

# The Costliness of The Christian Work

*Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*

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**Bible Text:** Nehemiah 4:1-11  
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Please turn with me in your Bibles to Nehemiah 4. Nehemiah in the fourth chapter. I appreciate Jess's giftedness and the blessing that the Lord has given us the last two Sundays through his preaching and really very very helpful messages and blessed me personally, and I'm sure you feel the same way. So grateful to be able to have him to fill the pulpit when I'm out and praise God for his goodness. And looking forward this morning to getting back into the book of Nehemiah.

In chapter 4, we're starting into this chapter this morning and we've been looking at the book and we've been realizing as we look at Ezra/Nehemiah, we've been looking at Ezra and Nehemiah in succession because we believe it was one book originally in the Hebrew Bible, and so we've seen that the Lord has great relevance in his word to what we're going through. One of the things that struck me as we've been going through each passage in Nehemiah is just the abiding relevance of the word of God, the most relevant thing at any moment in our lives is what God has to say and it speaks to with specificity to how we should live, and what a great comfort it is. It's like as the Psalmist says, it is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. It shows us how to live and ultimately, of course, it shows us that the way to live is to serve and to love the Lord Jesus Christ, to be united to him and to walk in the power that he gives us through the Gospel.

But we come this morning to Nehemiah 4 and the title of the message is "The Costliness of The Work." The costliness of the work. We know that Nehemiah, the main issue in the book of Nehemiah is the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. The work of rebuilding and that's the dominant theme, the rebuilding of Jerusalem. And so last week in chapter, or last time we were in chapter 3 for three or four messages, we were looking at the nature of the work. "The Work of the Christian" is what we titled that message and we talked about the work and the work is rebuilding the walls and what we've said is that in the wisdom of God and the way we see the Scriptures unfold, that the way that this book relates to us, the way that we are to interpret it is to understand that Jerusalem and the rebuilding of Jerusalem is a type that would one day be fulfilled in the church. As we read earlier in the Scriptures, we're encouraged to think about Revelation. Ted read Revelation 19, the people of God prepared as a bride coming down. You read on into chapter 20 and that bride, the marriage supper of the Lamb is the new Jerusalem being united to Christ. The new Jerusalem is the bride. The new Jerusalem is the church, those

from every tribe and tongue and kindred who have come to know Jesus Christ and be united to him.

So the new Jerusalem is the church and so there's a sense in which as God is dealing with Jerusalem in the Old Testament, that we have this anticipation, and so the application for us in general for the book of Nehemiah, to rebuild the walls is to rebuild, and if you think about it, in rebuilding the walls they were erecting that which made them separate and distinct from the peoples around them. It separated Jerusalem from the peoples around them and that's a key theme we've seen throughout Ezra and Nehemiah is separation, to be separate and distinct, to be different, not to be like the ungodly but God's calling to his people is to be separate and to be distinct, "To be holy for I am holy." This is the calling.

So building the walls was a visible way to demonstrate that and it was really protecting the worship of God and so he said that separation from the world is not just separation from but really the primary idea is not so much from, that's part of it clearly but the primary aspect of separation is not separated from but separated to. Separated unto God. Separated for the worship of the living God. Separated to belong to him. Separated to become holy as he is holy. To be separate as he is and to manifest his glory. So that's the main idea that's being driven. That's the main work, then, is that we can glean from Nehemiah is that to build the walls is to pursue our own personal holiness, to be different, to be like Jesus. It is to pursue our corporate holiness. It is to help one another to be like Jesus. It is to pursue that separation from which is separation to the worship of God and all being one people, his people.

Jess read earlier from Ephesians 2, that really are, the distinctions in the Scriptures are different than the distinctions we make humanly speaking in the world. It's really profound to think about. I mean, the Bible makes clear that really biblically speaking there's only one race, the human race. Now there are ethnicities. The Bible talks about ethne, people groups, language, culture differences, but ultimately we all come from Adam. Acts 17:26, Paul in preaching to the Athenians said that from one man God has made every nation on the face of the earth and he has determined their times and the boundaries of their habitations. He's the one that created you and me to live today. He's the one that created you and me to live in exactly the place, to be born in the place we were and to live in the place we are now. And though there is one race, the real distinction though the acknowledgment of ethnicities is there, that what God is doing is calling out for a people of every tribe and tongue and kindred who will truly embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and follow him, and that the real separation is between those who are in the covenant with God and those who are not.

Biblically that's the only distinction really that God sees. I mean, he's aware of the differences and different challenges that we face and this is not to minimize the fact that there are very real challenges that individuals face based on their ethnicity that are different than others. We certainly see that powerfully on display for us today. This does not mean that we should not have compassion and understanding and empathy, absolutely. This doesn't mean we should not pursue that kind of understanding and the oneness that comes from that, but we want to think biblically. It's so important. In fact,

we've been thinking about this, the message isn't primarily about what's going on in the world, we're gonna see it speaks to it because it's talking about separation, but with all that is going on in the world today in America, you know, the realities that we're facing, the reality of, you know, police brutality that does happen and did happen, the pain that that brings up for people, the experiences that it causes to become very real and the fears that it raises, and then on the other hand, you know, legitimate protest accompanied with illegitimate rioting, violence against police officers. There's a lot of fear. I mean, you think about how many people have added reasons to be afraid. It's a really difficult time. People are asking questions. People are making lots of statements and declarations and expressing lots of opinions and the dialog that's happening out there in the world that we can't help but be caught up in, right, is often informed by principles that are unbiblical. I mean, it's basically that's the approach that unbelievers have. They can't be biblical. They don't have the Spirit to understand the things of God. So we see that so much of what's being said is shaped by sociological beliefs, human sociology or humanistic psychology or humanistic political science, political views and economic principles or other things that are really not rooted in Scripture. It doesn't mean that there's not, you can't glean grains of truth in all of these different perspectives. There's usually some truth in virtually every perspective, you can find something that's helpful, but as Christians what are we called to do? We're called to think biblically. We're called to do what John Calvin said is to put on the spectacles of special revelation, the spectacles of the Bible and look at the world first with the lens of Scripture firmly on our minds and our hearts, and then as we're looking through Scripture, then we can interpret correctly what's happening around us and we can walk with wisdom, and then we can do the maximum good for our fellow man because we have the treasure of the word of God and we're thinking biblically and we're thinking with wisdom.

So this morning what we do every Sunday is we try to put on the spectacles of the word of God and see what God has to say about our lives from his word, to hear him first and then to let those things frame the way we think about everything else. You know, Paul says we're to take every thought captive, 2 Corinthians 10, and bring it to the obedience of Christ. That's our goal in expository preaching, to provide us with the mindset of God and to bring our thoughts into conformity with his thoughts. There's freedom there. There's hope there. There is true actually joy there, even in the midst of suffering, even in the midst of things that perplex us, God's word is such a treasure.

So we're gonna read chapter 4 and we're gonna look at verses 1 to 11 this morning and it's the cost of the work, the costliness of the work of being a Christian, or the costliness of the Christian work. In chapter 3 we saw how everyone was involved in the work, how the work was being carried out, an urgent work, a holy work, everyone's work. It was distinctive work. Each one had to do their own particular part. It was essential work. Everybody needed to do their part so everything would be protected. And it was impossible work, work that only the Holy Spirit can do, to build, to make people holy. Only God can do that. And now having begun the work, the work is really going on, they're carrying out repairs, remember 35 times in that chapter, carried out repairs, they were repairing, repairing, repairing, and now we see the response to the work and this is where we begin to see the costliness of the work.

Nehemiah 4:1,

1 Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews. 2 He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned ones?" 3 Now Tobiah the Ammonite was near him and he said, "Even what they are building--if a fox should jump on it, he would break their stone wall down!" 4 Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach on their own heads and give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. 5 Do not forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You, for they have demoralized the builders. 6 So we built the wall and the whole wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work. 7 Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, and that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry. 8 All of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it. 9 But we prayed to our God, and because of them we set up a guard against them day and night. 10 Thus in Judah it was said, "The strength of the burden bearers is failing, Yet there is much rubbish; And we ourselves are unable To rebuild the wall." 11 Our enemies said, "They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them and put a stop to the work."

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, how mindful we are of our great need of grace. Every time we open Your word, Lord, we know that except Your Spirit work in our hearts, we cannot fully understand or apply this precious truth to our lives. We acknowledge our unworthiness. We acknowledge our sinfulness. We acknowledge, Lord, that we do not seek You as we ought, that we have not loved You as we ought. We acknowledge that we have been too at home in this world and, Lord, we ask You today to remind us that our home is not in this world, our home is when we shall see You with our own eyes and we shall stand before You in Your holiness upright, robed in the righteousness of Your Son. Lord, speak to us. Your servants are listening. Do this for the glory of Christ. We pray in His name. Amen.*

The costliness of the work of the Christian. When we began to labor at holiness, there's going to be a great cost to be paid and we need to count the cost, as Jesus said, to understand the cost and this is one of the things that this passage really shows us, it shows us the costliness of the work, that if you are really going to be serious about working for holiness in your life, if you're going to be really serious about working for holiness in the lives of the people of God, as that is our calling, if you're really going to try to separate yourself from the world unto Christ, there will be a great cost. This is clear throughout

the entirety of Scripture and we're going to see this really clearly this morning in this passage. We're going to have two main points this morning to help us face and count the cost. The first point this morning is we need to face their hostility, to face the hostility or their hostility.

It's really shocking if you really think about it, you stop and really just reflect why do these guys care so much that they're rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. I mean, really, just ask yourself, "Why is Sanballat, the Horonite so upset? Why? I mean, what does it matter?" These walls are not gonna be the best walls that have ever been built. You've got amateurs building them. They're not really being built so that Jerusalem's gonna be a military power again. So why is he so bothered by it? Why are they so bothered by it? Because what we see is it's not just Sanballat the Horonite, the governor of Samaria, it's also Tobiah the Ammonite, the governor of Ammon, it's Ashdodites and Ammonites, it's all the people that surround Jerusalem are really seriously bothered by the fact that the people of God are rebuilding the walls. It is actually humanly illogical. It just doesn't make sense. But biblically it is perfectly in line with what the Scriptures teach because what's happening is God's worship is being restored, his glory is being made known and people hate God. Unbelievers hate God and they hate seeing his glory. That's what's happening throughout this passage.

I want us to consider this first point, face their hostility, under three subpoints. So the first point, face their hostility, there's three subpoints that help us unpack this and the first is the reality of their hostility. Let's just really look carefully at how the Scripture describes it. Verse 1, look at, first of all, their fury. "Now it came about that when Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious." This word "furious" means "to burn; to be kindled." It's a verb which actually pictures building a fire. It's a word which is used most often in Scripture to speak figuratively to speak of burning anger. It means to blaze up with anger. He hears they're rebuilding the wall and he blazes up with anger. He becomes furious. But it's not just one, that's not enough, he became furious and very angry, a second word, a second verb. He became furious and also he became very angry. This word means "to be greatly irritated and indignant." It's that same word in the second, he became very angry is repeated in verse 7 when they hear again about the work continuing it says in verse 7, "Now when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repair of the walls of Jerusalem went on, and that the breaches began to be closed, they were very angry." Intensely bothered. This is getting under their skin at such a level they must do something.

Well, what they do initially in verses 2 and 3, Sanballat begins by scorning the work and the people. It says he speaks to his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria, I'm reading from the New American Standard, it says "wealthy men of Samaria." The word there is an interesting word. I think it's better translated by the other translations. If you have the NIV or the ESV or the King James, you'll be reading, "He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the army of Samaria." I think that's a better translation. This word's actually used a couple of times already in Ezra/Nehemiah to speak of the army. It was used in chapter 2, verse 9, when it said, "Now the king had sent me with officers of the army." Same word "army" as it is here "wealthy." It's used as an adjective here but it's the same

root word, actually it's a noun, it's not really used. It's the army, the brothers and the army of Samaria.

Interesting that we're told that detail. Here he is and he didn't have a full-blown army because he's under Persia but apparently he had some contingent of soldiers and the Scripture describes it as an army. But what does he do? He scorns them. He asks five rhetorical questions. In the presence of all these people, he poses five questions that are aimed at humiliating the Jews and expressing his rage. "What are these feeble Jews doing? These weaklings," essentially. "What are these people with absolutely no ability trying to do? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? How much time is it gonna take them? Can they make these stones, can they make these stones that are dead live?" And then Tobiah the Ammonite piles on by making this mocking statement, "Even what they are building, if a fox should jump on it, it would break their walls down." The walls they are building are so small that even a little fox jumping up on it would knock it down.

So they're basically just deriding and mocking the people. Now what's interesting, though, is how does Nehemiah know about this? That's when you kind of ask the question, you know, because this is said in Samaria, before the army of Samaria. This is in the capital city of what used to be the northern kingdom which is now the regional capital of that province of Persia, Samaria, where Sanballat is the governor. How does Nehemiah know? Apparently he wanted the word to get to Nehemiah exactly what he said. I think he wanted it, he wanted Nehemiah to know what he said, he wanted Nehemiah to know that he said it in the presence of his army. This is psychological warfare. This is attempted intimidation. He had somebody take the notes down, "Tell him what I said and go tell him. Tell him who heard it." Because the attempt is to intimidate them to stop the work. "It's useless, it's pointless. What are they doing? They can't do anything."

But the question is why do they care so much again? I mean, really why does it bother them so much? Have you ever thought about that? I mean, isn't it interesting, you hear people talk about Christianity and they say things that are very dismissive, unbelievers, right? Atheists, unbelievers, you know, "Christians are believing this antiquated, outdated belief system. It's superstition." This is what they say about us, right? "And it's of no consequence. It's laughable that they do it, that they believe it." You know, we're all a bunch of ignoramuses to them, and so, okay, why does it bother you so much that we believe this? I bring that up because these same people are the same ones who get enraged when you, when people go out to protest abortion to make the point that abortion is murder. Here we are articulating what really the Bible teaches and what really even natural law shows, that a human being is a human being and of great value, and that an unborn child is valuable and should be. So what I'm saying is though the very fact that Christians are doing that bothers them more than it should. If they really just thought we were, you know, a bunch of backward people, what do you care what these backward hillbillies think, right? Why do they care so much? Why do they get so bothered about the fact that we maintain that marriage is between one man and one woman for life? Why does that bother them so much? Or that there's only two genders that God made and that

God determines gender not us? Why does that bother them so much? It's because when you speak, the very fact that you're saying that, you are bringing the living God close to them. You don't even realize that you're doing that and that's why the antipathy and the hostility arises in their hearts because those who have not yet received the grace of God, and we were there, Ephesians 2, you know Jess mentioned earlier, remember formerly you were far off and now you've been brought near by the blood of Christ, the two have been made one, our reconciliation with Christ makes us one with each other, before that in chapter 2, the early part of chapter 2 he talks about how you, remember that you were, you and I were dead in trespasses and sins. We were living according to the prince of the power of the air. We were indulging our lusts, enslaved to lust, and we were by nature children of wrath even like the rest. But God made you alive in Christ Jesus. But remember where you were. Never forget.

So the reality is we were that way too and so we can have compassion even on them even as they hate us. The Bible does tell us to love our enemies. In fact, it's interesting, one of the things you see in this passage, we'll talk about this a little more next time hopefully but let me just say something quickly on it. If you were, you know, reading carefully as we were reading, you read verses 4 and 5, the prayer of Nehemiah, and the prayer in a sense is another example of an imprecatory prayer. There are Psalms that are called imprecatory Psalms, they're Psalms where the Psalmist is calling down judgment on the enemies of God. This is what Nehemiah is doing. Do you see that? He says in chapter 4, verse 4, "Hear, O God, how we are despised, how they despise us. Return their reproach on their own heads. Give them up for plunder. Give them up for plunder in a land of captivity. Let them become plunder and captives. Don't forgive their iniquity and let not their sin be blotted out before You." That is an imprecatory prayer and the question is that is Nehemiah wrong to do that? Well, of course not. He's under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit right now and it's in the Bible. Not everything in the Bible, some things in the Bible are descriptive and sometimes people are sinning when they're doing it but this is exactly in line with what we see throughout the Scriptures and that is that the godly at times will call down, will agree with God in his just judgment upon the wicked.

And let me explain this kind of quickly just so you understand. I think that we're supposed to love our enemies, yes, but there are times where we also pray this kind of prayer, "Lord, if they're gonna continue to reject You, we ask You to fully deliver Your wrath to them in Your time and in...." And that is consistent and right to be that way, to have both. Now a lot of times folks can't understand that, "How can you do that?" Well, one of the problems people have is we don't understand that God has a dual stance toward unbelievers; that God at one and the same time loves unbelievers and is inviting and calling them to be saved. Every single person, he's inviting to Christ. You read the Gospel clearly, you read the Bible clearly this is true. He's making his name great, showing his glory and the invitation is there. "Whosoever will, come."

And God in Matthew 5 when he says, "Love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. Be like Your heavenly Father who's in heaven who causes it to rain on the just and the unjust." You see, your Father loves all people is what it's saying. But the Bible also says that the Lord is angry with the wicked every day. And so he has a dual stance. He's

able to at the same time exercise his love and his wrath. He doesn't deny any part of his attributes ever, and so he could be angry with sinners and at the same time offering in love and mercy to sinners the way of salvation.

So if God is like that, when we come to Christ we're to become more and more like Jesus, more and more like God and we have to learn this balance too, that we can truly love the person who is persecuting us and at the same time in our heart do like Paul says in Romans 12 when you don't return evil for evil but you return good for evil, then you heap coals of fire on their heads. If they're not going to turn, "Lord, this is bringing Your justice upon them." It's a mystery... The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives but this is what's happening and Nehemiah when he prays this prayer is kind of exemplifying that spirit. These people are hating God, hating his glory be made known and I love God so much that I hate seeing God hated. To be like Christ is to love what God loves and to hate what God hates.

So the reality of their hostility. We see it continue in verse 8 where after there is another report that reaches Sanballat, Tobiah, the other people, verse 8, well, verse 7, they became very angry, I mentioned earlier, and verse 8, "All of them conspired together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause a disturbance in it." They want to fight. Verse 11, "Our enemies said, 'They will not know or see until we come among them, kill them and put a stop to the work.'" They're secretly plotting to come and to take them by surprise and to kill the people so they can stop the work. They don't want these walls built and they're willing to risk their lives and to commit murder to stop it. And like I said, there's really, it doesn't make sense humanly speaking, but when you understand spiritually what's happening that when the people of God are the people of God, when the church is the church, when we just walk in holiness and love of Christ, when we speak the truth, the Bible makes clear that you will receive very often intensely negative responses and we have to be ready to face that.

The second subpoint under face their hostility is not just the reality of their hostility, this is 1B, the impact of their hostility. We see that their hostility and their expression of it and the word that Sanballat was able to get to Nehemiah so that Nehemiah heard it, exactly what he had said, it had impact on the people. We can see that as we read the passage carefully. The first thing in Nehemiah's prayer when he says, "For they have demoralized the builders," when he's saying that imprecatory prayer, "Don't forgive them. Don't blot out their sins for they have demoralized the builders." It's an interesting word order here in the translations. There's some ambiguity. A couple of translations say, "They have provoked You to anger before the builders," provoked God to anger. I think really the better idea is that this word "demoralized" is actually "provoke to anger" again. It's actually interestingly the same word as "became furious" in verse 1. Sanballat became furious in verse 1, this is actually the same root word in a different Hebrew form but the same root word and the idea is to provoke fury in the hearts of the builders. That's what's going on here, they have as the people hear about the incredible hostility and disdain of the peoples around them, they are becoming angry and it's impacting them in such a way that it's hindering them. That's what the NAS is trying to get across. Demoralize them. It's



kind of set them off the work, in a sense. They've become so angry that they're no longer able to focus on the work.

Interestingly the same word for demoralized and became furious is a word that you find in Psalm 37:1-8 three times. If you're familiar with Psalm 37, it's a great passage on fretting and this word is the word "fret." Three times in Psalm 37 it says, "Do not fret." The word is the same word that means "burn; become enraged; become heated," and the idea is a fretting is that you're burning inwardly. Psalm 37:1 says, "Do not fret because of evildoers." Verse 8 says, "Do not fret because of evildoers, fretting," or actually, "Do not fret. Fretting leads only to evildoing." You fret about evildoers and you become an evildoer. So don't sit there and stew in anger and thinking about and rehearsing over and over again what's been said about you or what's been done to you, that only produces evil.

So apparently that's what's happening with the people. They were demoralized because they were inwardly enraged at the hatred of the people around them and so Nehemiah is praying for them. Now God overcomes that and gives them grace. In verse 6 we see they still have a mind to the work, so the prayer, we see this inner change, Nehemiah is constantly praying. That's what we have to do, we have to constantly pray otherwise we'll lose heart. But the impact was real. The impact of the opposition, the impact of the hostility of unbelievers to us, God's not, it's not a Pollyanna faith that we have here, it's hard to deal with that. It's painful, agonizing even.

We see it also in verse 10. We have this interesting statement after he prayed again and because we set up a guard against them day and night, "Thus in Judah it was said," this is what the people are saying, listen to this, "The strength of the burden bearers is failing, Yet there is much rubbish." The burden bearers, we're getting weak. We can't do anymore and there's so much junk to get out of the way. "And we ourselves are unable To rebuild the wall." You see the discouragement that they're fighting against. And when we saw in verse 11 that the enemies are wanting to kill them, verse 14 Nehemiah tells them, "Don't be afraid." They were being impacted by the hostility but through prayer and through the word of the prophet that God had given them in Nehemiah, they were able to stand up under it and to complete the work.

So we've seen as we face their hostility, we see the reality of their hostility, and B, the impact of their hostility, and C, the source of their hostility. I've already kind of introduced this by saying why do they care? Why are they hostile? They care because they oppose God. Psalm 2 is a passage that you may look at this week and meditate on. It's where the Psalmist describes this kind of spiritual rebellion that is always going on in the world. Why do the nations rage? Why are the peoples in an uproar? The peoples plot in vain against the Lord and against his anointed saying, "Let us tear their fetters apart, throw off their shackles." So the people are constantly trying, plotting against God and against his anointed, his king that he's installed on Zion. They're plotting against him, enraged, and they're throwing off every vestige of his attempt to rule over them. This is always happening and what happens, you see it but it's an invisible reality but you see it become visible when you represent God to them, to an unbeliever, you show them the

Lord's will and they hate you. What's happening is the spirit of Psalm 2 is coming out. God's glory is being made known.

Now we have to be careful that we're not helping people hate us because we're being genuinely unkind or ungodly ourselves. Don't be persecuted as an evildoer, Peter talks about. You've got no glory in that. There's nothing good about that. But when you for Christ's sake are persecuted, rejoice for the Spirit of God and the glory rests upon you. The reason they're persecuting you is because the Spirit of God and of glory rests upon you. We saw this in the passage that we read this morning from Matthew 10. In fact, let's look at a couple of passages in the New Testament that show us the reality of the source of this hostility.

Matthew 10. Actually what we read last week in our Scripture reading, verse 24, "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!" If they have attacked Jesus and called him evil, how much more will they not attack you as his servant? "Therefore do not fear them." Verse 34, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother." What he's saying is the spiritual conflict is real, that when the kingdom of God comes into your life, the kingdom of God is now near to people who oppose the kingdom of God and there is an inevitable clash of kingdoms and sparks fly, and you're just trying to follow Jesus and be holy and speak his truth and yet hostility, it's because the kingdom of God is coming upon those who hate the kingdom of God.

Luke 6:22-23. Oh, happy are you. It says, "Blessed are you. Oh how happy you are when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil." Isn't that exactly what they did to people in Nehemiah's day? Blessed are you, or how happy is another way to translate that blessed. "Oh, how happy are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets."

In fact, in the first martyrdom in the New Testament, I mean the first martyrdom after the Holy Spirit is given, John the Baptist was certainly a martyr in the New Testament, but after the Holy Spirit is given is Stephen recorded in Scripture and he in preaching his message to the Jews, he's preaching to those, the Jews who were the Old Testament covenant people of God and he says to them, "Which of the prophets did your fathers not murder? You killed all of them and this is why you're gnashing your teeth at me." And that's what happens, then they gnashed their teeth at him and they stoned him to death and it says Paul was there approving it in chapter 8, verse 1 says a great persecution broke out against the church and all the disciples were spread throughout the area. Persecution is a reality.

Romans 8:35-37. "What shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus? Shall famine or nakedness or peril or persecution or sword. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." 2 Timothy 3:12, "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." That is the cost of discipleship and the source of it is their hatred of God.

You see this actually in John's Gospel too. You remember how John introduces his Gospel? He says in John 1:1-18, the prologue to his Gospel, he describes Jesus as the Word. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him and apart from Him nothing came into being that has been made. In Him was life and life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it." So Jesus is the Word and John 1:18 says, this is I think really explains what it means, the Word. You know, how do you know what's in a man's heart until he speaks, right? Have you ever had that experience where you see somebody from a distance, you kind of think, unintentionally you sort of size them up and you expect that they're going to be a certain way and then they speak and you're just kind of blown away? It's like it can happen sometimes, you know, somebody you think maybe they're dressed in such a way and you think they don't seem like maybe the sharpest knife in the drawer and then they speak and you're like, "Wow." Or I've had this, to me a really neat example of this was you know how people have accents and you don't expect it. Like you look at me and I have an accent and you could expect that, right? But we used to have a brother that came here years ago named Andrew and he was actually born in China and so the first time I meet him, I go up to say hello to him and I put out my hand to shake hands with him and this was before social distancing, and so he says, it was like, "Hey, Pastor Ty, thanks for that message." It comes out of a Chinese face. I mean, it sounded like that and I was like, "Oh, wow. Tell me about yourself. How long have you been in the country?" Well, he was raised up in like the mountains of north Georgia and it sounded like it.

So you don't, you don't know what's in the heart until something comes out. You don't know who the person is until they speak and so you don't know what God is like until he speaks and so the word is God's speaking to us. That's essentially what John is making this point in John 1:1-18 because he says in John 1:18, "No man has seen God at any time but the only begotten who's in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." That when you look at Jesus, you see God. And so he goes on to say, "Why are they hating Me? They're hating Me because they hate My Father." And he basically says in John 15:18-21, listen, this is kind of the same thing. "A servant is not above his master. I told you this before. I'm telling you again the night before I'm crucified. A servant is not above his master. If they hated Me, they will hate you." This is the calling of the Christian life because you and I now by being united to Christ, by becoming increasingly conformed to Jesus, by having this being indwelt with the Holy Spirit, we are walking opportunities for people to encounter God and we become like Paul says in 2 Corinthians, the aroma of life to those who are being saved and the smell, the stench of death to those who are not. We can't escape that and, in fact, that's a wonderful privilege to be able to stand with our Savior and to be like him. That's what Paul is talking about, we can be conformed to the

image of Christ, sharing in his sufferings. It's not something we think sounds good on the front end but we have to labor at thinking biblically.

So that's the source of the hostility. So face the hostility. That's the first point. The second point, embrace your identity. This is what Nehemiah encourages the people to do. Back to Nehemiah 4. The hostility is inevitable. Don't be surprised that it's happening. How do you respond? Embrace your identity. Nehemiah encouraged the people of Judah to do just that. You see this in a number of ways. One of the ways is you see the language that he uses as he speaks to them and even as he prays. You have this we/they, this us/them happening and essentially what he's saying is embrace your identity. You are the people of God. You are the people who belong to the one true God. You are the people God has set apart for himself, he has called to himself. He has called you to the feast. Though you were, why were you made a guest? Because of his sovereign electing grace, yes, but you are his people. Embrace that. To be his people means you are with him and the joy and pleasure of being in his presence is far far greater than any suffering that we experience at the hand of a world that is passing away. You are the people of God. You love him. They hate him. Because they hate him, they will hate you.

You see this us/them in kind of a couple of places particularly clearly. Verse 4, "Hear, O our God, how we are despised! Return their reproach upon their own heads and give them up for plunder. Do not let their sin be blotted out before You for they have demoralized the builders." You see, it's us and them. It's also in verse 9, "we prayed to our God." He's our God in verse 4 and our God in verse 9. That's who he is. That's who we are. We belong to him.

Verses 7 and 8. Them, all of them conspired together to fight. It's interesting the strange bedfellows that are made by the revelation of God's glory. Have you noticed that? How everyone's willing to unite, actually the one thing, this is one thing that unifies unbelievers in an amazing way is to their hatred of God and the truth. You see this in verse 7 and 8 because the Ammonites, the Ashdodites, Sanballat and Tobiah are working, they're working together with just great cooperation. These are people who normally would be trying to step on each other and get each other out of the way but here they are working together.

I remember seeing this years ago when after 9/11, some of you guys are old enough to remember maybe watching some of this stuff on tv. Did you see the Larry King episodes where John MacArthur was on there? There were several times and they had two that I can remember particularly, but one particularly well where he's on there as a panel to talk about why did this happen, what are we to make of it, and it's John MacArthur, it's a Jewish rabbi, a Muslim cleric, a Roman Catholic priest, and New Age kind of Hindu sort of guy, and I guess maybe that was it. There might have been somebody else but, you know, basically you get, it's a very pluralistic group and what I, as I watched the dialog happen, I was amazed at how it was almost like, I mean think about this, the Jewish rabbi and the Muslim cleric, it was almost like they could finish each other's sentences in attacking John MacArthur. Strange bedfellows. These guys don't belong together except when the true God is made known, everybody opposes him.

That's what they saw in Nehemiah's day, so don't even be surprised at that but embrace your identity, that you are the true people of God. This us/them that we see really makes clear what we talked about earlier briefly and that is that's really only one division among humanity in God's eyes. He made every nation on the face of the earth from one man and one woman and there's only one division. You see this, we mentioned Ephesians 2 and I encourage you to read that. Jess read part of it earlier, look at it this week but essentially what you see there is Paul is talking to the church in Ephesus, it's a church made up of Jew and Gentile and what he's telling them is, "Listen, there used to be a division between Jew and Gentile that's now been broken down and you now are one people in Christ." And what he's basically saying is, "You know, you guys who are from Asia Minor, you who are from other ethnicities that have moved into the area, you Jews who now belong to Christ, you're all one." And as God saw it, it wasn't, he doesn't talk about the various different ethnicity or different skin colors, he talks about Jew and Gentile. There's only two groups, the Jews and the Gentiles. What's going on? It's those who are in covenant and those who are outside of the covenant. That's all, that's the only distinction with God and it's not racial, it's not ethnic.

I heard Voddie Baucham preach on this particular passage and he made this interesting point, he said when did Abraham become a Jew? When he entered into covenant with God and in reality his brothers and his dad were the same blood as him but now he was separated from them unto God and now in the old covenant the way it worked, God was teaching us about this idea of covenant relationship through his dealings with Israel. Everyone who was born into the physical lineage of Abraham and circumcised, not just born but circumcised receiving the sign of the covenant was treated as a Jew and everybody else was Gentiles. That's the only two distinctions that matter.

So what God did is he brought us all together in Christ. He brought those two radically different groups to oneness in Jesus. That's what Christ has done and therefore we can understand that now on this side of it, though and what Paul is bringing out there is that now you who used to be enemies, God destroyed the hostility and the enmity between you Jew and Gentile and he brings you together as one and now we are the body of Christ. We are the people in true spiritual covenant. We are the true circumcision, Philippians 3:3, Romans 2:28-29. We are the ones who've received the circumcision of the heart and God has set us apart to himself and even then when you think about it, the Jew and Gentile distinction, all of us probably everybody in this room, maybe one or two of you that might be Jewish, most all of us are Gentiles. We were all in the same side of the wall, the outside. You look back at our histories and, you know, we all come from godless wicked people and we all individually, we were godless and wicked ourselves, weren't we? But when God made his grace known and made you alive together with Christ, he brought you near to himself and in coming one with Jesus through the Gospel, when you understand that you are hopeless without God, that you're worthy of hell, that there's no other remedy but that Jesus has done everything necessary in his perfect life, in his atoning death to make you a child of the living God and you repent and place your faith in Jesus, God has given you a new heart, then now you become a part of the people of God. Now you go from being out there to being inside the very family room of God

and all of us who belong to Christ have by God's grace come into that family room, and the way we're supposed to see it according to the New Testament, 1 Peter 2:9 and 10, "For you are a chosen race." Now Peter is talking to again people of different ethnicities, people who used to be Jew and Gentile distinction and now he's saying, "No, it's no longer the Jew/Gentile distinction, it's not a racial distinction between Jew and Gentile, even an old covenant distinction, it's now a distinction between those who have been born again by the Spirit of God and who love Christ and everyone else." And he says, "For you are a chosen race, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a peculiar people." That is, belonging to God. "He called out of darkness into his marvelous light, for once you were not a people but now you're the people of God. Once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy." Then he basically says, "Live as strangers and aliens in the world." Realize this world is not your home. You belong to God. You've been set apart unto God.

And if we're thinking biblically, though we understand there's lots of problems in our world, there are lots of very complex angles and issues to what's going on. In fact, the elders, I want you to pray for us. We really, we have been working on or continue to work on trying to shepherd the body through these difficult days, a lot of different issues that need to be considered and we need to think biblically about. So pray for us. But one of the things that the Bible does to give clarity, to put the spectacles on is it says that the us and them if you belong to Christ, is everyone who loves Jesus is with me and I am with them. Everyone who truly loves the Jesus of Scripture, the true Jesus. That's like Jess said earlier, that's more important than family. That's eternal. And we have so many challenges ourselves living holy lives and realizing as we try to live holy lives, we're gonna be opposed, we need to stand together. We need to help each other, hold each other's arms up. We need to lock arms together and walk through life together and opportunities like this when the world, when the world is so confused, there's so much pain and suffering, so much perplexity, so much fear and anxiety, for the people of God to say, "Hey, there's nothing new under the sun." We know it's ugly. We want to empathize with people that are hurting and sympathize with them as Christ did, but there's a sense in which we know that God is building his kingdom.

It's amazing what the Lord has done. You think about the coronavirus and now this cultural stuff that's happening, it's like the Lord is shaking America, just shaking at its foundations, but you have, if you belong to Christ, you have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken and God wants to show that. As he shakes the world, we're the ones who will be standing up, standing firm for Christ. That's what God wants to do. It's an opportunity. It is a great opportunity to lift up our great Savior Jesus Christ who has done everything necessary to bring us to God.

So let's build. Let's build. Let's pursue holiness. Let's put off the sin which so easily besets us. Let's help one another to do that. Let's pursue oneness, the kind of oneness that Jesus prayed for when he said, "I pray that they may be one even, Father, as You and I are one, that they may be in Us, that they may be one so that the world may know that You sent Me." 1 John 4 is interesting how, I mentioned earlier that no one has seen God at any time but the only begotten who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him,

John 1:18. There's an interesting verse in 1 John 4:12. John there in 1 John is saying, "Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." In verse 12 he says this, "When we love one another, God's love is perfected in us," and the idea is he says no one has seen God, he says the same thing, no one has seen God, 1 John 4:12, but when we love one another, his love is perfected in us. The idea is when do people see God? They see God when you and I love one another supernaturally. They can see him and when they see him, many are gonna come to faith. But even if they don't, God is glorified. And if we're persecuted, we can do like Jesus told us in Luke, rejoice, jump for joy because great is our reward in heaven.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for the calling that You've given us as Christians. Lord, help us. We feel like the people in Nehemiah's day who said the burden-bearers are becoming weak. There's so much rubble. We can become so easily discouraged, so easily disheartened and yet when we see as we ought to see, we see that we are the people of the living God and that the Lord will fight for us. The Lord is our strength, that they who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles. They'll run and not grow weary. They'll walk and not faint.*

*Father, help us. We pray that You would help each person here to be truly rooted and grounded in Christ. For those that do not yet have a new heart, Lord, give them a new heart. Help them keep looking at Jesus and keep pleading with Christ until they get a new heart. You're so gracious. You won't turn anyone away who earnestly seeks You. You're aware of all who diligently seek You. But Lord, we can't say of ourselves, You must say, and even after we become believers, we can't sanctify ourselves, You must sanctify us. Help us, though, to pursue You with everything that we are. Help us set our hearts to the work. Give us a heart to do the work like You gave the people in Nehemiah's day and let us build the wall to be different than the world, and at the same time to be looking out, holding forth the word of life in love and compassion to people who are in darkness, to people who are in darkness and so desperately need the light of the glory of Christ. Lord, let our hearts be like Your heart, that though we can love righteousness and we can hate sin like You do, we can also have love and compassion for sinners because we are no better. It's only Your grace. Father, do this work in our day all across America and all across the world. May Your church shine with Your glory. May it be a city set on a hill. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*