- We have mixed emotions happening here to the hearing of God's word. Both weeping and rejoicing. And this shows us, that God is moving in the hearts of his people.
- Yet in the midst of the weeping they are instructed to stop and rejoice for the occasion was such the situation. This is why they brought out the Word. To not only cause conviction, but to cause rejoicing.
- We can look at our failings and mourn over them and there is a time for that, as I mentioned earlier. But then there is also a time to stop making it all about ourselves and see God's mercy and steadfast love. To see God's faithfulness.
- Hope is found in the recounting of God's faithfulness even in the midst of God's people being unfaithful. Our strength is not found in ourselves, but in the one true God who is strength.

Next step

The Festival of Booths was Exercised

And they found it written in the Law that the Lord had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, 15 and that they should proclaim it and publish it in all their towns and in Jerusalem, “Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths, as it is written.” Nehemiah 8: 14,15

And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths, for from the days of Jeshua the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so. And there was very great rejoicing. Nehemiah 8:17

Israel's festivals commemorate what God had done for them in the past.

- Re-enacting the Festival of Booths, reminds them of God's faithfulness to them when they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years before inheriting the promise land. So They lived in makeshift booths for 7 days followed by another full day of sober assembly

Here in Nehemiah, he is inviting to people to compare their journey of returning to Jerusalem to the journey celebrated in the Festival of Booths.

This strengthening exercise, resulted “great rejoicing” why is that?

- Because God's mighty acts on behalf of his people show them that He loves them.. Those mighty acts are celebrated in the memorials that God gives his people So that they remember what he has done and how he has loved them.
- Hope has been restored by looking to the past faithfulness of God. And this in turned stimulated the people in Jerusalem to confess with rejoicing in his mercies and recommit themselves to the Lord through covenant in Chapter 9 -12(please read)

So in Nehemiah we see God strengthen his broken people

In Nehemiah we see God...

4. Sovereignly Foreshadow his Plan

When we read Nehemiah, we want the account to end on the happy note in chapter 12. A celebration of a holy people in a holy city in the holy temple.

However, Chapter 13 comes, and upon reading it, we realize that like all of God's people the no matter how committed we feel in reforming outwardly, we still need to be transformed inwardly. The people are still in need of a Savior.

While Nehemiah ends awkwardly with people of God still having problems and still looking for their ultimate Messiah as Malachi prophecies, we know and understand that Christ is coming.

In this redemptive story Nehemiah foreshadow Jesus work and God's plan in several ways.

- Nehemiah foreshadows and typifies Jesus who will one day be sent by God the Father from the throne room of heaven just as he was sent by God from the Persian throne room to Jerusalem
- Nehemiah foreshadows a day when the enemies of God 's see the finished work of Christ and will proclaim "surely he was the son of God" just as they saw the finished wall and perceived the God had helped the Israelites.
- Nehemiah typifies Jesus who wept over Jerusalem, just as he had done when he heard of the report of the disgraced city walls and gates and the people in trouble and shame
- Nehemiah typifies Jesus who would call his disciples to come and follow him and build God's kingdom through the church, as he called the people of God to rise and build the wall with him.
- Just as there were plots against Jesus, there were plots against Nehemiah.
- Nehemiah, typifies Jesus who cleansed the temple with righteous indignation, just as he had to do upon his return.
- Nehemiah, finished the work God sent him to do just as Jesus finished the work, the Father told him to do.
- "With the rebuilding of the temple and the walls, Nehemiah initiated a renewal of the covenant typifying the way Jesus would come and replace the temple and provide His people with security and initiate a new covenant". -James Hamilton in "Christ Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Ezra Nehemiah

Isn't that amazing? **God sovereignly foreshadows his Plan throughout the book of Nehemiah**

So I said earlier Nehemiah foreshadows the restoring of the lives of his people. How do we see this?

I'd suggest he does it through 3 tools today that we need to dig deeper into at times in our life

First God restores our identity as his people when we remember Our Baptism where we declare that we are Citizen of Heaven and partakers in the priesthood of Christ. His Children

and a new creation in Christ. The old life passed away, the New Life as born again. Our identity found in Him.

Second God exclaims and explains in the New Testament that his steadfast love and mercies never end for those who he loves. There is no condemnation for those in Christ. So realize you are invited to come to the throne of grace and ask and enjoy your Father's forgiveness.

Third God reminds us of his saving mercies through the memorial exercise or partaking in the Lord's Supper. Which is to be both a sobering reflection and a jubilant celebration. A reminder of the new covenant in His blood in which he has done a heart change in our lives and writes his covenant word on our hearts.

So brothers and sisters, read the book of Nehemiah, grow in your worldview as you see God moving in it. Be challenged in your work as you see how Nehemiah depends on the Lord for all he did. And finally worship as you recount God's mercy in your life to renew and restore you.

Let's pray.

Supplemental

Some quick take away about his passion and prayer life-

When was the last time you have wept over your unfaithfulness and shortcomings before God? Have you ever allowed yourself to feel that and then dive into a full on confession of sin?

- Nehemiah, recognizes that a few Israelites return to Jerusalem has revealed a broken city- which reminds Nehemiah of Israel's unfaithfulness in breaking there covenant obligation It reminds him of the gap between what Israel was supposed to be and the reality of what Israel is at this moment in history. Which was in shame of their sin and discipline and their city in ruins.
- To Have such clarity of your own disobedience that you are so quick to admit it and weep over it and ask God to forgive you and spend significant time repenting and praying can be cleansing process.

Another thing...

Have you ever been so burdened to see God do a work that you have allowed it to affect your emotions like this? Not simply a cause for kindness sake but a burden for Christ to move and minister to people

- What is your burden for Christ?
- **Is your burden for a person** like you wish to see come to Christ or perhaps grow deeper into Christ? Maybe it's a person God is calling you to support through simply a friendship. Or a tough time
- **Is your burden for a people group**, like seniors or empty nesters or children or perhaps a people group like Men or specifically single people or marriages? Maybe it's your extended family you have a burden for.
- **Is your burden for a place** where people are at. Maybe one of our missionary nations, or maybe your burden is for the place you live. You want to shine the light in your neighborhood? Or maybe your place of business, you'd like to see God move there.