

Keep Calm and Carry On Pt 2

Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

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Bible Text: Nehemiah 4
Preached on: Sunday, January 31, 2021

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Turn with me in your Bibles to, well, we're going to start in Ezra 1 and just touch on it and kind of move through it. We're returning, as I said last Sunday if you were here with us, we began, well, we returned to an exposition of the books Ezra and Nehemiah which we believe are really one book. In the Hebrew Bible they are one book, Ezra-Nehemiah, and so we've taken it that way and so we started in Ezra 1 and worked all the way through those 10 chapters of Ezra, then worked through the first four chapters of Nehemiah, and then last summer took a long break from Nehemiah and we returned last Sunday to that exposition, and so we're kind of recalibrating our understanding of the books of Ezra-Nehemiah before digging back into chapter 5 which is where we will need to start again, Lord willing, possibly next Sunday, I think likely. Well, maybe not next Sunday, maybe the Sunday after.

But I titled the message last Sunday and this is the title of the message today as well, "Keep Calm and Carry On." Keep calm and carry on. I took that title, some of you will recognize that phrase, perhaps you've seen the posters or the memes online, it actually was used extensively in Great Britain during the blitz, the German bombing of London and England, British territory during the battle of Britain when the Germans were preparing to invade, what Hitler called Operation Sea Lion was their intention to invade the British Isles and to bring them under the tyranny of Nazism. And so from September, 1940 through May, 1941, the Germans dropped roughly 45,000 bombs on London, other population centers, particularly aiming also at the airfields and the factories, but thousands and thousands of British citizens were killed or injured. The estimate is a little less than 50,000 died, another 90,000 injured over those eight months. And so the British would get up each morning, I mean, it was nightly, relentless, day after day, in the evening the Germans bombing, running to the bomb shelters, trying to get to safety, wake up the next morning and see what really had happened, what was the damage, go out and dig among the rubble, put out the fires, and the stiff upper lip of the British people and the determination of the British people was embodied in that phrase, that motto, "Keep calm and carry on." Let's just carry on.

So they'd get back to work and I chose that title because I have been thinking about, in a lot of ways, how the, you know, something that we've recognized and people have talked about for decades is the culture war in the United States where we see just kind of a

cataclysmic sort of coming together of radically different worldviews that are vying for control in society, and Bible-believing Christians are seeing over the last decades and particularly in the last five or six years even, an acceleration of the culture war in its intensity and its focus. If you don't hold the right view or the politically correct view, then the cancel culture cancels you. You can lose your job, lose your friends because people need to get away from you so that they're not associated with your guilt of violating the culture's standards on any position, lose your livelihood, your reputation.

So in the midst of these days where we see really it's been a coalition of elites in our country that are advocating for a new way of thinking about life, they're advocating so many different agendas but particularly the idea is absolute human autonomy. That's the goal, for everyone to define their own reality, and they resist and chafe against anything that stands in the way of that. It's how they came to understand that abortion which we would see clearly scripturally is the murder of an innocent life, no, to this culture it is a woman's right to choose. It's her right to be autonomous over her body. That's the way it's articulated. And we see it perhaps most astonishingly in the recent last few years really, the very recent past, the present in this gender identity confusion. We would call it confusion but this culture sees it as, again, the individual's autonomy to determine for themselves their gender, and that if you say anything against that, then you are to be canceled, you are to be silenced, that if it means you lose your job, your reputation, your livelihood, your family, then so be it. It's what you deserve. That's how the culture thinks.

So this coalition of elites, the Hollywood entertainment industry, the news media, large corporations, all of the large corporations, the big banks, big tech, educators, they're all pushing actively and more and more aggressively this mandate to individual autonomy and that anyone who stands in the way of that is guilty of hate, and they end debate before there's any discussion. In fact, one of the values of the present group of people, this coalition, is they do not value free speech at all. They oppose it. They think it's harmful. They think for you to have your opinion and articulate it is not something you should be able to do if you are articulating an opinion that is offensive to me. That's how people think. Better said, if you're articulating an opinion that is different than the consensus of this group of people, this coalition of people.

Well, those of us who were watching and thinking deeply about what we see in society, this leads to some real discouragement because if they're that opposed to people who say something different about politically than they believe, how much more will they come against those who speak the gospel because the offense of the gospel is the greatest offense of all. And so we see that. It doesn't take, it's not a rocket science kind of thing, it's just obvious. The culture is becoming more and more opposed to free speech which means more and more opposed to the gospel, which means more and more opposed to us as his people.

We know that we're called by Jesus to call people, to make disciples of Jesus means to call people to follow him, to submit to his Lordship. So we're calling people not to human autonomy, we're calling people to submission, absolute submission to Christ who said, "If any man would come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me."

And our message is that that submission, that in truth slavery to Jesus is the essence and beginning of real freedom; that human autonomy that's being advocated is actually just like putting lipstick on a pig. It is prettying up slavery to sin. It's putting cosmetics on that which leads to and is itself death. So part of that message is we say to people who believe that they can live as they want, we say to them, "Listen, no, God intends for us to live in obedience to Him, in submission to His will and His word. He defines our identity, not us. He makes you male or female." As Jesus said when he was asked about divorce, "Do you not know that from the beginning He made them male and female," Matthew 19. That's not a culturally shaped reality. That is divine truth, and we as Christians must love others enough and must love God enough to proclaim his truth because the truth of the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. To speak the truth is to unleash the power of God.

I love the image in 2 Corinthians 4 where Paul in describing salvation, he says, "God who spoke into darkness and said let there be light." Now think about that for a moment. In the beginning, in creation, when there was nothing, God looked at darkness, looked at the primordial chaos and God spoke into it and said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God then continued to speak and he brought into being the beautiful order and harmony that we see in this world. But he created out of nothing. He spoke and darkness became light. Paul says, "God who spoke into darkness and said let there be light has spoken into our hearts and has said, in a sense, let there be light in the knowledge of His Son, the face of Christ," to see Jesus. That's salvation. So salvation is like the creative power of God becoming, it is the creative power of God coming upon someone who's dead in sin and making them alive just like you heard testified today. "I once was blind but now I see."

So we're called, we're essentially called to do what we've always been called to do and that's the good news is that things really haven't changed. And so keep calm and carry on was the basic thrust of the message and I said there's three main points that these come essentially from looking at how Ezra-Nehemiah, the ministry of Ezra and Nehemiah and what that ministry and the book talks about is essentially God's people living in times of cultural and social hostility. God's people living in times in the face of government oppression, and that was the norm for the people of God. In fact, the first point I shared last week was this is normal. That's what we talked about last week, this is normal. This is what the church normally experiences. If the church is becoming more and more disenfranchised in America, this is we're now getting back to normal. This is what church history has looked like and there's a sense in which that's really comforting. I mean, we are really in the anomaly, this isn't the anomaly. This is normal.

Then I said the second point is God is sovereign. In the same way that the people of God were always under tyranny whether it was the Babylonians or the Persians or the Greeks or the Romans throughout church history under the tyranny of an oppressive, unbiblical, Roman Catholic Church, or various local tyrants throughout Europe and other places, China. Wherever the gospel has gone, it has tended to exist under tyrannical opposition, not friendly government.

So it's normal and God is sovereign, and that's what we see and we saw last week, that part of the theme, one of the underlying themes of the book Ezra-Nehemiah is that you see God bending the heart of the Persian Emperor again and again and again. The book starts with the Cyrus edict where Cyrus the Persian, Cyrus the Great issues an edict that they should rebuild the temple, 538 BC. In 520, after Cyrus has been dead and the temple work was halted by local opposition against the will of the emperor even, 18 years later another emperor, Darius I, God bends his will to reissue the Cyrus edict with great emphasis and authority and say, "Let them alone. Finish God's house." Then 458 BC, 60 years roughly after they complete the temple, God bends the heart of the Persian ruler, Artaxerxes, a third ruler, to send Ezra back to Jerusalem. And then 13 years later, God bends the heart of that same Persian ruler a second time to send Nehemiah back. And so we see the sovereignty of God. God is sovereign. If this is normal and God is sovereign, you see you can keep calm. That's really that part of the message. There's nothing new under the sun. God is on the throne. You can be calm. We can be calm. This is what we should expect and the reality is that God holds every single detail in his sovereign hand.

Now we come to the third major point which we're going to spend a little more time on and that is the answer to carry on which is, essentially the outline is this is normal, God is sovereign, our calling is clear. Your calling is clear. Our calling is clear. It's abundantly clear what we're called to do. So what are we to carry on with? It's real clear and it's made emphatically clear in the books of Ezra-Nehemiah in the very way that the book unfolds. We're going to read just the first few verses of chapter 1 of Ezra and then we'll be moving around some and then finishing up in the book of Romans today.

Ezra 1:1,

1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying: 2 "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3 Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem.

Cyrus the Persian according to the author of this book says, "to fulfill the word of the LORD to Jeremiah," that is, Jeremiah had prophesied that the exile would last 70 years, Jeremiah 25, and this, it's been 70 years. It's time now and so to fulfill the word of the Lord, Cyrus issues this edict. Our God is sovereign so we can keep calm.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank You for this time to study Your word. We pray that You would continue to open the eyes of our hearts, open our ears that we might hear, and Lord Jesus, let us

be built up in our most holy faith. Let us be strengthened to the work that You've called us to do and let us be filled with joy and peace. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So now this morning, the focus is really carry on and we'll probably, it will probably take us two weeks to finish this but what I want, the carry on part. So that will be three weeks total for keep calm and carry on, two weeks, I think, for the carry on part. What is our work? Your calling is clear. So what are you to be about? When you keep calm, what are you to carry on about? What are you to do? And the books of Ezra-Nehemiah make this emphatically clear.

I mentioned last time it's really something to think about that when, you know, God sends his people Israel because they're unfaithful and ungodly and they continue to walk in disobedience, he finally judges them, as he told them he was going to, and he sends them into exile. They're taken by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, into exile in Babylon. They're taken, uprooted from the land of Canaan, the land of Israel, a land flowing with milk and honey, and they're taken far away to live as slaves in Babylon. God told them it would last 70 years and then he would send them back, and he gives all kinds of promises in the prophets that say, "Listen, this is coming. This is going to be bad because you guys won't repent, but don't be disheartened when you go through it because I have not forgotten My promises. I will still make you a great nation. I will still bring salvation through you." So he promises he's going to bring them back in the land, plant them back in the land, but what's interesting is it takes three different returns. The return to the land happens in three installments.

Now this is where you just ask yourself a question: why? "I mean, Lord, couldn't You just go ahead and get the prophets there to make sure they know everything they're supposed to do, they get it in one message and they all come back with joy, they do everything they're supposed to do?" Well, God chose not to do it that way. He chose to do it in three installments over 90 years, a total of 93 years. The ways of God are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. He does things differently than we would do it. It almost never, if you ever find yourself moving in a straight line from Point A to Point B, just really rejoice. That's like so rare. God normally takes you in different routes to get to where he's taking you, right? It doesn't mean you don't plan your way but God directs your steps. We plan a straight line but God directs our steps so rarely in a straight line.

So it took three different installments, three different times people from Babylon and Persia came home, and it's beautiful how the Lord did this. What he does basically is each return has a different and distinct purpose. Each return sets before us what our work is. Now that we are living under the oppression of a foreign power, now that we are living at a time of spiritual hostility, how should we then live? He gives it to us in three installments that make the point really emphatically clear and essentially this is how it breaks down. The first return, which is discussed in Ezra 1 that we just read through chapter 6, what they're called to do, their work is rebuild the temple. That's the work, rebuild the temple. It takes them 20 years to get it done. There's quite a little bit of opposition to that. It takes two decrees, Cyrus' decree and Darius' decree to get this done. It takes the ministry of Haggai, Zechariah. One of the things you see, I think, in these

three returns just as a little side note, is that building the kingdom of God in a fallen world is extremely difficult. It is not easy. Expect it to be difficult.

So this first return, though, is rebuild the temple. The second return, which happened under Ezra in 458 BC, God moves the heart of Artaxerxes, apparently Ezra goes and appeals to him, we don't have all of that side of it but we see what Artaxerxes decreed in chapter 7 of Ezra. You can look with me at chapter 7 for a moment, verses 11 to 14, which is a little bit of the decree of Artaxerxes. This happens in 458 BC, 60 years after the temple has now been completed. Ezra 7:11,

11 Now this is the copy of the decree which King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, learned in the words of the commandments of the LORD and His statutes to Israel: [And here the decree begins,] 12 "Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace. And now 13 I have issued a decree that any of the people of Israel and their priests and the Levites in my kingdom who are willing to go to Jerusalem, may go with you. 14 Forasmuch as you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God which is in your hand,

It's the law. Ezra is a scribe skilled in the law. He's one who studies the law. Verse 10, right before this, it said, chapter 7, verse 10,

10 For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.

We're all called to do, study the law of God, practice it, do it, teach it.

So Artaxerxes is sending him, saying, "Take your law and teach it." In fact, he says it real clearly in verses 25 and 26, the last two verses in this decree. Still Artaxerxes talking here. Listen to what he says, verse 25, "You, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand." He's talking about the law again. "You, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand," it's like Ezra is holding his Bible and he says, "You take the wisdom of God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges that they may judge all the people who are in the province beyond the River, even all those who know the laws of your God; and you may teach anyone who is ignorant of them." I want you to teach the law of your God. "Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him strictly, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of goods or for imprisonment." It's astonishing. He's like saying, "Ezra, go back and preach the word," but it's coming from an ungodly king who calls himself the king of kings, if you notice, by the way, at the beginning. It's not like they really were submitted to God, as I said last time, the Persian policy was basically keep all the gods happy and all the peoples relatively happy about religion and they will be more orderly subjects. Cyrus was not a godly man. I mentioned last week, Isaiah 44 and 45, you see God prophesy more than 100 years before Cyrus is

born that he will use Cyrus. But he says, "Cyrus, I've taken you by My right hand, yet you have not known Me, and I put you in this position to do this, though you have not known Me."

So this second return is about the law of God. So the second return, the purpose is restore the law. If the first return was to rebuild the temple, the second return under Ezra is restore the law. That's Ezra 7 through 10. That's going to all be about that. Then the third return happens in Nehemiah 1 to 13 and the third point of the third return, why does Nehemiah get permission to go back again with another group of exiles returning to Jerusalem? He has a mandate and his mandate is rebuild the walls. Rebuild the walls. The walls of Jerusalem need to be rebuilt. So you have these three returns: rebuild the temple, restore the law, rebuild the walls. And I think this really comes from just a really great synopsis of how we are to carry on, what we are to be about.

Let me just kind of sketch it for you quickly before we really start digging into that first point this morning, rebuild the temple. To rebuild the temple essentially means to put worship where it needs to be in your life. So if you keep calm and carry on, what you always want to get back to doing is get back to work, and what is work? Work is what you're called to do, what you're made to do is to worship God. That's what rebuilding the temple is about. It's about making worship your ultimate priority and your constant activity.

The second return is to restore the law, that is, restore the word to the center of your life; that if you're really going to be able to worship as you ought, you must have the word directing you. It's impossible to worship God even if you're a believer, a person born again, without the word continually guiding you. That's the purpose of that second return. It's to show us that the people of God need to make worship central, make worship everything, and the word must also be undergirding every part of life.

And then the third return, rebuild the walls, is to say there must be a distinction and a separation between the people of God and the people out there, and it doesn't mean that we're trying to look down. No, they're the mission field. We're to go to them. But it means that there's a sense in which we are to not be like them. We are to be holy as God is holy. We are to seek to help one another to pursue holiness. So it's like living out the word of God. It's worship, all of life is worship. Rebuild the temple. All of life is to be caught up into worship. Everything you do, whether you eat or drink. Whatever you do, do it for the glory of God. When you eat, are you eating for the glory of God? God says that's what he wants. The most mundane things of life are to be caught up into worship. Put worship as the central focus of everything but to do that, he shows us, listen, it's not going to work well and it didn't work well for them, if you don't have the word continually redirecting and refocusing you and helping you think biblically, to think like God thinks. That's the second return, restore the law. And then the third return is, listen, you can talk about worship and you can talk about the word, but if it's not changing you and making you like Jesus, something is wrong. Where are the walls?

Now what I want us to do in the time we have left is probably talk about that first point this morning about the first return. Make worship your ultimate, this is essentially the theme of this first point. What was the meaning, what's the application to us of God's call to them to rebuild the temple? We're not called to start a building program. I mean, well, we actually are wanting to build a building, but it would be a terrible misuse of scripture for me to preach from this passage about building a building. Now there are a lot of people that maybe have done that and it's just wrong. You hear the word as God intended it to be heard. What God is talking about is building and restoring worship and if he's talking about building a temple, he's talking about building the spiritual temple for us because we're told in the New Testament, Ephesians 2:19-22, that we are being built into a spiritual temple, a spiritual house.

1 Peter 2:1-5 says you all as Christians are living stones being built on a corner stone, being built into a house to offer sacrifices to God. The imagery is we are the temple. That's the fulfillment of the Old Testament temple. Jesus was the temple when he came. He was the meeting place of God and man, and now as he has brought us to himself, ascended at the right hand of God, we are his body. We are the temple. So the building program is spiritual, relational, life-on-life discipleship with a particular focus, though. What is it we're aiming at? What God is aiming at is worship. Jesus said, remember what he said to the woman at the well? This is another example of how the transition from the temple. Jesus said, he's talking to her and she was a Samaritan and the Samaritans believed that God could be worshiped in Samaria, in the Samaritan temple, and she asked Jesus, "You know, our fathers teach that we can worship God there. Your fathers, the Jews, teach to worship in Jerusalem." And Jesus basically says, "Listen, a day is coming when you'll worship God neither there or there. You will worship God in spirit and in truth for God is seeking, the Father is seeking true worshipers who will worship in spirit and truth." The purpose of Christ coming is to restore us to what we were originally created to be and this is what we know that every person who's an unbeliever, who's living for their own autonomy doesn't know. Every human being according to the word of God was made to worship God. They were made to see and savor the beauty and glory of Almighty God and worship is gladly reflecting back to him the radiance of his worth. To see his greatness and to praise him for it, that's what we are made to do. Nothing is more fulfilling than to truly worship God. That's because that's what you're made to do. That's the very essence of what God made you and me to do, and every human being was made for that purpose.

So this first part of Ezra is saying, listen, we're so prone to forget that life's all about worship. Life is all about worship and the reality is that people, everybody worships. They can say they're not worshipping. They can say they're an atheist but then they just worship man, they worship nature, they worship somehow the Darwinian principle that is somehow guiding things that they believe, which takes a lot more faith, a lot more, it takes blind faith to believe in that. I mean, why would everything work to make life better? Why would that happen? Do you see that happen in your life? I love the illustration somebody said, actually it was a friend of mine in seminary who used this illustration he had used with somebody. He said that tonight I'm going to leave, it was an atheist he was talking to and was staying with him, a friend of his and he said, "You

know, I'm gonna, I want to make a cake and so I'm gonna leave some flour and some eggs and some milk and some sugar out on the counter and see if tomorrow I come down and there's a cake." He said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "That's as logical as you believing that out of the primordial slime, life formed and it kept getting better until man. That is much harder to believe than that a cake will be there in the morning without somebody coming and doing something secretly." Wouldn't it have been funny if somebody had heard that and then made a cake? But we know if the cake was there, everyone knows, everyone knows it couldn't have been there, it couldn't be there without causation, without intelligence.

So they're the ones that believe the most ridiculous thing. Now it happens to be a very popular thing and so people think it's very chic and it's in vogue, and that you and I are the backward people, but we have to understand, listen, it's not about pride, it's not about that we know more than, it's we have our eyes opened. God has graciously made himself known to us. There but for the grace of God would we be. We would still be believing the things we believe before God opened our eyes but we were made for worship. We were made for worship and so that means the thing you're to be about every moment of every day is worshipping God.

So you think about how, I mean, life brings hard things, not just the culture stuff we're talking about, just life is hard. Illness. This past year, how many folks have gotten sick and we have many people of our church who have had loved ones die. Praise the Lord, to this point no one's died in the church from Covid but we don't know how long that's going to last. It's in the hand of God. But every day people die, people get cancer, people have car accidents, and suddenly your life is changed and suddenly there's a sense in which you feel like those English people getting up in the morning, something's happened in the night and suddenly everything is different and you find yourself waking up digging through the rubble of your life, trying to put out the fire. The message is keep calm and carry on.

This is normal in a fallen world and how comforting it is to know that God has brought exactly the trial that you're in, he's brought it carefully and in the most measured and loving way to your life to bless you. That's what the Bible teaches. It is clear and emphatic in the scripture's proclamation of God's absolute complete sovereignty. And so what am I to do when I find myself there picking up the rubble? I'm in that moment to worship God. And what are we to do when we comfort someone who's looking at the rubble of their life? We're to come alongside them and we're to mourn with them. The Bible says mourn with those who mourn. We're not to come alongside and immediately preach a sermon to them. We're to be like Jesus. Jesus came near to us. Read Hebrews 2:14 and following where it talks about to be a great Savior he had to be made like his brethren in every way. He had to experience what we experience so he could be a high priest that could bring us to God. Hebrews 4:15, he's a sympathetic high priest who knows, who's been tempted in every way we have yet without sin. And so Jesus as someone who understands, he went to the trouble of coming down and experiencing what we experience so that he could understand and he could come alongside us in our misery, in our brokenness, and he could put his arm around us and then he could lead us forward.

And that's what we're called to do, we're called to enter into one another's suffering, to mourn with those that mourn, but our focus is even in that brokenness to say we have an opportunity in this moment to worship our great God, to worship a God who's at work in this, to do above and beyond all we can ask or imagine, who has told us in his word in Romans 8:32 that if God, this is so precious, "If God did not spare His own Son," this is an argument from the greater to the lesser, "If God did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not together with Him freely give us all things?" Paul is talking about suffering in that passage, this is Romans 8:32, he's talking about the reality and pain of living in a fallen world, a world which is under the dominion of sin, under the dominion of darkness, and he says, "Listen, when you're going through it," right before this verse he says, "all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose," which is to be made like Jesus, but then he says that precious verse, if God did not spare his own Son, if he was willing to give his Son for you, if he was willing to give that which is most precious to him for you, if he was willing to sacrifice his Son and not spare him from all the experience, the wrath of God that he experienced on the cross, the punishment, the bruising for our iniquities, the piercing for our transgressions, if God was willing to not spare his Son, to give him, how can you doubt his heart to only want to give you good things now? If God gave you the most precious, he will only give you good things. Paul is saying when you suffer, when you find your life hammered by reality, pain, agony, separation, brokenheartedness, when you find your life wrecked and you put it in context of the cross, it says, listen, even this is God loving me. I don't understand it. It doesn't mean that he approves of the evil that happens, he doesn't, but he's sovereign over it. He's going to punish the evil.

I mean, it's amazing, he sends the Babylonians, you read the prophets, read Isaiah, he said, "Listen, Judah, you guys are going to get it because you're being ungodly, you won't repent. Repent. Repent. Repent. If you don't, I'm sending the Babylonians." He sends the Babylonians and then in the same book he says, "But then I'm going to judge the Babylonians. I mean, I am going to judge those Babylonians for their wickedness and what they do to you." Isn't that amazing? He uses the instrument, then he judges the instrument and he's godly and holy in everything that he does. The mystery and the wisdom, this is when Paul's thinking of these kind of things when he says in Romans 11:36, "Oh, the depths of the mystery of the wisdom of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways." Everything he does is perfect and right.

So we come alongside one another and help one another dig through the rubble, help one another put out the fires, weep with one another over what is lost, and then help one another to worship God and to keep trusting him, and that is the victory that overcomes the world. When people do that, the world knows there's something different, there's something of reality about those people that the world cannot understand. So we're called to worship.

I want to take about five minutes and look at a passage and I want to encourage you to meditate on this, this week. We'll look at it again next Sunday. Romans 12:1. I'll give you some quick thoughts about this and remember the point is make worship your ultimate

priority and your constant activity. That's what it means to put the temple back where it needs to be. That's what it means to start worshiping again as they did. It means make worship your ultimate priority and your constant activity, and you see this in Romans 12:1-2. In fact, 12:1-2, I encourage you to read this passage, meditate on it this week. All three points we're talking about in Ezra-Nehemiah are here in these two verses and this is Paul in his most majestic epistle turning from the doctrine of all that Christ has done for us and in chapter 12, verse 1, he turns the corner to the practical application of all that he's taught. In light of all these things that I've been talking about, the glorious gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, the wonder of God's electing purposes in salvation, in light of all these things I've been talking about, now live it out. Romans 12:1. Romans 12-16, the last five chapters is the practical application. This is what you're to do with it and the hinge is these two verses. This is like the hinge of the whole book, takes the doctrine and the practice and puts it together in this hinge, these two verses, and in these two verses you basically see the same message that Ezra-Nehemiah is saying. Rebuild the temple. Restore the law. Rebuild the walls. Not exactly in those words but the essence is there with clarity.

And the first is rebuild the temple because look at this, verse 1, reading Romans 12:1-2,

1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Do you see that? All three points right there. But the first point we want to look at in verse 1. "I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." Paul basically says as a Christian, as a believer, you and I are called to make all of our lives about worship. We're to see ourselves as priests. The imagery is emphatic. He lays word upon word that would have resonated with his readers of the Old Testament priesthood.

Present. That's a word laden with temple worship imagery. Present a sacrifice. Present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice. Present sacrifice. Holy, that which is set apart, that which is for the temple. Acceptable to God, it means well-pleasing. This is like a word that would have been used particularly in the Old Testament to speak of the well-pleasing aroma of the incense or the well-pleasing aroma of the burnt offering ascending to God which is your spiritual service of worship. That's the fifth word that just lays it out. This is what the priests were to be about, this spiritual service of worship. The service of worship, that phrase, service of worship.

So you're called to be a priest. He uses this imagery and he says, "Listen, in light of all that God has done for you in the gospel, this is what you're to do, see yourself as a priest." Every Christian is a priest. This is the priesthood of the believer. This is why we don't call the pastor the priest because everybody is a priest.

1 Peter 2:9, "You are a chosen race, a holy nation, a royal priesthood." We're all priests. What is a priest? First of all, a priest is about worship. He's about worship, from wake-up to bedtime he's about worship. I mean, the Old Testament priest, this is what they did, basically all of their life when they were serving as a priest, everything in their life was about worship. In getting ready to go and serve in the temple, they had rotations, the Levites had rotations, the priests had rotations, and so they would be at their home taking care of their business, and then when they went to be a priest, they would for a period of time be working through ceremonial cleansing, certain things they wouldn't do. If somebody died, they could not touch the body because that would defile them from being able to serve as a priest in the upcoming service time they had. They would go through ritual cleansings. They would go to the temple, stay in the temple, sleep in the temple.

They would get up in the morning well before dawn. Listen, this is how it started out for the priests each day. They would get up in the morning well before dawn, tend to the incense, tend to the fire to make sure the altar, the fire in the altar is burning. They would get the sacrifice ready. They would be running around. There would be a priest on the eastern wall of the temple looking to the east. It's dark now. Before sunrise, they're looking off to the east. There would be a relay of priests ready to relay the word and there was a priest sitting there with the animal that had been prepared perfectly for the morning sacrifice. The priest has the knife in his hand. When that priest on the eastern wall sees the sun crest just at the horizon, he gives the word, the word is passed along, and the priest offers the sacrifice, that first lamb that is the morning offering. Then the rest of the day they're offering offerings. The people of Judah are coming from all over and they're bringing all kinds of sacrifices according to Leviticus laid down. They're bringing fellowship offerings, peace offerings, burnt offerings, grain offerings. All of these things to worship God and the priest is there all day worshipping the Lord and facilitating the worship of the Lord. He ends the night with the last sacrifice at sundown, the last sacrifice is offered, and then they begin cleaning things up, putting things away. They go to bed. The next morning, get up and do it all right over again. Dawn to dusk worship.

Paul says, "Now in view of God's mercies, in view of all that God has done in Christ, you are from dawn to dusk, from wake-up to going to bed, you are to worship God. You are to give yourself to the worship of God and you're to help others worship God. That is your calling." That is my calling. So keep calm and carry on means keep calm and be about worship continually.

What you're called to do? You're called to offer your bodies. You're to offer yourselves. Every moment you're dying to self, you're putting to death the desires of the sinful flesh that still is in us, and through union with Christ your faith in what Jesus has accomplished for us. You're living in light of that. Sin does not reign anymore. I can now be free. "Lord, I believe what You've done for me. I'm going to walk in holiness." And we help one another to do that, to believe the reality that we've been born again. Todd preached a couple of weeks ago from Romans 6. That's actually being consistent with who we are. Remember how he made that point? That when you obey, even though you feel the desire of the flesh to go a certain way and it's very familiar because your whole life, that's been a weakness, in reality in Christ to act consistently with what you feel in your flesh is utter

hypocrisy because in Christ you have been born again and now your old nature is not what you're to live by. But when you do that which may not feel as natural initially because you know who you are in Jesus, you are actually living consistently with who you are.

So he says offer your bodies, every part of your life, it's to be a continual living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God. And I love how the King James translates this last word or this word in verse 1, it's not your spiritual service of worship, the King James says your reasonable service of worship. It's the only reasonable thing to do in light of all God has done for you. And how do you worship God like that? You keep your focus on the mercies of God. You don't do these things to gain God's favor. You don't try to live a life of worship as a priest to gain his favor. Listen, this is very important. That's not the gospel. The gospel is because you already stand in his favor, you've already received the riches of his grace, you can earn nothing, now out of gratitude you offer yourself to him in worship. That's the gospel and that's what we're called to do. Every day, every moment seeking to worship God. No matter what happens, no matter where we find ourselves, no matter who we're around, seeking to worship God and helping others to become worshipers of God. That's the first point of what we're to do in carrying on. May the Lord help us do that.

It's so good to know what you're supposed to do, isn't it? Don't you sometimes feel that way? I mean, I feel like I'm constantly having to remember what I'm supposed to be doing. The Lord knows that. He knows we're sheep and we help each other and that's what we come alongside each other and we remind each other, "Hey." Sometimes we have to mourn with them for a while with each other, but essentially the message is we've got to worship now. That's why we're here.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the stability that comes from Your word, that it is a rock, that You, Lord, are a rock and a refuge, and that Your word is something we can put all of our trust in, we can build our lives upon, and when the winds blow and the storms come and beat against our house, it will not fall for it's built upon the rock. But Lord, to be that way, we have to be doers of the word. Help us be doers of the word in this area. Help us be worshipers. Help us be pursuing worship. Help us keep our eyes on the cross and on what Jesus has done for us. Help us keep drinking in the reality of Him doing everything necessary to give us life and God now, You seeing us in His righteousness, accepting us for His finished work, and may the wonder of that captivate our hearts. May we continually offer to You the praise of thanksgiving and a life lived in worship. For those that do not know You, Lord, may they today by Your grace stop living for themselves and surrender to such a glorious and wonderful Savior. And we pray in His name. Amen.