

# How Should We Then Live? Part 2 Recognize The Problem

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*Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*

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**Bible Text:** Nehemiah 2:9-20  
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Amen. Good morning. Please turn with me in your Bibles to the second chapter of Nehemiah, Nehemiah 2. We're going to be looking again at verses 9 to 20, this week actually getting into the text more than we did last week which really introduced the passage last time, and we titled the message the same title we're gonna title today, "How Should We Then Live?" How should we then live is the title and this morning we're going to look at recognizing the problem. Recognizing the problem which I think is the main point of this passage. Nehemiah 2:9-20. Recognizing the problem, you could say prioritizing the real problem, what God sees as the real issue was the focus of this passage and is very relevant to us. We think about so many things that are concerns and cares for us especially in this interesting time in which we're living, we're in the midst of something of a medical emergency that has brought on some financial hardship, economic uncertainty, we see political infighting, and against these recent events we look at our society and we continue to see moral decay, spiritual darkness, confusion, and as we look at the world around us the question is: how should we then live? In light of being the people of God, in light of being those who have been bought with a price by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, how should we then live in light of the darkness around us. This passage speaks with great relevance to that issue because the intended purpose of the book Ezra-Nehemiah was to help God's people live, know how to live, how they should then live in the midst of, in the face of political oppression, social unrest, financial hardship, moral decay, spiritual confusion that they lived in during the time of the Persian Empire when this book was written somewhere in the late fifth century BC, 420-430 BC, and so they were asking the same kind of questions. How should we respond to the circumstances around us? How should we live?

We've seen the message of Ezra-Nehemiah basically says that God wants his people to have their focus on his priority, his priorities and three priorities emerged from the text. We see that the temple and the rebuilding of the temple was a key priority; the law of God being at the center of the people of God's lives was a key priority; and then the well-being of Jerusalem, the walls being rebuilt, that the Lord wanted the focus of the people in that day and our focus to be instructed in the same way, the focus was to be really in here first. Not so much a preoccupation with all that's wrong out there, but that God wants to get his house in order. Judgment begins at the house of God, 1 Peter 4 says. And

so God's priority is always that his people put him at the center of their lives, not that we're preoccupied with all that's wrong out there. Something we don't speak to. It's not that we don't have concern about it. No, we do but first things first. We need to recognize the true problem that God wants us to focus on and that is what's going on in our lives, and particularly when we come to the issue of the walls of Jerusalem being broken down that Nehemiah was dealing with, this key aspect of the message of the book Ezra-Nehemiah, the focus is to be on holiness. The walls separate the people of God and the worship of God, those who truly are worshipers of God from the world.

It's really instructive too when you think about the fact that this was likely, or very likely the last book written in the Old Testament. It's possible that Malachi is later, they're rough contemporaries. I tend to think Ezra-Nehemiah is more likely to be the last book. It along with Chronicles were the last books written in the Old Testament. So you think about the fact that you have a thousand years basically of the writing of the Old Testament in which there's an unbroken succession of prophets beginning with Moses in 1440 BC ending here with the author of this book, Malachi, around 420 BC so a good thousand years, basically an unbroken succession prophet after prophet after prophet. God puts his words in his man's mouth, he speaks them, and then it comes to this time and this book and then God stops speaking for 400 years, for more than 400 years of silence until the angel Gabriel goes and appears to a man named Zacharias who's a priest in the temple and tells him that he's going to have a son, John the Baptist. So 400 years of silence and you think about that, all that time of silence, the importance of the last words of God. If he's gonna prepare his people for these 400 years of silence, what did he say? And what he's essentially saying to them in the message of this book, I think it's also true of Chronicles and Malachi is, "Keep your focus on your house, My house," he says. "Keep your focus on being a holy people set apart unto Me. Put the temple at the center, the law at the center and build the walls, that is, the well-being of Jerusalem, and that's going to hold you whether the Babylonians are in charge or the Persians or the Greeks or the Romans." That's the focus.

So how should we then live? Recognize and assess the problem accurately that God wants us to deal with. So Nehemiah 2:9-20.

9 Then I came to the governors of the provinces beyond the River and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen. 10 When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, it was very displeasing to them that someone had come to seek the welfare of the sons of Israel. 11 So I came to Jerusalem and was there three days. 12 And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding. 13 So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire. 14 Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. 15 So I went up at

night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned. 16 The officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials or the rest who did the work. 17 Then I said to them, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach." 18 I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said, "Let us arise and build." So they put their hands to the good work. 19 But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab heard it, they mocked us and despised us and said, "What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" 20 So I answered them and said to them, "The God of heaven will give us success; therefore we His servants will arise and build, but you have no portion, right or memorial in Jerusalem."

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for Your word and we come this morning asking that You might now grant us grace, that You might send forth Your lovingkindness and Your truth and may they lead us to Your holy hill to worship You from the depth of our being, to submit to You, to offer to You praise from increasingly holy lives. Lord, help us. Search us and know us, try us and know our thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in us and lead us in the way everlasting through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

How should we then live? Recognizing the problem. Recognizing the problem and the priority that God wants us to have. So what is the spiritual state of your life right now? If we could stop and examine your life and we helped you to walk around the walls of your life and to assess your life and the state of the walls in your life, that is, your holy, your personal holiness, what would we find? What if the Lord were to himself walk with you around your life inspecting the walls, what would he see? You could think of that individually and we should also think of this as application corporately. If the Lord were to come to our church and to examine us corporately, individually as parts of the body of Christ, and he looked at this manifestation of his people, this part of his city Jerusalem, what would he find? Would he see the walls of Jerusalem broken down? And where would he see the gates burned with fire?

I want to show you how I really believe this is the right application of the concept here in Ezra-Nehemiah, that is, Jerusalem in the Old Testament is a type, God's working through his people but Jerusalem is a type of the church, that it is a type and the church is the antitype, that Jerusalem is the shadow, the physical city of Jerusalem, the city of David, the place where the temple dwelt was a shadow and the substance truly in Christ is the people of God connected to him. You see this in Revelation 21 when the end of history, the revelation of God's kingdom finally coming down, God making his dwelling with man, what does he say? "Then I looked and behold Jerusalem, the new Jerusalem is coming down out of heaven adorned as a bride for her husband." The new Jerusalem, that

is, the bride was coming down adorned for her husband and now the bride will dwell with her husband. What is that? That's Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:25, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." The church is the bride of Christ. The bride is Jerusalem, and so Jerusalem is the church. It's the picture of the church. The application to us on this side of Calvary, on this side of the giving of the Holy Spirit is to see that to rebuild the walls is to build the spiritual security of the church, that is, to pursue the holiness of God's people.

Let me show you a couple other places, well, that you can see this. One is in Hebrews 12. Turn with me to Hebrews 12:22, "But you have come to Mount Zion," here the author of Hebrews writing to the Hebrew Christians, "you have come to Mount Zion." "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven." He's talking to the Jewish believers and encouraging them to persevere in their faith and he says, "Listen, you didn't come to just a mountain that was touched with fire. No, you've come to Mount Zion, the true Mount Zion." Mount Zion is the key mountain in Jerusalem physically but he says that physical mountain, Mount Zion, was really a type of the church of the firstborn so that Jerusalem, Mount Zion, is fulfilled in the church. Now that means that the walls of Jerusalem then are the walls of the church, so to build the walls, protect the walls of Jerusalem is to protect the walls of the church but not the physical walls of the building but the spiritual walls.

Let me show you a couple of places in the Old Testament where you also see this idea. The first is Proverbs 25:28, "Like a city that is broken into and without walls Is a man who has no control over his spirit." So that the walls being broken down of a city is like a man who has no defense against temptation. The enemy just comes in at will and has their way in his life, a man who has no self-control, no ability to restrain his spirit. And so walls being broken down related to the ease with which sin overtakes us.

Then another place I want to show you is Psalm 51. It's a very familiar Psalm of David after he sinned against the Lord with Bathsheba, the adultery with Bathsheba, the murder of her husband Uriah, after convicted, confronted by Nathan, convicted of his sin, he repents and wonderfully expresses this repentance from the heart in this wonderful Psalm. It's interesting to look at some of the last words of the Psalm, a familiar verse, verse 17. He says, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." But look at verse 18, "By Your favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering."

Charles Spurgeon in commenting on this points out that David as he's reflecting on his sin, he's confessing and pouring out his heart to God, he's understanding that the Lord is receiving him back because of his grace and he's grateful for God's grace evident in a broken heart and a broken spirit, and as he confesses his sin he sees that spiritually he through his sin has, this is what Spurgeon says, has torn down the walls of Jerusalem, that his sin actively tore down the walls of Jerusalem and opened up the people of God to the onslaughts of the enemy. So he's burdened about that and he's asking God to build the

walls back, the spiritual walls around the people of God. So even David anticipating this idea that there's something more going on than just the physical walls in this Psalm.

I preached a sermon if you want to look at this, the typology of Jerusalem and the church, I preached a sermon in January of 2019 called "The Most Beautiful Place on Earth," and while you're in Psalm 51, I'll just take you a couple places to show you this. The glory of Zion of chapter 48, just turn back over to chapter 48 for just a moment, Psalm 48, "Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, In the city of our God, His holy mountain." Speaking of Jerusalem, holy mountain. "Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, Is Mount Zion in the far north, The city of the great King." God delights in the beauty of Jerusalem. Why? It's the place where he meets with man. Look at chapter 50, verse 2. You may be, I don't have to turn my page there. It's right on the next page. "Out of Zion," chapter 50, verse 2, "Out of Zion the perfection of beauty, God has shone forth." And all of that is fulfilled when the Lord looks as his bride comes down in Revelation 21:1-5, his bride comes down out of heaven, the new Jerusalem prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. The delight of the Son of God in receiving his bride to himself typified in the old covenant with the delight of God in Jerusalem.

So now building the walls, though, is related to fighting against sin, being holy, being separate and distinct. So if we're gonna honor what the Lord's telling us to do from Nehemiah 2, back to our text, if we're gonna recognize the problem that God wants us to be addressing, God's concern is to keep the church holy. God's concern is to keep, if you name the name of Christ, to keep your life holy. To make your life more and more holy, separate, set apart from the world, and that's what we're gonna look at as we look at Nehemiah and what we can learn about how we do that because it's very instructive, this passage, this has great help for us in practically understanding what, how do you pursue holiness? When God says, "Be holy for I am holy," how do you do that? Well, we have some help, some practical wisdom here in the example of the man of God, Nehemiah, who the Lord sent to bring comfort to his people and to be a help to them in a time when they were in disgrace, when their lives were a mess.

I asked earlier what would it look like? You know, one of the things, we should be, I mean, we are to fear God and God always sees what's going on in our lives and we tend to ignore this, we put it out of our minds far too much, but if I were to say to any of us that randomly we're going to, if we had the ability to do this, one person a week, we're going to show on the screen their sin, videos of, you know, losing his temper, posts to Instagram that they made that weren't appropriate or comments they made on Twitter where they sinned in maybe calling somebody a fool on Twitter, whatever. We're gonna show how the malicious attitudes they had toward drivers, they had a camera in their car and we also had a transcript of their thoughts. Now would you want to come to church if you know that you were the one that was....? I wouldn't want to be here. I'd have to have Jess preach for me that day. I don't want to be here if you show that and we're all gonna look at that. There's a sense in which we should be humbled before each other when we sin, of course, but the reality is God sees that and knows that every moment of every day and he's the one, the only one we need to please.

So how do we really pursue holiness? We recognize how the sad state of affairs and because that's what's going on here, this situation is really distressing. The walls are broken down, the gates are burned with fire, Jerusalem is not the glorious place of God's delight, what we just read from Psalm 48 and Psalm 50, "Look at Jerusalem, the most beautiful place in the world, the elevation, the envy of all the earth." That's what God wants it to be, look how far from that it is. God wants you and me to be holy for he is holy. We're a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, a chosen race so that we could proclaim the excellencies of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light, 1 Peter 2.

We're called to be that. What's the reality? We need to allow the Lord to search us in these weeks to come, this morning and in weeks to come, and to really take stock of where we are spiritually before him. You know, we need to be asking God even now and I ask you to pray with me now that the Lord will search us in this time together right now, that Jesus who has eyes that are like flames of fire in Revelation 1, that when John sees the risen Christ he falls at his feet as a dead man, that same Lord and Master is able to look into our lives and to see the reality of who we are and we need to ask him, "Lord, show us, show us our sin. Search us and know our hearts. Try us and know our thoughts."

Well, what I want us to see as we look at this, if we're going to really recognize the problem fully, the first thing we need to understand is we need to recognize the opposition. It's quite instructive to note that Nehemiah, he deals with continuous opposition throughout the work that God has called him to and you see it in the beginning right off the bat in verse 10. Now we saw, we came out of chapter 2, verses 1 to 8, with the amazing reality of Nehemiah going to the Persian Emperor, asking Artaxerxes to basically make a complete reversal in policy. Remember he had told Ezra to stop the work. He had sent word through the people like Sanballat who had opposed the work of Ezra 13 years, 12 years before, 12-13 years before, and had stopped the work on rebuilding the city and they stopped it by force of arms, chapter 4, verse 23, you can see that, Ezra 4:23. So Nehemiah's going asking Artaxerxes to change his own policy from a dozen years before. He fasts and he prays for four months. He goes and the Lord gives him his heart's desire. What an amazing reality. Not only that, he says how much do you need? How much time do you need? And just basically like a blank check and Nehemiah is sent with the blessing of the Emperor, with letters to all of the governors so that they will not hinder him on the way, letters to the keeper of the king's forest to get all the supplies he needs to rebuild the gates and to rebuild the walls.

So it looks like things are riding high. Here we go, and look, chapter 2, verse 9, he comes to the governors of the provinces beyond the river, he gives them the king's letters, and he interjects this, "Now the king had sent with me officers of the army and horsemen," an added comment here. He's going to these governors who he knows, Nehemiah knows are gonna oppose the work and we're gonna find out immediately they do oppose the work, and he just wants us to know, "Hey, I want you to know when I went, I had a contingent of soldiers with me, officers, leaders. They were guys on horseback, impressive Persian military with me." That would seem to carry the day but what he tells us, even he gives the letters to these different governors and here he records in verse 10 who two of them

were. Sanballat the Horonite we know from extrabiblical sources was the governor of Samaria, the kingdom to the north of Judea, and at this time probably he had aspirations to have Judea as his own, or at least partly. And then the other guy mentioned is Tobiah the Ammonite who would be the ruler of the kingdom, I mean, not kingdom, the ruler of the province to the northeast. So north northwest and northeast, these two provincial governors, Nehemiah's gotta pass through their land to get to Jerusalem and he delivers the letters with his impressive contingent and what he wants you to know is in spite of the fact that he has this impressive contingent with him, he can tell immediately they're not happy.

When Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about it, they were, it was very displeasing to them. In fact, the language is really emphatic. It's in the Hebrew it says in a sense, "They were displeased with great displeasure." The word "displeasure, displeases" is there twice and there's also a magnifying adverb, "very," about how displeased they were. So I really think the NASB is a little weak on this. Very displeasing is not quite strong enough. They were exceedingly upset. He knows that as he gives them the letter. Now what we know is they don't know what he's gonna do. The letter doesn't tell them he's coming back to build the walls. How do we know that? Well, we see that as we look at their response later when they find out he's building the walls in verse 19. They don't know it. They just know that he's come to seek to do good to the sons of Israel and that in itself is very displeasing to them.

It's interesting, one of the key words in the book, there's this key back and forth between good and evil that it's there in the Hebrew a little more clearly than in the English because the word "displeased, with great displeasure" actually is a form, the root form of that word is "evil," and now evil in the sense of harm, hurt, because that's one of the key ideas of good and evil in the Bible, good is that which is benevolent and blessing, brings well-being, wholeness; evil is that which works against that and brings harm and hurt and displeasure.

So the words actually "good and evil" are throughout the chapter. In fact, when, let me just show you this in verse 2 when the king said, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart." The word "sad" is actually the same word "evil." It's the same word as "displeasure" in chapter 2, verse 10, "very displeasing." It is that you're hurt. "Why are you hurt, Nehemiah? Why is your face showing that you're hurt? This must be a deep hurt of heart." If we were trying to translate in the English where you'd hear, I say this because in the Hebrew they would keep hearing that same root, even though the word means something slightly different, it's like you hear the root. Like if you hear "good natured, I feel good, well-being," you know, this idea of good and well, you're hearing it over and over again as someone's talking. You're hearing good and evil, good and evil.

What's evil to these guys, what's hurtful to them back to chapter 2 and verse 10, what is displeasing, what is hurtful to Sanballat and Tobiah is that Nehemiah has come to seek the welfare of Israel. That's the word "good." In fact, the word "good" occurs eight times in the chapter and the word "evil" occurs seven times in the chapter. That they want to do

good, the enemies of God see that as evil. The enemies of God call good evil and they call evil good, and so Nehemiah's letting us know right up front he's come to do this important work of restoring the walls of Jerusalem that the worship of the people of God, the health of the people of God, the spiritual well-being of the people of God might be protected and just the fact that they don't know about the walls yet, they just know he's come to do something good for, to be some encouragement to the people and they're already deeply distressed and they couldn't even hide it.

He's got these officials with him. I'm sure he's got the other guys with him there and they, maybe it's on their face, he knows it, he can see it, the rage in their eyes, and he knows, "We're against some serious opposition," and you see then him show great wisdom as we go through the chapter. But you also see it in verse 19, this opposition. I mentioned they didn't understand he was gonna build the walls. Well, after Sanballat and Tobiah and a third person, Geshem the Arab, hear that the people have started the work, they've agreed to start the work on the walls, they come, "they mock and despise us." And mock, they literally, the word means "to mimic and to make fun of." I mean, they are putting them down in the most crass way. Here Nehemiah the cup-bearer to the king, that's appalling. I mean, now obviously this is where before the internet, he can't shoot off an email and then get an email back the same day, "Look what they're doing to me." Although I don't know if he would have anyway because he doesn't want to push too hard on Artaxerxes in the first place and he's trusting in God. But it's really something that they had the audacity to treat this man who has come with the blessing of their Emperor with this kind of contempt.

Such is the malicious blind hatred of evil for the things of God and we are up against that. When you are trying to do good in your life, when you are seeking to make your life holy, to be like Jesus Christ, when you are seeking to help other believers to be holy, to be like Jesus Christ, Satan and those who belong to him will oppose every effort you make. It's intense opposition. It is fundamental opposition. It's good versus evil. There can be no peace with the enemies of Christ and so we have to choose sides. It doesn't mean that we don't have compassion and love for the unbeliever, we do, but we hate the sin and we hate the evil and we're willing to reject them and to be firm and bold in making clear that we stand with Jesus.

You see in verse 19, "they mocked us and despised us and said, 'What is this thing you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?'" That resonates so much with what happened to Ezra 12-13 years before when another official sent off a letter and got Artaxerxes to stop the work and these guys, remember it's only 12-13 years ago. Fresh in their minds.

So this opposition, recognize the opposition and so when you are fighting for holiness, you have a well-organized and highly motivated array of opponents against you. Here we saw two that become three, it's kind of a growing opposition. At first it's Sanballat and Tobiah because he had to pass through their lands to get to Jerusalem. Now Geshem the Arab, he would have been the enemy to the southeast. So I mentioned Sanballat, northwest. Tobiah, northeast. And Geshem, southwest, the Arab coming up around the

Dead Sea to that side of Jerusalem. These guys all had a claim. They wanted more and more territory to be governed themselves and now Nehemiah has been made the governor of Judea and that troubles them and they're angry, and now they hear the walls are being built and they are enraged.

When you, and isn't it true when you really get serious about dealing with sin in your life, isn't it amazing how much opposition you run into. You see, Satan is content to leave you alone if you're content just kind of floundering in a certain level of sin but he knows the most powerful thing that a child of God can do to impact this world is to pursue likeness to Christ. That is the most impactful thing that any Christian can do is to grow in holiness and to become more like Jesus Christ and Satan will oppose that with everything that he can, and not only Satan but there is an array of enemies against us. We're surrounded the same way that Nehemiah and the Jews were on all sides by enemies. We're surrounded by the world, the flesh and the devil.

The world system is working against us every day, every moment of every day continually lying to us, continually mocking the things that we value, making fun of us, seeking to humiliate us. If you listen carefully to their message, that's their message. The world system is our enemy.

The devil is a personal enemy. Isn't it interesting he gives personal names to these guys. He says it was Sanballat the Horonite who actually was the governor of Samaria as late as 407 BC. He's gonna be governor for another 40 years after Nehemiah's dealing with this. Apparently a fairly young governor and he's gonna continue that position for years, decades. Now think about that, the readers of this book, the first recipients, they know Sanballat the Horonite. In fact, Tobiah the Ammonite, Tobiah, the name Tobiah and his descendants would rule over the precinct of Ammon for a number of years as well, decades. Actually more than a century later we find descendants by the name Tobiah ruling over Ammon. And so they know these names. For us, I mean, we would, recognizable figures. I mean, Stalin, Lenin, or more recently Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, how those names carry with it baggage. Well, there was all kinds of baggage with these names and so what it's telling us though is our enemy is not just theoretical, he's personal, it is a personal enemy that is aimed at our destruction and the devil is a personal enemy aimed at our destruction. As 1 Peter 5:8 says, be sober, be vigilant, your adversary, the devil, is like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. Resist him firm in the faith. You have to understand the reality of the enemy, to recognize the opposition. You're not going to be able to build the wall of holiness in your life unless you understand that you are against an array of organized and intense enemies that want to hinder everything that you're doing because they hate God and they hate those who love God. So don't fail to have a proper estimate of what you're up against. It's not going to be easy. The Christian life is a war. Jesus said, "In this world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Satan is a roaring lion but greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

And then not only the world and the devil, we have the flesh. We have our sin nature that is not yet redeemed. I mean, our soul has been redeemed, we have a new heart and yet so

close to that in our thoughts, in the wiring of our human brains and our experience is the old nature that still opposes the things of God. John Owen in speaking of the power of the flesh and has written so wonderfully on this in his books on indwelling sin and overcoming the power of sin, he speaks that, he uses the metaphor of Samson. Remember how Samson was deceived by Delilah and it's really amazing the deception he went in for with Delilah. You look at, you read the story and you're like, "Really? You're gonna do what she says? You're gonna tell her something again?" You know, she keeps asking him, "Samson," he's killing 50 Philistines, 100 Philistines, you know, no problem. They come out and he just wipes them out and, "Samson, what's the secret of your great strength? Well, what would happen to remove your great strength?" So he tells her. He tells her things that aren't true. "If I'm bound with fresh cords, I won't have any strength." And so he wakes up and he's bound with fresh cords. He breaks, and she says, "Samson, your enemies are upon you!" because she's trying to get him killed. I mean, and he jumps up, breaks off the cords and kills all the people that came in. Now you would think you would break off this relationship but he doesn't, and so he tells her something else. I can't remember what the next one is. Two or three times he basically tells her, "If this happens, you know, if my hair is tied," he starts getting closer when he tells her his hair is tied in a certain kind of braid or whatever, he won't have any power. Same thing. "Samson, your enemies are upon you!" He jumps up, kills them all and she's like, "Samson, I feel like you're really not committed to this relationship." This is what she says to him, "How can you not tell me the truth?" Isn't that appalling? I mean, it's ridiculous. Why would you tell her anything. Run, Samson! He finally tells her it's his hair. She cuts his hair. They come in, his strength is gone because the Lord has left him and he's taken prisoner. Owen in talking about that, he says as Samson was continually having to realize with these words, "Samson, get up and prepare to fight! Your enemies are upon you!" He goes on to say we have it even worse, in a sense, for the enemies aren't just upon us, your enemies are within you. Your sin nature. I find in me this principle that resists the reign and rule of Christ, something that still finds pleasure in the things of the world, something that still delights in the things that, you know, my better moments that grieve me.

We have an array against us, the world, the flesh and the devil. It is not going to be easy to be holy but we have all that we need in Christ but I want to tell you, one of the beautiful things about Nehemiah is it is not a book that anybody who has a theology of let go and let God, you've heard that, let go and let God, you know, just basically you don't have to do anything, just trust in who you are in Christ, it's all about your identity in Christ and so just let go and let God. That's not a biblical approach to sanctification and the book of Nehemiah really just swats that right out of the park again and again and again because what we see in Nehemiah is he's basically saying how to pursue holiness. You're gonna have incredible opposition, that was the first point. Recognize the opposition. But the second point is assess the depth of the problem. You could say honestly assess the depth of the problem. Investigate. Nehemiah opens an investigation. He spends time examining carefully the depth of the problem, how bad are things.

In the second point, I want to, there's basically three subpoints here under this second point: assess the depth of the problem. As we look at how Nehemiah goes about assessing the depth of the problem, the first thing we note is that we need to, in assessing the depth

of the problem we need thoughtful planning. 2A, thoughtful planning. It's interesting to note Nehemiah mentions, he makes a point out of saying that he went out at night. Three times in the text it says in the night or at night. Look, chapter 2, verse 12, "And I arose in the night." Verse 13, "So I went out at night by the Valley Gate." Verse 15, "So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall." Why is he going up at night? He's thinking through carefully with wisdom how to assess the problem. You could think, "Well, hey, I'm God's man. The Lord has sent me. My name means comfort from Yahweh. Nehemiah. And so I'm his man and I'm just gonna name it and claim it and I'm just gonna walk around the city whenever I want to and I need to assess the problem and I'm gonna do it in the daytime." No, he takes thought and applies wisdom to how to go about assessing the problem. He knows that if he does it during the daytime, there are spies around that will tell his enemies and they'll get ahead of him and start propagandizing the people.

So he sets out at night and he's also careful to tell us, twice he mentions he did not tell anyone what he was doing other than the few men that went with him. He doesn't go alone, he goes with a small party of men, probably mostly the guys that he brought with him from Persia, possibly one or two confidantes, we don't know, close confidantes in Jerusalem. We're not sure but it says in verse 12, "I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind." You see, nobody knows he's gonna build the walls of Jerusalem right now. That wasn't in the letters he gave to Tobiah and Sanballat. And it also says the same thing in verse 16, "The officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials or the rest who did the work." I haven't told anybody basically.

So his thoughtful planning. He basically sits down and thinks about how to address and assess his problem. This means that if you're going to fight for holiness in your life, you're gonna have to take practical, apply practical wisdom to your life. If you're gonna help someone else, the same thing, there are practical steps that will need to be taken and they won't all be able to find a verse of Scripture that you could just say that's it. You will try to apply biblical principles in a godly way to assess the situation and you're gonna need to do that with wisdom.

Thoughtful planning. So that's recognizing or assessing the true nature of the problem. First subpoint: thoughtful planning. Secondly, thorough examination. 2B, thorough examination. The text is careful to, in a sense, this is again where you're just reading the text, think about what you're reading. Look at the detail and think about how significant that is to you and me. I mean, I had to look at a map myself and I went to seminary 30 years ago and I've been reading and studying the Scriptures through the years but I don't know where the Valley Gate is in Jerusalem, or where it was. I had to pull out some charts and look at it.

He says, "I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate." Verse 14, "I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool." Verse 15, "I went up at night by the ravine, inspected the wall, then I reentered the Valley

Gate." He wants us to see him though we don't know the places. Now the original readers would have known. For them it would have been like saying, "You go down Peachtree Industrial until you get to 20 and you turn left." They could have seen it in their minds. But that's not the point for us, the point for us is that what they were knowing was look at the detail. They could tell, for instance, that this journey that he makes is about a mile, roughly total of about a mile, well, round trip it's over a mile, probably about 1.6 or 1.8 miles that he makes on apparently a donkey or a horse, a mount he says; that he is inspecting the walls of the city. So hours he's going slowly looking at the walls. He wants us to know where he started. He starts on the west side, the Valley Gate. He makes his way all the way down to the Refuse Gate at the southern tip of the wall of Jerusalem. Then he starts up the other side, he's gonna start up the east wall. He's been on the west wall coming down to the southern tip. Now he's going up the east wall and as he does, he runs into the Kidron Valley, the great slope off the side of Jerusalem and he says, "My mount can't pass. I couldn't stay on my donkey because I would've, my donkey might have fallen down the hill and I might have died." That's essentially what he's saying. "I had to get off my donkey because... and we couldn't walk along, we had to go down in the ravine and come back up on foot."

Now why is he telling us all that? Does that mean that you should go down in the ravine and come back up on foot, that's the way you're gonna pursue holiness? Of course not. What he's telling you is how much effort it took to really assess the problem. In God's providence it wasn't easy to find out what really needed to be addressed. It wasn't easy to find out where the breaches in the wall were the most severe. It wasn't easy to find out how much material is gonna need to be brought. And so he's gotta go, he's gotta carefully examine. What this means for us is that when we look at our lives, I say look at your life, look at the state of the walls in your life, it's something you have to commit to. Even just the assessment itself is a great project and the good news is the Lord has promised to give you what you need to assess your problem.

Earlier I mentioned Psalm 139:23-24 where the Psalmist David says, "Search me and know my heart; Try me and know my thoughts; And see if there be any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting." He's asking God to search his heart, asking God to search his thoughts, asking God to find out what's wrong and to show me the way to walk, to turn away from the things I need to turn away from, to turn toward you. So we're looking to God but it's not a passive asking. It needs to be an active asking.

Then the other thing, another passage that I think we should think about is when it talks about how we should be searching our own lives is Hebrews 4:12 because we want to do, if we're gonna pursue holiness, we have to get to the issues in our hearts where we are turning to sin, where we're motivated by ungodly desires, where we're worshiping false gods and Hebrews 4:12 says, "the word of God," and how can you know what's in your heart? Before I get to Hebrews 4:12, Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" You see, the work of getting to the sin in your heart is an impossible task if you're trying to help your brother and sister. And there's great application in this passage for our "one anothering." I've been thinking about this, this is a great study on how to do biblical counseling actually, to find out where the

walls are broken down in someone's life, how do you assess that, and then what do you do to help them rebuild?

So it's impossible to know on your own. The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, Proverbs 25. The purposes and intentions of our heart are mysteries to even us but Proverbs 20:5 says, "But a man of understanding draws them out." How does he draw them out? Hebrews 4:12. I started to quote it a moment ago, let me come back to that. Hebrews 4:12, "the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, it pierces to dividing joints and marrow, soul and spirit, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart." He goes on to say, "and all our hearts are laid bare before the one with whom we have to do." The word of God is able to lay open our hearts and so the issue is to put ourselves under the word as we seek to find out and assess our lives, and to help one another by bringing the word to each other, speaking the truth in love to each other so that the word will do the work of showing the true state of the heart, to show the state of the walls, to show where they're broken down.

And the idea of teamwork is even I think hinted at in the fact that he went out with a few men with him. He didn't do this alone. There were a few men helping him assess. In fact, that might be a good point for team counseling. It's better to have two sets of eyes looking at a problem and if you're really dealing with something and you want to ask a couple of friends to help you who have wisdom and who you can count on to be confidential, that's a perfectly biblical thing to do and the right thing to do. All the "one anothers" in Scripture: confess your sins to one another; encourage one another; provoke one another to love and good works; admonish one another; teach one another.

So the word of God is the way that we need, examine though carefully by the word of God, and so but look at your life. Think about your life in light of Scripture. What are the areas where you struggle? Where does the enemy have the most success in your life? Where and how are you most often defeated? If I ask you to say what is the sin that is most troublesome? What is the sin as Hebrews 12:2 says that most easily ensnares you? And what are you doing about it? Are you actively addressing that or are you just, are you like the people of Israel that were there, think about this, the people in Judea that had come back with Ezra or had come back on the previous return before Ezra with Zerubbabel, the walls are broken down, the gates are burned with fire, but they're not the ones initiating the conversation about the problem. Isn't that interesting? It's like either complacency or ignorance. It's Nehemiah that has to go assess the problem and then bring to them with great clarity the ugliness of sin and there's something there.

Sin deadens and dulls our ability to even see its reality. It numbs. It has a numbing power. This is why it's so urgent to have other people speaking into your life because there will be areas in your life where you will be numbed to something. You need other people who are not numb to that in the same way and who recognize it to speak truth to you. You need to invite that. You need to eagerly invite that. I need to do that. We all need to do that and then we need to love each other enough to realize that when we're doing that, this is not just easy, you know, easy pickings kind of stuff. This is hard work and labor but God is faithful. Even though we have opposition against us, even though the task itself is

difficult to even assess the problem, we have more than enough resources in Christ and with the power of the Spirit and with his mighty word. We have all that we need to be more than conquerors in addressing the situation and beginning to rebuild the wall in our lives.

You think about where are you most defeated, is it anger? Is it anxiety? Is it sexual lust? Is it fear? Is it laziness? Is it being consumed with politics and fretting over what's going on in the world? Is it a love of comfort? Is it a preoccupation with entertainment or sports? Things that are crowding out your worship? It's like the walls of Jerusalem are broken down, remember David's verse we looked at in Psalm 51:18 and following, "Build the walls of Jerusalem," and the idea is, "so that worship can happen like it ought to, then you will delight in righteous sacrifices." What's hindering your worship?

We need to set our hearts to the work and to know that if you will set your heart to the work, if you will do what they did in verse 17 after he says, "'Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach.' I told them how the hand of my God had been favorable to me and also about the king's words which he had spoken to me. Then they said," they said, will you say what they said? They said, "'Let us arise and build.' So they put their hands to the good work." God's good hand was upon Nehemiah and they put their hand to the good work. The Lord delights to show himself strong on behalf of those who will humble themselves under his mighty hand. Let us ask God for fervency of heart, humility of mind that's willing to honestly take the assessment of God on our hearts, on our lives. If you will not humble yourself under that, if you won't let him really assess where things are, you can't be helped to go where he wants you to go. Let us humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God that in due time he might exalt us.

So we'll continue next week looking at some of the other things that come out of this passage as we try to understand how we can truly recognize the problem so that we can understand fully what needs to be done.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for You and Your incredible mercy and Your goodness, Lord. Everything about You is good. Your ways are right and perfect and holy and good. Your will, Your commands are righteous altogether. Your laws, Your decrees, Your ordinances are sweeter than the honeycomb. When we truly understand them as they are, every one of them is a delight to the human soul. Forgive us for our sin nature that takes delight in twisting these things. Forgive us for our sin nature that doubts Your goodness and let us, as we look at Christ, know that there is no doubt, there is no logical reason to doubt Your complete kindness and goodness, Your holy perfection. Father, we come as people who are a reproach like the people of Nehemiah's day. You see where the walls are broken down. You see where the gates are burned with fire in our lives. You see where the enemy comes and goes at his pleasure. You see how we stumble and fall. O Lord, have mercy on us. We cry out to You, O God, to send forth Your truth, to send forth Your light and Your truth and may they bring cleansing and healing and may they bring*

*holiness. Make us like Jesus. Lord, help us be like our great Savior. Thank You that He has done everything necessary in His death and resurrection to make us like Him and we pray He would be glorified. In Jesus' name. Amen.*