

# How Should We Then Live? Part 3 Recognize Your Real Problem sermonaudio.com

*Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*

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**Bible Text:** Nehemiah 2:9-20  
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If you turn with me in your Bibles to Nehemiah 2, thinking about those verses I mentioned last couple of weeks about the beauty of Zion, just how to the Lord the most glorious place on earth is the place where his people are gathered in worship to his Son, that that is the delight of his heart and that should be the delight of our hearts as well and how good it is to be together.

We are looking again at Nehemiah 2:9-20 and the title of the message is "How Should We Then Live?" And I think last week I may have, I can't remember what I called it but I want to say the title of this series, "How Should We Then Live?" is "How Should We Then Live?" Subtitle, "Recognize Your Real Problem." Recognize your real problem and I think that's the focus of Nehemiah 2 is that the people have to come to an awareness of what their real problem is and their real problem is, of course related to the walls of Jerusalem being down, and as I look at this passage and been working through the books of Ezra/Nehemiah myself, I thought how interesting it is, how the circumstances of the people who received the book Ezra/Nehemiah, we believe it was one book originally in the Hebrew, Hebrew Bible it was one book, two parts, Ezra/Nehemiah, that the people who received the book Ezra/Nehemiah were in very similar circumstances to our day. The questions they were asking, the challenges that they were facing were remarkably similar to those facing us today, particularly as American Christians, as American Bible believing Christians. I think it's extraordinary the parallels at this particular point in time because they had returned from exile expecting a restoration to their former glory, they were expecting things to be much different politically and economically and socially, they expected prosperity and blessing that they had had under David and Solomon, that God was going to restore them in the exile to that kind of former earthly glory, but it was not God's plan. God's plan was for them to be faithful to him as a worshiping community in the midst of a society in which they were increasingly disenfranchised, and how that resonates with the experience of modern evangelicalism in the United States of America.

We are becoming increasingly disenfranchised and the question is how should we then live in circumstances like that? What does God want from us? Does he want us to seek to reestablish our influence politically, culturally, socially? Is he interested in the external? Is he interested in us being primarily interested in the external forms of society? Should

we be preoccupied with political power, social justice, economic fairness, well-being, prosperity? And I think what this book is saying to us in general is that God wants his people to be primarily focused on spiritual things. It doesn't mean that you don't have some concern for those natural things, you do, but the concern is its appropriate place a small part of your life, the majority of your thought processes, the majority of your prayer concerns are not for, you know, American political outcomes to be the certain things they are. I mean, you should pray for that but it's not the primary focus of your life, for a return to economic prosperity. We should all be praying for that that it's not the big deal. It's not insignificant. Yes, it is certainly of great consequence practically for millions of people and we should have compassion and we should understand and care and be doing what we can to alleviate suffering and be concerned of the people around us. Yes, but it's not primarily the physical issues that we even concern ourselves with the practical issues. It's not primarily the physical practical issues are not an end in themselves. They're a means to the end of helping people see the reality of who Jesus Christ is.

So we're not to be primarily preoccupied with these external things, political, social, economic issues should not be predominating our thoughts on a daily basis. We are to be making our focus spiritual things and this will be ironically, if you make your focus spiritual things and the Gospel, this will be the way that you make the greatest impact in the world by far. This is God's way of impacting the world. When the church is the church, when the church is doing good works, then we are the light of the world. When we are doing good works like Jesus Christ, we are the light of the world. That's what he says in Matthew 5:13 to 16, he says you are the salt of the earth. The salt preserves the decaying world around it, the same way to salt meat to stop the decaying process. The salt of the earth, the presence of holy people in society has a preserving impact and a blessing, it has a blessing effect, an incredible blessing effect on every unbeliever though they don't appreciate it or recognize it. How do we know that? God says it does. It preserves them from going into more and more inward internal anarchy and ungodliness. Our presence in their lives has a restraining impact on evil and keeps them from being consumed by it.

We're the light of the world. He goes on to say you are the light of the world but you don't light a lamp and put it under a basket, you put it on a stand and it gives light to the whole house. In the same way he says glorify, as you do good works you will glorify your Father in heaven. People who see your good works will glorify your Father in heaven. You light the world by doing good works, good works, works of sometimes kindness and practical love, yes, but out of a heart that is seeking the glory of Christ and that lights the world, and that's what we're called to be about and this is exactly what the Lord intended his people in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, getting close to 480 BC, in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century means like 430 to 400 BC. These things always kind of play games with my mind, you can see it as I say it. The 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, that's right. The 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D., it's the 400s, right, not the 500s. Well, it works that way going backwards too. The 5<sup>th</sup> century BC is the 400s. So the late 5<sup>th</sup> century is the lower 400s, the 430-400, and that's when this letter or this book was penned under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, somewhere between 425 and 400 BC. To Jews who were now in the land having returned from exile in the land, the temple is built, the law is being proclaimed, the walls of

Jerusalem are now intact, they are receiving the message of the whole book now, you see, so all the things that have happened in Ezra/Nehemiah have happened and the question is how should we then live now?

So the message of Ezra/Nehemiah is the way that you impact the world is seen and remember those three key themes of Ezra/Nehemiah, the three returns. You have three returns from Babylon to Israel, to Jerusalem. Three separate returns with three separate purposes. The first return in 538 BC under Zerubbabel and Joshua was to rebuild the temple, and so the sense of this message is to them that what we need is to make worship the central priority in our lives. How do you impact this world, how do you live as a disenfranchised person for the glory of God where you are? You make worship the central priority of your life. That's in that first return. Rebuild the temple. For us that means put worship at the center of our lives. It doesn't mean build the physical church, it means make worship and the regular gathering with the people of God the primary, of primary importance in your life.

The second return gives you a second key theme of how we make a difference and that is we are, the preaching of the law of God. Ezra in 458 comes back to bring the law of the Lord back to the people of God and so it means put the word of God at the center of your life. How do you impact the world? You put worship at the center, you put the word of God at the center, and in the third return we're looking at in Nehemiah 1 through 13, you build the walls of Jerusalem. What does that mean? It means that I'm suggesting to you and I want to show you again today a little more about this, that it means that you pursue holiness. It's not enough to put worship at the center and the word at the center if you don't pursue holiness. You must do all of them to make an impact. To be pleasing to God, we must be people who put worship at the center, the word at the center, and as a means of giving glory to God and worshiping him, we pursue actively holiness, separateness.

And I want to show you, I really believe this is exactly what this book is teaching and one of, I mentioned that it's based on some typology that Jerusalem was a type of the church. Yes, that's part of it, absolutely. I think that bears out if you look carefully at the whole Bible, this is what's happening, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven is the church prepared as a bride for her husband. Jerusalem typifies that, so build the walls of Jerusalem means put walls around the church spiritually. That is the holiness, the separateness of the church being different from the world. But I think that it was even evident to the people in Nehemiah's day, though they didn't know fully what was going to unfold in the plan of God and I want to show you this because it's important that you be Bereans and test if what you're hearing from the pulpit or a Bible study is true, is it faithful to the Scriptures. I want to show you this. This idea I think is there in Ezra/Nehemiah and I had made this clear previously and it's because of a keyword in the books Ezra/Nehemiah is the word "separate," and the concept of separation, and I want to show you this. First of all, it occurs I think it's nine times total but I want us to look at five of them that really emphasize, show this importance.

First, go back, I haven't even read the text in Nehemiah 2 yet, have I? Okay, well, we're still going to go, we'll come to that. Let me stop and pray now because it's going to be about 20 minutes in the sermon and we're going to pray. Let's pray now.

*Father, we ask that You would open the eyes of our hearts that You might have your way in us, that Your word might be given to us by the power of your Spirit and, Lord, that You might make us holy, You might set us apart unto Yourself that we would be people who were more preoccupied with You and Your will and Your pleasure than anything else in life, and that we would know that to be set apart unto You is the very best life imaginable; that there is no greater joy, no greater delight than to live before the face of God. Help us, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So let me show you this, the importance of the word "separation." So we're seeing that holiness, the pursuit of holiness is a key theme, this third major theme of the book Ezra/Nehemiah. In chapter 9, verse 1 of Ezra, now remember Ezra is now preaching the law and what happens when he preaches the law? Remember we saw this. In chapter 9, verse 1, "Now when these things had been completed, the princes approached me," Ezra is preaching, he's preaching the word, he's telling them what they're supposed to be and conviction comes upon them. "The princes approached me saying," this is what the princes said, "The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands, according to their abominations, those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled with the peoples of the lands; indeed, the hands of the princes and the rulers have been foremost in this unfaithfulness." And this is a cause of great anguish to Ezra. He knows this is exactly the opposite of what God has called them to and they are intermingling with the people and the issue is not racial at all. When you look at this carefully, it's not about race, it is about spiritual compatibility. Not a racial issue. This is clear because the word "separated," it does say he's basically saying the idea of separation is to, it can mean to sever, to disconnect, to withdraw from, and the way that it's used in Ezra it has a reflexive meaning, it means "to separate one's self," reflexive verb, a reflexive verb, the subject does the action and receives the action of the verb. Do you see what I'm saying? I hit myself, you know, that's reflexive, the verb itself. It looks like that's a reflex, doesn't it? So I hit my elbow, I did that, anyway. Good illustration. No, not really. Reflexive means that you do and you receive. So to separate oneself, the particular form of the Hebrew verb in Ezra is this way, it means not just to set apart, it means to separate one's self. You are receiving the action. And I think what that is saying is that you're separating yourself, it's not so much that you're looking at the world and saying, "No I'm getting away from you." You are separating yourself unto God. The focus is more on separating yourself unto the Lord and in doing that, by necessity you end up moving away from the world and it's not that you're saying, "I don't want to be with you," you're saying, "I want to follow Jesus Christ." And you could say to everyone around you, "Follow me as I follow Christ," and they say, "You're separating yourself from me." No, I'm not, I'm separating myself unto Christ who we were all created to live for. Follow me. So there's no racial issue going on here.

Let me show you this for a moment. Turn back to chapter 6, verse 21. Same word is used in 6:21. This is after the first return to rebuild the temple. This is after the dedication of the temple they celebrate the Passover and it tells us in verse 21, "The sons of Israel who returned from exile and," listen to that, the people who came back from, the Jews who came back, this is the first return, the first mass migration of Jews from Babylon to Jerusalem, they're now here and it's them plus, look what he says plus, "all those who had separated themselves from the impurity of the nations of the land to join them, to seek the LORD God of Israel, ate the Passover." Everyone, every other Jew and every other person who was willing to separate themselves from the impurity of the world could join themselves to the people of God and seek the Lord in the Passover. That is always the way it has been. You read your Old Testament carefully, it's there everywhere. There were Egyptians who went, who followed in the train of the Israelites with them as they left Egypt. It wasn't a racial thing. Not, "You're Egyptian blood." No, it is a spiritual thing. "Will you follow Yahweh, will you follow Jehovah," sometimes it's pronounced that way. "If you will follow Him, come with us."

But then having done that, now the idea of separation. So they had to separate themselves and this is a key theme. I said 6:21, 9:1, 9:2. How had they intermingled, back to chapter 9. It said they had joined in the abominations of the Canaanites, Hittites, etc. Look at verse 2, "For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has intermingled." They intermarried and their intermarriage was not with people who wanted follow God. Their intermarriage was with people who still were worshipping their false gods, and God has warned against this from the beginning because he knows that that is a temptation. To be married to someone like that is a great temptation to your faith in God, especially before the gift of the Holy Spirit it was virtually impossible for someone to stay faithful. Solomon himself, the most wise man other than Christ who ever lived, he could not bear up under intermarrying with ungodly women.

So the separation is about spiritual separation unto God. Now let me show you how it continues though, chapter 10 verses 10 and 11. So Ezra after he fasts and prays and then the people come and they start repenting, this is what he tells them to do in verse 10, Ezra 10:10, "Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, 'You have been unfaithful and have married foreign wives adding to the guilt of Israel. Now therefore, make confession to the LORD God of your fathers and do His will; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.'" You're going to have to separate yourself from these people who will not follow Jesus, in this time will not follow Yahweh. So this was a major theme in that first part in Ezra. Chapter 7 to 10 as he preaches the word, the issue is separation.

Now what's interesting, so you come out of chapter 10 and they put their wives away and the first thing now we're talking about is the walls of Jerusalem and what are walls? They're boundaries. They create a separation. And then what you see is this theme continues to be throughout the book of Nehemiah, this idea of separation.

Let me show you. Let's see, chapter 9 of Nehemiah. After they finish building the walls and they've had the law read by Ezra in chapter 8 because he's here in this book as well, Ezra and Nehemiah working together, in chapter 9, "on the twenty-fourth day," this is chapter 9, verse 1, "on the twenty-fourth day of this month the sons of Israel assembled with fasting, in sackcloth and with dirt upon them. The descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers." This is 13 years after Ezra went back and Ezra had that major revival, he's preaching the word, people see we haven't separated ourselves, they are brokenhearted, they separate themselves, 13 years later they're still needing to separate themselves. Not only that, it gets even more emphatic in chapter 13, verse 3. As time goes on here, they've dedicated the wall and now in chapter 13 verse 3, "So when they heard the law, they excluded all foreigners from Israel." Here again now they are realizing, "We need to make a separation." The people who belong to God are distinct from the people who do not. Then even though intermarriage had been the main problem that Ezra was so brokenhearted over, Nehemiah when he comes back 12 years later, now this is now 25 years since Ezra had his issue, Nehemiah finds that in chapter 13, verse 23, "In those days I also saw that the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. As for their children, half spoke in the language of Ashdod, and none of them was able to speak the language of Judah." They can't understand the language the Bible is in. They had, intermarriage has happened again and so the book of Ezra/Nehemiah ends again with this story of intermarriage. What is going on with these people? So the whole weight of the book is walls of Jerusalem, this part of Nehemiah, walls of Jerusalem and separation. Do you see that? Being separate. So that's what I'm saying, I think the spiritual application is separation unto God, pursuit of holiness, and so in reality what this whole book of Nehemiah is about pursuing holiness.

How do we do that? Well, chapter 2, back to chapter 2 of Nehemiah 9 to 20, our text this morning, we pursue holiness, first of all, by recognizing the true problem, the real problem we have. The real problem is not out there, the real problem is in here. The real problem is in here, it's our lack of holiness. That's what Nehemiah is dealing with in the second chapter, the urgency of really honestly facing your real problem is your lack of holiness. This is what God sees as your problem. You may think my problem is I'm not happy, my problem is I don't have direction. Well, those are problems, those are significant problems but if you were to ask God, "What is my real problem?" For most of us what he would say is, "You are not holy. You are not separated unto Me."

So let's read the text together, Nehemiah 2:9 to 20. He's prayed in the first eight verses, he prayed, went and talked to the king, the king has granted his request and now he says in chapter 2, verse 9 as he's returning on this third return now, he's coming back to Jerusalem, this third return with the purpose in his mind of building the walls.

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."

And we began to look at this last time and we looked at the first two points. Now essentially what's happening is Nehemiah is assessing the state of the walls which are in absolute, it's just abject, just desolateness. I mean, everything, they're crumbling, they're down, the gates are burned with fire, there is no security to the city of Jerusalem. When you think about a city without walls is a city without the ability to defend itself and its hurting worship because to worship God correctly you have to bring money for the priest to be able to have funds to feed themselves. You've got to bring food. You've got to bring offerings. You've got, you know, lambs and oxen and stuff ready to be sacrificed but with no walls and no gates, enemies can come at any time and just plunder the place. So it's destroying the ability of the people to really have worship as they needed to at that time, and so in the same way holiness and the lack of holiness has a profound impact on the reality of our worship.

Now our standing before God is secured by what Jesus Christ has done and that is always the way that you approach God is on the basis of the finished work of Christ, not upon your sanctification. That doesn't mean that your sanctification, your holiness is not very very important to God. He wants us to worship him as Psalm 96:9 says, in the beauty of holiness, and as we become more like his Son, our worship ascends to him with a sweeter and sweeter savor. Remember I mentioned Psalm 51:18 and 19. Write this down and look it up again just to remind yourself. David has sinned with Bathsheba and he has realized that he has hurt the worship of God and he says this interesting thing, this is before the temple is even built he says, "Build the walls of Jerusalem," basically when you read it in

context, "in order that you will be pleased with sacrifices again." That the walls of Jerusalem have to be built for you to really take pleasure Lord in the sacrifices; that there is a sense in which the security of the people and the holiness of the people relates to the beauty of the worship to God. It doesn't mean that you still always go according to the bloodstained half of Jesus Christ, not your own sanctification but our sanctification is very important to God. That's why the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 12:14, pursue peace with all men and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. That if you're not pursuing holiness, the question is are you really a true Christian. A true follower of Christ should have a desire for holiness. Now it can become blurred and it can become buried under, you know, in times of backsliding, but the reality is it should be there in the true heart of a true follower of Christ.

So holiness is so important so the point, then, in chapter 2 is he's saying if you're going to pursue holiness, you're going to offer to God a life that is secure; that you're building the right barriers not to separate from unbelievers, no, you're to be engaged with unbelievers, you're to be like Jesus who was a friend of tax collectors and drunkards. They thought he was a drunkard because he hung out with people who had formerly been known as drunkards. When he hung out with them they changed and we are supposed to be around people so that they can change, not so that we change and become like them. No, we're to be so separated unto God that truly our interaction has this savor, continually by our lives we're saying, "Follow me as I follow Jesus." That should be the tone and tenor of our interactions with unbelievers so if this is the case, then chapter 2, if you want to pursue holiness, you have to first assess where things are and this should be a continual process in our lives where we're continually evaluating under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the help of the Holy Spirit, I mean, along with the word of God, "Where in my life do I need to be working, Lord? Where are You concerned that the walls are broken down? Where are the places where the enemy is having his way and I've become numb to it? Lord, show me." And we need to be doing that and so last week we talked about the first two points, this is a five-point message and the first two points were last week so we're going to have three, Lord willing, today, right?

So the first two were recognize the opposition because as Nehemiah comes to start the work of assessing the situation, he encounters opposition. Sanballat, Tobiah, they hate the fact that he's come to do good for the people of God and that's the reality. There are people who will hate that you are pursuing holiness because they do not know God and some of them are more given to their fallen nature than others and they are more like their father the devil. So Sanballat and Tobiah certainly were of that character, and there will be people like that but bigger picture for us is when you try to pursue holiness, you will have to fight. It's not an easy thing. You have to fight the world, the flesh and the devil; this axis of evil arrayed against us every time we try to pursue holiness, those three enemies are joined in their efforts to stop us.

So recognize the opposition, we saw that last time. The second point was assess, I think I said the problem but assess the situation, assess the problem, that is, do some investigation. Look at your life. Like I was just saying, ask the Lord to help you. Read the word and as you read the word let the word expose, "Hey, this is a problem. Lord, I didn't



even know I had a problem in this area, this anger or this attitude, I'm worrying too much." Whatever, let the Lord be showing you and we need others to help us with that. The third point and fourth point and fifth point we're now going to move to, so they are going to be points 1, 2 and 3. I'm going to go to 1, 2 and 3, you just remember that they're really 3, 4 and 5, okay?

The first point that we want to look at this morning, the next thing in the passage that we need to do after we recognize the opposition and assess the situation, we need to acknowledge the depth of your need. Acknowledge the depth of our need. This is seen in Nehemiah clearly stating for the people the reality of the situation they're in. Now he assessed it, that's part of it, right? But then you've got to face it. You've got to accept God's verdict on your situation. It's another level of spiritual work that the Spirit has to do in your life. It's one thing to say, "You know, I really have a problem with anger," or "You know, I struggle with anxiety. It's just kind of the way I am." It's another to accept what God says about it and acknowledge the depth of your need of his grace. You want to see it like he sees it and so look how Nehemiah just clearly and frankly lays out the reality of their situation.

Verse 17, "You see the bad situation we are in, that Jerusalem is desolate and its gates burned by fire." He says, "Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem so that we will no longer be a reproach." Four different ways he tells them how bad things are. It's a bad situation, desolate, gates are burned with fire, and we are right now a reproach. This bad situation, I mentioned last time good and bad, there's this interplay between good and evil throughout the book, throughout this chapter, passage particularly, good and evil and this is actually, the word "bad" means "evil," it's the same word as evil. You see the evil situation we are in. You see the situation we're in, the fact that I have a problem with anger or a problem with anxiety is not just kind of, just sort of a trouble, it is an evil in my life. It is the presence of evil in the place that is supposed to be consecrated to holiness to God. It's not a small thing. Evil is having its way where God, in the heart that God owns.

You know, we belong to the Lord. This is why holiness is what is basic to a Christian. What is a Christian? A Christian is a person who has been redeemed. Jess said this is the face of those, these are the faces of those who have been redeemed. Redeemed means bought out of slavery unto a new slavery to Christ which is true freedom, to be a bondslave of Jesus. Redeemed.

1 Corinthians 6:18 to 20, the Apostle Paul applies this issue in how to think about how to overcome sexual sin. He says, "Flee immorality." 1 Corinthians 6:18, "Flee immorality," sexual sin. "Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the man who sins [sexually sins] against his body." He says, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" He says, "Listen, sexual sin is a sin against the body and your body doesn't belong to you." It does not belong to you. He goes on, he says, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price:

therefore glorify God in your body." Our bodies exist for the glory of God. They have been bought therefore we are to be set apart. We are like a holy implement that would have been used in the temple, and to be holy really means to be set apart. The word normally translated "holy" in the Bible also means "separate," like the word we have seen that is key in Ezra/Nehemiah. It means "to separate unto sacred purposes." Again you see it's not so much about what you separated from as what you're separated to. It's so important, you're separated unto usefulness of God. He bought you for himself for you to be dedicated to his purposes and this is what you were created to be in the first place. This is why the most delightful thing in the world is to be holy because you were created to be holy. You've forgotten that because sin has warped your taste and your perspectives and just like me, my heart is desperately wicked, who can know it? But if I saw what I should see, I would long to be like Jesus Christ every moment of every day and you would too.

So we were created to be holy and then you've been redeemed to be holy, you've been bought back therefore glorify God with your body. So any presence of evil, any presence of sin is actually evil in a holy place. It's like the temple has been polluted. Ezra 10 I think, no, Ezekiel 10 deals with this where 9 or 10 where he sees a vision of the temple, and ugliness of the temple, maybe it's chapter 6 to 10. I can't remember exactly. Ezekiel is transported from Babylon. He was in exile in Babylon before they got to come back to Jerusalem, prophesied there and one of his visions he sees the reality of the temple spiritually and he sees the people there, it's like he could see before it was destroyed what was happening, and they are worshiping all kinds of, they're worshiping the sun, they're worshiping animals and creatures. This place is supposed to be devoted to the worship of the one true God is being defiled and basically the point of Ezekiel is God is justified in the exile. Look how wicked these people are.

Well, so you and I are created to be holy and so the presence of sin is not a small thing and I'm like you, I tend to get content and complacent with it. This is why we must fight against that, the familiarity of sin. It feels like an old friend but in reality it is a deadly enemy that is out of place in every way and needs to be separated from, but the only way you can do that is you don't focus so much on the sin, you do, you have to put it to death but you keep looking at Christ and separate yourself unto him, giving yourself to him.

So acknowledge the depth of your need. You're in a bad situation, you're in an evil situation and you need deliverance. Jerusalem is desolate, he said. The second term here of this first point this morning, not just a bad situation, desolate. The idea is a waste place, a place that has been devastated as if by natural disaster. It's barren. It also has an association with dry and so the idea of like a desert, an area that used to be fertile is now a desert. Jerusalem used to be spiritually fertile and Zion was supposed to be almost like, or even more so in one way, like in God's eyes like the Garden of Eden, a place of incredible fruitfulness and yet it's desolate. It's a barren wasteland.

So he says to them, "Do you see this is what we're living in?" They weren't as appalled as he was because they were complacent. You know how it is once you get used to things, don't you? Isn't it amazing how, this has been true even if at my house, although my wife

is really good at noticing things but I am good at just like walking by the same problem and just, even like something that needs to be fixed, I think, "Yeah, that lightbulb is out," and I might go as far as, "I need to fix that," and then walk on. Come by the next day, "The lightbulb's out. I need to fix that." And walk by the next day, and at some point if I really need that light or if she says, "Hey, that lightbulb is out, you need to fix it," then I'll fix it. No, but I mean there's something about, that's just a character issue I'm trying to work on. When you recognize something, I've gotten a little better at this, "Hey, that lightbulb is out," start walking, "No, I'm gonna go fix that right now." Address it now. But it's easy to get used to like if you had a stain in your carpet, this would be true of most guys than ladies, you can learn to live with that and you stop seeing it. Now what happens when somebody walks into your house for the first time? They see it. And if you could go out and forget that you'd ever been there and come in again like you did that first time, you would see it. There's something about sin that's like that, you get accustomed to it and comfortable with it and you need the Lord to let him help you see through his eyes the reality of your life. "That's what I need," so that I say, "Lord, this needs to be fixed. This is desolation where there should be fruitfulness."

So sin left in your life, what it means is sin in any area, if you leave sin alone in any area, it will sap the fruitfulness of your whole life. It will. Over time it will take more and more ground and you will have less and less fruit. You will have less and less love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. You will have less of all of those things. You will have less good works. You will do much less good for the benefit of other people, real good in the eyes of God. Desolation, sin brings that, so any area of your life that you're struggling in is not a small thing. It's a huge issue and this is true for all of us, we all have areas where we've gotten used to that stain in the carpet and God is saying, "Listen, be holy for I am holy. It's how I'm going to use you to make a real difference in the world." And it actually though there is an element in which it means dying to self, yes, it means denying yourself, yes, it means crucifying the flesh, yes, but it is the path to joy and life. It is always the path to joy and life. Holiness is the doorway to happiness, real happiness.

So Jerusalem is desolate. Its gates are burned with fire, that is, there is no defense. In this area he's describing it so think about an area in your life where the gates are burned, the enemy comes at will and goes. What a horrible place to really live in a city like that where the marauding bands could come in at any moment and rape and pillage. Think about that and meditate on that a little bit and think about that's my soul. I've got to do something.

We will no longer be a reproach is the fourth thing he says. We've got to arise and build so we'll no longer be a reproach. Reproach means an object of scorn and ridicule, that spiritually when we have areas of our lives that are like that, we create an occasion for the spiritual enemies of God to scorn and ridicule us. They may not say it to our face, this is saying this really diminishes our impact. When you have an area of sin in your life and you're not dealing with it, you're not even acknowledging it, it's going to hinder your ability to witness to unbelievers. They see that like a, it's like you walk up to somebody and say, "I want to tell you about Jesus," and you've got this big massive thing all over

your face. It's like, you know, if you were, I can't think of a good illustration but if you had, you know, okay, if you had, if you're bleeding. Just forget it. If you walk up to them and you want to help them, "I need to help you," and they're like, "Man, you can't help me. You're a mess." That's the idea. "I'm so glad I'm not as bad off as you are," and Satan has a way of magnifying that stuff, unbelievers, because they want to, they hate God and they don't want God get into their lives, they have a way of magnifying it.

So it means if we're pursuing holiness and we really are and we acknowledge the problem, "Yeah, I do have a problem with that, but I'm so glad," we can turn that into a conversation on the Gospel. You know, even after we've sinned against an unbeliever, we've been angry or something and we go to them and we say, "You know, I want to ask your forgiveness." Whatever, you know, "No, I really grieved God and I was unkind to you and I really want to ask your forgiveness. I've talked to the Lord about that and I just think it was just terrible and I'm so glad that Jesus Christ has paid for my sins and that He is helping me. And I hope you'll be patient with me. I'm trying to be more like Him." So it turns into an opportunity to actually turn things around if you are facing it, you are acknowledging the situation and you're working on it. We're all in process. You don't have to wait till you get to a certain point to evangelize people. No, I'm not saying that at all but I'm saying that there's something about an obliviousness to sin that fosters a pride that puts up walls to the Gospel and people around you, but when you are humble from having really seeing yourself as you are before the Lord, there is a power about even your acknowledgment of your frailties, even your acknowledgment of your sin because it has the fragrance of Christ and God will use that. So you see, it's urgent that we be dealing with our sin problems rather than just sort of ignoring them. We're no good to anyone ignoring it and we dishonor, bring dishonor to the Lord.

It's interesting, an interesting passage, it's in 2 Samuel, I think it's chapter 12 when Nathan reproves David. Remember when David sins with Bathsheba, commits adultery and has her husband killed basically by ordering the troops to withdraw from him as they're fighting, Uriah the Hittite? He's not convicted about his sin. He's not repenting or praying about it. He's ignoring it. He's forgetting it. He's not thinking about it. Here's a man after God's heart who is struggling like that, so this shows that we need to watch out. You can become darkened in your thinking but Nathan comes to him and Nathan tells him that story about the man that had the sheep and the neighbors had a whole bunch of sheep but they killed the sheep that was like a pet. They lived in the house, he killed the sheep and fed his friends, this other guy did. And David reacts and says that man should die and Nathan says, "You are that man. You took Uriah's wife." David is cut to the heart, he repents and he writes Psalm 51 as a part of that repentance but Nathan says this to him, "Because you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the sword shall never depart from your house. Your sin has given occasion to the Lord, I mean occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, to curse God and to insult God and to ridicule His people. You see, your sin does that, David." That's what Nathan said.

Now it was certainly true for David the king of Israel but it's also true for all of us that our sin gives occasion to the enemies of the Lord, unbelieving enemies, human enemies but also spiritual enemies. That's exactly what Satan was trying to accomplish with Job,

remember? He was basically trying to get Job to blaspheme God so that he could then attack God because he's basically doing it. "He only serves You because of what You give him." Chapter 1, "Let me touch his stuff and he'll curse You to Your face." So if Job had sinned, Satan would have had fuel in his blasphemy and when you and I sin and we have areas of unaddressed sin, ignored sin, it is creating that kind of problem.

So acknowledge the depth of your need and so the point is we are in a terrible situation and the wonder of it is it's so hard to face that. Our natural resistance is I don't want to see my sins but this is not the way of God. The way of God is let the Lord open your heart to him, keep moving toward him as he searches out your heart. Let him do surgery. Don't back away. Don't hide. Come to him and say, "Lord, search everything within me." Like the psalmist, Psalm 139, "Search me and know my heart. Try me, know my thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me and then lead me in the way everlasting."

So that's what we're trying to do here in this point, acknowledge the depth of your need and then face it clearly. And so if you were counseling, helping another brother and, listen, there's really three ways, I didn't say this up front, there are three ways you can think about application of this. I've been focusing on primarily our own lives, our own holiness, right? So we need to be assessing the situation in our own lives and we need to be acknowledging our own need, but if you turn this around, if you're trying to help a brother or sister, you're trying to help them assess their situation and acknowledge the depth of their need, and so you speak clearly and frankly based on Scripture, "This is what I think I'm seeing." You've got to have humility. I don't see your heart, I don't know everything but it looks to me like this is a problem and don't shy away from that. Nehemiah speaks frankly. Once he sees it clearly, he doesn't speak before he saw it, before he knows it, does he? He went out and investigated it carefully. But once he sees it, he speaks clearly, and so that's something that's instructive to us.

Let me also say this is something we should think about particularly as parents and fathers. You can apply all we're talking about, the walls of Jerusalem in a sense to your family, "Have I assessed how my family is doing? What am I doing to protect my family from the assaults of the world and evil?" And we need to think that way and we need to be able to assess the problem. We need to carefully investigate and look at things. How are things with my spouse or this child or that child or this child? What's going on? You're accountable before God for that and in a third, so it's individually, then you can think of it family wise, and then also church wise which is as a church as a whole, the elders and leaders but also as members of the body we're responsible to help each other, one anothering. So you can apply it in these different ways but let's get back on track with thinking about it personally.

So acknowledge the depth of your need. If your situation is bad, you see the desolation, you see that you're causing reproach, what do you do? You accept the reality of that. You accept God's assessment. Acknowledge the depth of your need. Second point this morning, what do you do next? The second point this morning is accept the provision of God's grace. Accept or you could say accept God's gracious provision. Accept God's gracious provision.

Verse 18, he continues to tell them, he gives them good news. "Listen, I told them, after he told them how bad things are," he says, "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." So he gives them good news too. You put that in context, I mean, the Lord is at work. The fact that you're seeing how desolate things are, now think about this, the fact that you see and the Lord is putting his hand on an area of your life in this message and you're seeing it with new force, that is a mark of grace. The good hand of God is upon you to bless you. You see his good hand comes to deal with the things that need to be dealt with, so if he's exposing that in your life, that's the beginning. So Nehemiah, he follows up with that bad news and says, "I told them how the hand of my God was favorable upon me." And about the things that were already happening, look at how the Lord is orchestrating the circumstances in your life. Look how he's put pressure on you. Look how he's disciplining you. His kindness, his lovingkindness. Run to him. And so that is to accept God's gracious provision.

He tells them that, look at verse 18, then they accept it. He issues the call basically which says, he says, "Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem," and then in verse 18, "Then they said, 'Let us arise and build.' So they put their hands to the good work." He said, "Let us arise and build." God does not expose your sin to leave you in it to wallow in it. God is far too good and kind to do that. He exposes your sin so that you can see Christ and you can run to Christ and Jesus will transform you over time as you keep walking and seeking him.

So you have to say, you have to accept the provision of God's grace. One of the things that in context here, you think about this, Nehemiah, what his name meant, it meant comfort. I shared that in one of the first messages. Nehemiah's name meant comfort. Ezra's name meant help. So to be what you need to be, you need God's help and his comfort. Nehemiah actually means comfort from Yahweh, comfort from the Lord.

So they were troubled. They were in anguish. They were in need and God sent comfort from himself in the person of Nehemiah, this man of extraordinary leadership ability, extraordinary insightfulness, extraordinary courage, practical wisdom, and he's exactly what they need. And the Lord will give you exactly what you need. He will. Now don't judge by your standards, trust him because it's not going to look like always what you think it's exactly what you need. We tend to have in our minds what we think we need and the Lord sends us something else and we're like, "No, thank you. I'm looking for this." And the Lord sends this again and we're like, "No." Kind of like that story remember about the guy that's trapped in the flood on top of the roof and he prays to the Lord to save him and a boat comes by, a motorboat and they say, "Hey, we'll take you." "No, I'm waiting on the Lord to save me." He won't go and then another boat comes by and then he won't go, "I've prayed for the Lord to save me." And then a helicopter comes and lowers a rope down, "No, I've prayed for the Lord to save me." And he dies and he goes to heaven, question whether he would have. No, I don't know, he very well may have. But the story is he goes to heaven and he says to the Lord, "Lord, why didn't You save me?" And he said, "I sent two boats and a helicopter. What did you want Me to do?"

You know, so there's a grain of truth in that sort of silly story and that is we sometimes predetermine what we think God should do. No, he's going to send his comfort and his help but your heart really is to pursue holiness. He will send you his comfort and his help. Don't stop seeking him, but the main help is Jesus Christ himself because Nehemiah was comfort from Yahweh, Jesus says in John 14:16, "Don't be discouraged I am going away for I am going to send another Comforter. I will ask the Father and He will send another Comforter." I love that because it's implying very clearly that Jesus' ministry, he's characterizing his own ministry as the Comforter. "He will send you when I go away another Comforter. I have been comfort from Yahweh to you and He will send another Comforter." It is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our comfort.

So accept God's provision, gracious provision. It's Christ. Jesus is the answer. He's the one who knows how to assess what's going on in your life, can walk around the walls of your life and see exactly what is wrong. He sees with eyes that penetrate through any disguise or difficulty. He sees all the way through it, those eyes that burned with flames of fire that John saw in Revelation 1, the risen Christ. He sees. He is walking among the lampstands remember, he's walking among the churches. He sees exactly what's going on. He says over and over in those seven letters to the churches as the risen Christ walking among the church, he says, "I know. I know. I know. I know your sin. I know your sin." And so what we need is the Lord Jesus Christ, "I need You, Lord, to look at my life. I need You to help me see what You see. And not only in seeing that, I need You to be the answer to that." Because he not only exposes our sin, he comforts us. He exposes the need and then he is the comfort because he says, "Look to Me and be saved. Your life is a mess because you're a sinner and you're living not depending upon Me. You need Me to save you from your sins by believing, repenting, placing your faith in Me, surrendering to Me. I've done everything necessary to make you right with Me." His blood paying for your sins. His perfect life now giving you a robe of righteousness to come before God so that you can come directly into the throne room of God at any moment boldly, and that's astonishing, come boldly before the throne of God to receive grace and mercy in your time of need. When you're in need, you can go because you have a great high priest. You see, the comfort from God has come. You can go boldly for help in dealing with your sin and your need. Christ, he is the beginning and end, the author and finisher of our faith, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. It's always Jesus. Go to Jesus. I need Jesus to show me what holiness is because I need to be like him. If I'm looking at him and I'm looking at myself, I see the great distance, I see the problem. He says, "Come follow Me." I'm to follow him. I'm to make my goal of life is to be like him.

This is real life. That's the ultimate is to be like Jesus. It's not what we think it is. If you're listening to Satan, you think it's not joy to be like Christ, you think it's a pleasure to be like the world and you have been lied to and you are living a lie, the same lie that killed Adam and Eve and killed the whole race is in danger of killing you. Life is found in the presence of God, loving God, and Jesus Christ has made a way for you to be in the presence of God. He is the comfort from God and so as you see who you are and you see what he has done and you give yourself to him and surrender yourself to him and you focus on your union with him, that to believe in him is to become one with him and that

now his death is your death, you can die to sin because he died. You can live in righteousness because he is risen. And understanding more of that will change and transform your life little by little, this area of the wall being broken down will begin to be built up and it will become a place of strength and dignity and honor to God. The very weakest area of your life can become the greatest strength. God loves to do that. He loves to do that. He loves to take the sinners who are the worst sinners and make them and to take Christians whose area of sin is the worst in their life and to turn it around and make it a platform for his glory to shine. He will do that if you will surrender to him. He promises he'll do that. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, 2 Chronicles 16:9. Think about that, the imagery. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth searching for a man whose heart is perfect toward him that God might show himself strong on his behalf. God is looking for someone whose heart is perfect. What does perfect mean? It doesn't mean sinless, it means surrendered. God's just looking for someone to surrender their heart and he will take that area of weakness and he will turn it into something beautiful and you will have, you will be filled with inexpressible joy, full of glory as you behold Christ working in your life. You will know what it really means to live. That's what God wants for us.

So then the last point this morning. We said that we need to recognize the opposition, assess the problem, acknowledge the depth of your need, accept God's gracious provision, and fifthly, re-examine your goals. It's a really important point that kind of steps back and looks at the big picture again. It's so important as you start dealing with an area in your life of sin, you start really pursuing holiness, one of the problems, the pitfalls that trips up so many is we stop having the right goal.

Think about this with me for a moment. Why do you want to overcome anxiety? Why do you want to have more victory over lust? Really why? What is your motive? Why do you want to overcome outbursts of anger? Why? Why do you want to gain victory over fear? What is the motive of your heart in seeking those things? It is very easy for the real motive of your heart to be something like, "I want to overcome anger because I'm embarrassed by my anger. I'm humiliated that I struggle with sexual sin. It's just so hard dealing with the effects of my fear. You know, the Bible says the way of the transgressor is hard and I'm tired of how hard it is. I want relief." You see how that becomes the motive of why you want to be free from sin. That's not the right motive and that is a deadly mistake. It will kill the process. It may be not deadly, maybe the right word to say is it is a completely deal-breaking motivation. If you have the wrong motivation, God won't bless it. What is the motivation? Check your motive. Why is it that you want to rebuild the walls? What is it you're wanting to do? The right motive is to be holy as he is holy. The right motive is, "The reason I want to overcome anxiety is so that I can be more like Jesus. I'll be separated unto Him. I know that my anxiety is hindering my worship. I know that my anxiety is keeping my mind tied up with all the things I'm worried about and I'm not worshiping. Lord Jesus, I want my heart to be more devoted to You in worship. That's why I want to put this off." The reason I want to put lust away is not because I'm embarrassed, that I don't want anybody to find out. Of course you don't want anybody, people to find out about your sin but that's not the issue. In fact, David in a sense Psalm 51, he announces throughout history what he did with Bathsheba, now in a



spiritual way, in a broken way. It's not the issue of hiding it. It doesn't mean that you go around sharing it either recklessly. No, but that's not the issue. The issue is to put off sin because, "I'm wanting more of You, Lord. I want You to have more of me," is a better way to say it. "This area is held back from You and I want nothing held back from You. I want to live a life devoted to You."

This means whatever area Jesus wants to deal with in your life, this is how we're supposed to live, we are to bring it to him in a sense of worship, lay it at his feet, "Lord, You want to work on this area of my life? Here it is. Show me. Assess the problem. Let's walk around it together. Show me the depth of my need. Show me how awful this is. I don't see it. Help me see it in all of its ugliness because I know You're faithful and when You show me its ugliness, You're also going to show me how glorious and sufficient Your provision of grace is. Where sin abounds, there does grace much more abound so show me, Lord." And when you're thinking like that and your goal is for holiness, that's what that means, 2 Chronicles 16:9, your heart is perfect toward him, your heart is, "Lord, I want to be clean from this sin so that I can be devoted to You, a worthy instrument in Your hand." If that is your heart, God is just waiting for you to get there and he's going to work in your life. It's not going to happen instantly. No, it normally happens over progress over time. This is the way he likes to do it, he likes to lead people and he says like Abraham, "Come follow Me to the land I will show you." So we have to stay with him all along the way. He's not interested in quick fixes and instant relief. He's too good for that, because if we got that, we wouldn't be yearning for him. He's interested in giving us what we really need which is a moment by moment intimate relationship of dependence upon him.

So the Lord is saying to us today, "Are you willing to look at your life? Are you willing to really open up and let Me look at your life?" And that may mean to really receive the comfort of the Lord, I said Jesus is the comfort, right, and you look to him, he's always the focus but he works through his body, the body of Christ is the church. So if you want Jesus to work on you, he may have to use people in your life to really help you assess the reality of your situation and to be able to really lay hold of his grace. Are you willing to humble yourself and let Jesus do that? You and I need to ask ourselves and there's only one sane answer to that, "Yes, Lord, whatever You want You can have because I trust You because You are good. And Lord, all the areas of my life where I've not wanted You as I should, I still struggle in so many ways, let's crucify that. Let's die to that. And I can be more devoted to You and that my brothers and sisters can be more devoted to You, that we can all keep moving upward and onward toward Christ, becoming more and more different than the world but at the same time loving the lost even more intently, and we give them some light to follow in this darkness."

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for Your goodness. Lord, Your ways are not our ways, Your thoughts are not our thoughts. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so are Your thoughts about our thoughts and Your ways above our ways. We doubt You so often, Lord. We struggle, we wrestle with is Your way really the best? We have these*

*things that we cling to, we're complacent and yet when You open our eyes to see that it really is, it's evil, it's deadly, it's death that we're toying with because it's something that separates us in some way from the full enjoyment of Christ and the full enjoyment of Jesus is everything. Father, have Your way in every heart. Help those who need to repent to truly repent today. Help those who need to place their faith in Jesus to truly trust in Jesus today. Save, Lord. Today is the day of salvation. Be glorified in Your people, Lord. Make us holy as You are holy. We pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen.*