

Well, good evening, y'all. Welcome to Center Point on this rainy evening. Glad y'all are here. Good to see y'all. Hope you're having a good week. Always a pleasure and an encouragement to pray with y'all. And we'll continue our study on Nehemiah tonight. We'll pick up halfway through chapter six, where Sean left us last week. or rather David left us last week. I'll pick up with verse 10 and read through the end of the chapter. This is God's word. Now when I went into the house of Shemiah, the son of Deliah, son of Mehetzabel, who was confined to his home, he said, let us meet together in the house of God within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night. But I said, should a man such as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live? I will not go in. And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin. And so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me. Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, oh my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess Nodiah and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid. So the wall was finished on the 25th day of the month, Elul, in 52 days. And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. Moreover, in those days, the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah. Tobiah's letters came to them. For many in Judah were bound by oath to him because he was the son-in-law of Shekeniah, the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshulam, the son of Berechiah, as his wife. Also they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him, and Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid. This is God's word. Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you so much for your Holy Spirit who inspired these words to be written down for our encouragement and edification and growth and grace so many years ago. And I thank you for your sovereign preserving of these words so that we can have an accurate record of what you spoke through the prophets and apostles available to us to read and mark and learn and inwardly digest. Would you help us to do that? by your Holy Spirit. May we be led to not only a greater understanding, but also a willingness to obey what you reveal to us and apply to our lives. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Franklin Delano Roosevelt said, right in the throes of World War II, that memorable phrase, that we have nothing to fear, but what? Fear itself. That doesn't always apply, does

it? There are sometimes actual things to fear besides fear itself, but it certainly applies to Nehemiah in this passage and in the many attempts that people make to intimidate him and to scare him and to frighten him away from his duty. But because Nehemiah fears the Lord, he is for that reason not afraid of men. Men cannot dissuade him from doing what God has called him to do, and that is because he has a healthy fear of God. And Nehemiah shows the kind of discernment that comes from really knowing God's word, not just intellectually, but in a heart depth that penetrates to our will and moves us to action. And Nehemiah is a man of prayer. We've talked about that before, too. So between listening to God's word and talking to God in prayer, Nehemiah has developed this wonderful discernment, whereas he can tell good from evil, and he can even discern what is best from what is merely good. So he's able to stand his ground in the face of attempts to intimidate him here. And we see God do something marvelous. He actually turns the tables on Nehemiah's enemies so that they wind up being the ones who are intimidated rather than Nehemiah himself. So Nehemiah is able to push through resistance yet again here and accomplish an amazing task to actually complete the building of this wall in 52 days, in less than two months. Herculean task and one that could only be done by the grace of God. In one sense, we would say that Nehemiah is a brilliant administrator and just a fantastic leader and truly he is, but really the closer you look at Nehemiah's book and Nehemiah's life, you really see that through Nehemiah is a wonder-working God who is enabling him to do everything that he does. Nehemiah is only able to accomplish what he does because the good hand of his God is upon him. In fact, he's the first to remind us of that, isn't he? That's his refrain again and again in this book. The good hand of our God was upon us. Anything something good happens, Nehemiah gives credit to God. But this attempt at intimidation comes from a priest by the name of Shekiniah, who claims to be prophesying, which gives what he says, of course, the veneer of credibility. If someone claims to be speaking for God, God-fearing people tend to pay attention to that, don't they? And Shekiniah, or Shemiah rather, knows that. That's why he says it. Who are we to question God, right? And so, Shemaiah gets Nehemiah to come to his house because Shemaiah is apparently disabled in some way. He can't go to Nehemiah. He wants Nehemiah to come to him. Could be that he's trying to generate sympathy, trying to stir up Nehemiah's compassion. But while Nehemiah is there at Shemaiah's house, Shemaiah says to him, let's go meet in the temple. which makes you wonder how disabled is Shemaiah really, if he's able to go from his home to the temple. But he says, with some sense of urgency here, let's go to the temple quickly, and let's

bolt the doors behind us, because they are out to get you. There are assassins about, and they're coming after you, and they're coming under cover of night, and we've gotta do this for your protection. Doesn't that sound sinister? And he comes across as if he's trying to help Nehemiah, as if he's trying to do Nehemiah a favor, as if he's trying to preserve Nehemiah's life. But it's meant to sound menacing in order to intimidate Nehemiah. Because fear often makes us rush into knee-jerk reactions. Rather than thinking things through prayerfully and carefully and deliberately, we can just react without really thinking it through. But Nehemiah is not that gullible. We've seen that he is a man of discernment before. He certainly shows it here. He has the same wisdom of the Apostle John, who writes these words for our help. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but do what? Test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. Well, false prophets abounded just as much in Nehemiah's day, apparently, as they did in John's day. And guess what? Are false prophets still around? You bet they are. So we need that discernment every bit as much as Nehemiah did. Not everyone who says, thus saith the Lord, is actually speaking from God, are they? So to his credit, Nehemiah does not buy what Shemaiah is selling here. He puts it to the test and he finds it lacking. To that end, y'all are familiar with the he gets us phenomenon, the he gets us billboards and commercials during the Super Bowl and so on. They are interesting, to say the least. The message that Jesus understands and sympathizes with sinners is a compelling message, isn't it? Because it's a half truth. Truly he is a friend of sinners, someone who welcomes and is compassionate to sinners. But what he gets us, neglects to communicate is that Jesus' very first words recorded in the gospels are what? Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. He loves sinners and yes, because he does, he hates their sin. Well, Nehemiah is not fooled by half-truths. He is a discerning man, a man of prayer. And it may or may not be true that assassins are actually out to get him. But even if they are, it doesn't follow that the proper response for Nehemiah is to go hide in the temple and bolt the doors. Because Nehemiah knows his Bible, doesn't he? And numbers three, among other places, tells us that the outsider, and by that it means the non-priest who enters the temple, shall be put to death. So Nehemiah knows also the story of King Uzziah. Y'all remember King Uzziah, who became a strong king and a popular king in Israel. And when he did, he became a proud king. And when he became proud, he irrigated to himself the privilege of going into the temple and offering incense, even though he was not a priest. You'll remember how the Lord disciplined him. He struck him with leprosy on the spot, immediate retribution. Because not even the king is above the law of God. And so Nehemiah knows that you

cannot do sinful things for good reasons. You can't do evil so that good will result. The ends do not justify the means. So you can't rationalize away

disobedience to God no matter how many pragmatic reasons you give that this is a good idea. If it's prohibited by the word of God, it's never a good idea. And so he declines this offer in no uncertain terms, not unequivocal about it at all. He says, how can such a man as me, meaning just a layman, I'm not a priest, I'm not in any way qualified to go into the temple for any reason, how can I do this? Also, how can I run from danger if the path of duty brings me into danger? How can I do that? So he says, I will not do it. He refuses outright. And then because Nehemiah fears God, he shows that he does not need to fear any man, even these assassins that may or may not be out to get him, even Shemaiah, even all Shemaiah's political connections. And so he uses great discernment

here. And where does that discernment come from? Well, Nehemiah has obviously read and memorized and hidden God's word in his heart that he not sin against God. And Nehemiah was seen again and again as a man of persistent and fervent prayer. We remember where it says that Nehemiah spent four months in consistent prayer on behalf of his people in Jerusalem, fasting and praying, seeking God's face. We also hear every once in a while, Nehemiah, when he gets in a pinch, what does he do? Well, he shoots what we call an arrow prayer to God. Lord, help me, I'm in desperate need. Give me wisdom, give me strength, give me discernment. And I really don't think there's any shortcut to becoming a discerning person than this. We have to have the hammer of prayer on the anvil of God's word under the searing heat of affliction for that discernment to be worked into our hearts and minds. And so through all that, Nehemiah has learned to abhor what is evil and cling to what is good. And he correctly identifies Shemaiah

as a false prophet and he doesn't care whose feeling that hurts. So anytime someone tries to convince you that you can do good in the long term by breaking God's law in the short term, run away as fast as you can because you're looking at a false prophet. You're looking at someone who's trying to sell you a lie. So they're either misled themselves or they're trying to mislead you, or both. So have nothing to do with it. So Nehemiah figures out that Shemaiah is trying to take him for a ride here, and that Shemaiah is just a minion. He's actually working for someone else. So Nehemiah digs a little bit deeper and he uncovers that it's his old nemeses, Tobiah and Sanballat, yet again, these villains in the book of Nehemiah, who have hired Shemaiah to do this. They've given him money to try to bamboozle Nehemiah and throw him off. Why do they do that? Well, they know they're Old Testaments too, and they're trying to use them against Nehemiah. They know

that if they can swindle Nehemiah into sin and to scandal, well, they've discredited him as a leader. They've undercut his authority. Billy Graham famously took pretty radical measures when he was on his evangelistic crusades so that he not give ammunition to the kinds of people who would try to discredit him morally, who would try to throw him into a trap. He didn't give him any chance to do that. But even if these hucksters can paint Nehemiah as somebody who runs from trouble even, then they can brand him as a coward and that will undercut Nehemiah's effectiveness as well. So these are snakes in the grass. These are tricksters. These are people who are devious and are trying to undermine Nehemiah at every turn. They try again and again and again. But Nehemiah, rather than having that quick knee-jerk reaction, in fear, actually discerns this plot and responds thoughtfully and prayerfully and decisively. And he shows us here how we can respond when fear gets the better of us, which it can very easily do. Fatigue can make cowards of us all and Nehemiah really has every excuse at this point to be fatigued. He has been beleaguered with all kinds of opposition and undermining political pressure, death threats, fighting without, fears within, just unbelievable opposition. How in the world does this man, he's just a flesh and blood person like us, how does he keep going in the face of all this? Well, how did the Apostle Paul keep going under very similar ministry duress? Paul writes this, we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the hardships we encountered in the province of Asia. We were under a burden far beyond our ability to endure so that we despaired even of life. That's pretty deep despair, isn't it? Indeed, we felt we were under the sentence of death. Here's the reason. Paul says, in order that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. We have to be brought to that end of ourselves to realize my wisdom and strength is not sufficient for the needs of this day. I only have one hope, and that's the Lord. And I turn to him. So this is a God in whom Nehemiah trusts. This is a God to whom Nehemiah prays. And part of that prayer, we have to notice here, is imprecatory. He's praying against Shemaiah, isn't he? He's praying against Tobiah and Sanballat. He's saying, Lord, take care of these evil men. And it's a reminder to us that God is not only a God of grace, but to the unrepentant sinner, he is ultimately the God of justice as well. And we're reminded that vengeance is not a bad thing. It's just not our prerogative as people. It is God's prerogative. Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord. So we see Nehemiah here turning these men over to God as if to say, do with them as you will, Lord. You will always do what is right. Either cause them to repent by your grace or strike

them down in your justice, but you will do what is right. So, he shows us good path forward. He shows us very clear thinking that is born of godly fear and discernment, knowing the word of God and praying to God, and that allows Nehemiah to keep from making this knee-jerk reaction out of fear and instead to look at the situation and ask questions of the situation and it would behoove us when we are faced with intimidation and threats and difficulty to ask some questions of our fears, to interrogate our fears a bit. Is this real? Is this fear based in reality or is it just a mirage? Does what Shemaiah is saying actually make sense? What does God's word say about this? Is it right for me to seek self-protection when the people I'm serving are still in the face of danger? What consequences could come if I compromise with these people? So he's able to see through this fog of fear and intimidation and to see things clearly, to see things as they really are. And so he's able to think clearly. And Christianity is nothing if it's not a matter of thinking clearly. It's nothing if not a religion of the mind. We're not called to check our brains at the door as Christians, are we? Our reasonable service, Paul says, is to present our bodies as living sacrifices. Our rational, reasonable service, because our minds have been renewed by the scriptures. So Nehemiah thinks before he acts, because his thinking has been informed by scripture, and then he acts rightly, because he thinks rightly, because scripture has trained his mind to do so. And the beautiful result here is that God effectively turns the tables against Nehemiah's enemies. Those who were trying to intimidate him actually end up being the ones who are intimidated. It's a sweet and ironic turn of providence that his enemies have to acknowledge, whether they like it or not, that God was behind this. And so they grudgingly give credit to God, which is a beautiful thing. Nehemiah also shows us another way to combat fears besides the clear thinking. And I credit Stanley Anderson in his commentary for these points. One of those ways is hard work. One of the effects that irrational fear can have on us is to paralyze us so that we don't know what to do. And to quote the famous philosopher Patrick Swayze in Point Break, fear makes us hesitate and then hesitation makes us fulfill our worst fears. But one of the reasons that the phrase fear not appears so many times in scripture is because God knows, doesn't he, how susceptible we would be to the paralysis that comes from being afraid. And so he's constantly reminding us in his word, fear not, and giving us good and logical gospel reasons not to fear. And one practical remedy to fear is to get busy. Just start doing something, anything. You can't take 1,000 steps until you first take that one step. And Nehemiah, we see, just keeps moving forward in this book, one step at a time. And we see him mobilize this large workforce around Jerusalem. And he doesn't

wait until he has all the best building materials either. He simply takes this pile of recycled rubble from the old walls that got torn down, and he uses it to build the new walls. and ends up pulling off this amazing task in 52 days. It's because he just simply refuses to be intimidated. He knows what he knows, he knows God's word, he's a man of prayer, he's a man of discernment, and he doesn't back down. I think we're designed in such a way that physical activity itself actually makes us feel better. Even it's just getting out in the yard and doing some yard work or doing some exercise. We just feel better. The endorphins

start flowing through our bloodstream. But if we channel that another step towards purposeful, focused action, if we attack our problem and we attack the most unpleasant part of our problem first, that does wonders to our psychological well-being and helps us to do something about our fear, to combat our fear. So he just keeps moving forward here. And finally, the third thing he does is constant prayer. Nehemiah is always, always a man of prayer. He shows us again that both extended times of prayer and fasting, as well as those one sentence, sometimes one phrase, one word prayers, Lord, help me, are always on Nehemiah's lips and heart. He prays to the Lord and asks him to strengthen his hands, which implies that Nehemiah is very human, that he's actually getting weary, that humanly speaking, he is being worn down. And so he needs the Lord and he's very keenly aware of that. So he cries out and asks the Lord to strengthen his hands. And then he unhesitatingly gives God all the glory for strengthening the hands of the people. The good hand of our God was upon us. So these people, these enemies of Nehemiah, who tried their best to intimidate him, after God's providence turns the situation around, actually end up being the ones who are intimidated. They recognize that God is behind this. And they'd be fools to try to oppose what God is doing, but of course they do continue to oppose it anyway. Tobiah has political and family connections around Jerusalem. And these people don't appreciate at all what Nehemiah has said about Shemaiah, and so they start this letter-writing campaign against Nehemiah to slander him and to bring him down. So these fresh schemes are constantly being cooked up. Satan never rests, and those who are his minions are always out to discredit and throw a monkey wrench into what God is doing in the world. And what is God doing ultimately? Well again, what God is doing is rebuilding from the rubble in Jerusalem this worshiping covenant community out of which he will one day cause his son to be born as a Jew into a believing Jewish family. He came to that which was his own, his own did not receive him. but to as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God. This is what God is ultimately doing in Nehemiah, preparing his people to bring his son into

the world. So God's work does continue here and Nehemiah gives him all the credit for truly unless the Lord builds the house or builds the wall or builds anything, the builders labor in vain that build. Peter tells us that we are also in a building project, that we are precious stones out of which God is building a spiritual building, a temple not made with human hands. We are stones that are placed upon the chief cornerstone, the Lord Jesus Christ. And as we're built on the foundation of the prophets and the apostles, we each have our place. May God use us as his living stones to build what only God can build. And when we're beleaguered ourselves with intimidation, with fightings without, with fears within, with attempts to intimidate us, we deal with it by hard work, we deal with it by constant prayer. We deal with it by clear thinking that's born of a covenant relationship with the Lord through prayer and through being immersed in his word and the covenant community. And we'll wait and see because God sometimes does turn the tables on those that seek to intimidate us so that they actually are the ones who are intimidated. It is certainly not beyond God to do that. His arm is not short. and we know that he will be faithful to his promises. Let's pray together. Father, we know that since Eden, the seed of The serpent has always been in conflict with the seed of the woman. And we are thankful that the outcome of that battle is not in doubt. We thank you that through the life and death and resurrection of your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, you have forever won the battle. You have secured our souls for eternity. You have built a people and a building for yourself made up of spiritual stones with Christ as the chief cornerstone. We thank you that the gates of hell will never prevail against what you are building. And we are grateful, Lord, that when we are beleaguered with fears and fatigue and intimidation, we can turn to you in prayer. We can get to work doing, by your grace, what you've commanded us to do. and we can think rightly, guided by your word, guided by your truth, we ask that you would help us by your Holy Spirit to do that, Lord. Bless us now as we enter into a time of prayer together. We pray that you would hear us for Christ's sake. Amen.