

It's a beautiful Wednesday evening and glad to see the remnant is here. We're going to look at Nehemiah chapter 13, actually the end of Nehemiah. Let me open us in prayer and then we'll read the scriptures together. Our gracious God in heaven, we do want to give you thanks and praise for this day, and we thank you, Lord, that when we gather together, Lord, you promised that you will be there in our midst, and Lord, we are grateful that you are working in our lives, and you work, Lord, by your word and spirit in our hearts to conform us to the image of Christ, Lord, to knit us together upon the foundation of your word and spirit working in our hearts that we, Lord, might reflect your glory to those around us. We pray, Lord, that as we open your word tonight, Lord, that you would speak through me, give me the words to speak. Lord, and calm our hearts. And Lord, may you work in our hearts that we may be those who glorify you in our lives. And so, Lord, we pray that you will be with us during this time, and we commit it to you and pray in Jesus' name, amen. All right, so Nehemiah chapter 13, verses 23 through 31. This is the word of the Lord. In those days also, I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab, and half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, you shall not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters from your sons or for yourselves. Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin on account of such women? Among the many nations, there was no king like him. and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women? And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashab, the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanbalat the Horonite. Therefore, I chased him from me. Remember them, oh my God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites. Thus, I cleansed them from everything foreign, and I established the duties of the priests and Levites, each in his work, and I provided for the wood offering at appointed times and for the first fruits. Remember me, oh my God, for good. Well, this is a word of our God. Thanks be to God for His holy and inerrant word. And so as we end the book of Nehemiah and chronologically the Old Testament, we find ourselves at a sort of a down point in the story, don't we? Last time I shared with you the example of Dead Poets Society and how the script writer had pivoted from the original ending, which was to have an ending where the hero of the story is dying in a hospital and the students going back to school and being relegated to a life of misery

under the leadership of a harsh taskmaster, and they realize that's probably not the best way to end a story, and so they changed it to the ending that we now know. But unlike Dead Poets Society, Nehemiah doesn't pivot us, really, to a happy ending so much. Right after a revival had occurred in the land where we had seen God lead the Israelites back into the promised land after he had restored proper worship in the land, centering them on the word of God, rebuilding the city so that they could love and serve him in the place that he had promised and given to them. This book ends really with the people of God in disarray and essentially apostasy. Right, as we looked at last week, they were misusing the resources that God had given them. They were neglecting the needs of the Levites. They were violating the Sabbath, treating it as any other day of the week, doing business on it and so on. And here in this passage tonight, we see that they are also ignoring God's command regarding marriage. I guess in some ways, those of you who are Star Wars fans will appreciate this. It's a little bit like Empire Strikes Back, when that movie ends, Han Solo has been frozen in carbonite and taken away to Jabba's palace. Luke Skywalker has just devastatingly learned that Darth Vader is his father and had his hand chopped off. The rebellion is fleeing from the empire. But then there's that scene at the very end where we see Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, R2-D2, and C-3PO just kind of looking out upon the galaxy. And it provides this slight glimmer of hope that perhaps a better day awaits. And in many ways that's what we have here at the end of the book of Nehemiah. The people of Israel are in a shambles. They are scattered more or less. But Nehemiah, at the very end, gives us this glimmer of hope in verse 32 and following when he says, I cleansed them from everything foreign. I established the duties of the priests, the Levites, each in his work, and I provided the wood offering at appointed times for the first fruits. And he says, remember me, oh my God, for good. And of course, a glimmer of hope there is not the corrections that Nehemiah had made per se. It's the remembrance, the one to whom Nehemiah calls out at the end that provides the glimmer of hope, isn't it? Remember me, oh my God. Because it points us to the ultimate remembrance of God for his people in sending his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to save his people from their sin, to save them, to redeem them from their perpetual rebellion and disobedience, which the story of Nehemiah really illustrates for us once again as God's people persist in their sin, and so tonight we're gonna look at really two things, two parts to this passage. One is the contagiousness of compromise, and the second is the call to ruthlessly root out sin. So first of all, the contagiousness of compromise. As we just read, right, in these

verses, Nehemiah had discovered that the Israelites had married the women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. This, of course, being directly contrary to what God had told his people in Deuteronomy chapter 7, right, when he said that you shall not intermarry with the people of the land, that you shall not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. And then he gives this explanatory note, really, for they would turn away your sons from following me to serve other gods. And that's a key phrase, really, in that instruction, isn't it? I mean, yes, God told them not to do it, therefore they ought not do it, but he really provides an explanation for why this would be bad for them. They will turn your heart to follow other gods. And really, that's the heart of God's instruction regarding marriage, isn't it? In other words, God doesn't command his people not to marry outside the covenant community because he's a bigot, or wants them to be bigots. Rather, what he's saying, or what's at the heart of this, is that God knows that the heart is, as Jeremiah says in 17 verse nine, the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. And our hearts yearn to love the same things as those that we love. And so Nehemiah confronts these

Israelites with their compromise in this area. And again, right, he's not just pointing out that God's command is contrary to their practice, he's pointing out that, he points them, I'm sorry, to a well-known example in scripture of somebody who fell into this same trap. As it were, in verse 26, he says, did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin on account of such women? Among the many nations, there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. And that example of Solomon is really is a sobering one, isn't it? When we think about King Solomon. I mean, King Solomon, he had everything. He was really unparalleled in his earthly majesty as the king, right? He was in many ways an object of envy to others, right? The scripture tells us he was beloved of God. He was the wisest man in the world. When God asked him, you know, of all the things you can have, what would you want? And what did he ask for? He asked for wisdom. But Solomon, like his father before him, was undone by his desire for foreign women. And of course, we read the tragic story of Solomon in 1 Kings 11, four, right? When Solomon was old, his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord, his God. And it's sobering to read the story of Solomon, to know the wisdom of Solomon, and yet to understand the depth to which he had fallen. I mean, if Solomon, great King Solomon, the wisest man in the world, was unable to withstand the pressure to worship other gods because of his desire for his foreign wives, what makes anyone else, the Israelites or

any of us, to think that we could withstand that same temptation or pressure? to reject God when those closest to us reject God? Of course, the answer is we cannot, certainly not without God's help. But God's command in Scripture, of course, is very clear. and consistent throughout that God's people ought not be unequally yoked, right? To use the language of Paul in 2 Corinthians 6, 14 and following, do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers for what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God. And so this is a problem that is persistent with God's people. Certainly it was persistent in the Old Testament, it was persistent in the New, and it is persistent even in the church today. Now again, it's important to understand that the command was not simply to preserve ethnic unity. In fact, we see the very important story of Ruth, for example, in the Old Testament that There were occasions when non-Jews could marry Jews, but only when they had embraced the God of Israel, Yahweh, as the one true and living God, even so to the point where the Messianic line includes such an individual. So it really has nothing to do with ethnic purity. It has everything to do with religious purity. And so, It was to protect God's people from compromise at the center, and I shouldn't say it was, it is a command to protect God's people from compromise at the center of their most important human relationship, the relationship between a husband and a wife, right? That there is no greater, importance or greater dynamic in a marriage relationship than a shared commitment to loving, serving, and worshiping God together. Right, of all the other factors that might be considered in choosing a spouse, there's none Right, not chemistry, not appearance, not shared interests, not compatible personalities, and so on and so forth. Rather, the importance of a shared commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and his word. And the reality is, is that if God is not at the center of that relationship, then all those other things will not endure. Now if you've heard me, if you feel like you've heard me say this before, it's because I have. Because the same thing happened in Ezra chapter 9. Again, history repeating itself. over and over, right? In Ezra chapter nine, we talked about this very thing, and we saw, right, that the Israelites were marrying foreign wives, and so Ezra, back then, was lamenting and repented for the unfaithfulness of God's people. And here we are, 25 years later, with the same problem rearing its head, assuming I did the math correctly, which I think I did. But again, right, it points out the need to repeat the instruction, but also it points out the need for every generation. to be renewed in their commitment

to the authority of God's word, right? The authority of God's word in our lives, the need for God's spirit to work in our hearts that we might live in accordance to it. It points us to the need, right, to daily die to sin and live to Christ. We need to, in Colossians chapter three, I'm gonna cite a few verses there tonight, but in verse 16, he says, right, we need to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in our hearts to God. And what does that mean to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly? Well, as the passage goes on, we see in verse 18, for example, the need to apply that word of God to every aspect of our lives and our relationships, but specifically in verse 18 to our marriages, right? When it says, wives submit to your husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. That the word of God must be our guiding principle, we might say, or more than that, it must be our rule of life. It must guide us in all things,

especially and particularly our marriages. And of course, if it is not, if both parties are not committed to this, then it doesn't take long for the rails to come off, does it? Because as soon as scripture is removed from the centerpiece of our relationships, then it's up to you and I to decide what's right and wrong, or society. or whoever can manipulate the

other one better enough to get their way. And we easily can begin when scripture is removed from the center of our relationships to begin to chase after every other God that this world has to offer and worship and serve them rather than the one true and living God. And so, of course, the message

is if you are married, right, to be sure to put Christ at the center of your marriage, worship together, pray together, serve God together. And if you're not, to make sure that Christ is central to the life of anyone that you would consider as a potential mate. that they love the Lord God above all else even more than you because as we've said, right, if they do not, then it doesn't take long before the idols of this world gain a foothold in our lives and in our hearts and draw us away from God. And usually, right, it doesn't start big. It starts small. It starts, for

example, by not spending time together. in the word are not praying together as a couple. It starts by saying he's a really great guy or gal, even though he doesn't know the Lord, so I'll just date him for now and bail out later if, or before we get married if he doesn't become a believer. But that's a lie, isn't it? And that is the contagiousness of compromise. It is so easy in our minds and hearts to justify whatever is accord with our own desires. But it also points us to why

we must deal with sin harshly. And that brings us to the second point, which is that we must ruthlessly root out sin. Now, in verse 25, Nehemiah

deals harshly with sin. Right, he says he confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. Now, that is not how we should approach or deal with disobedience in the church. or in our relationships. This is not what Jesus had in mind in Matthew 18 when he said to instruct or to go to your brother in private if they've sinned against you and try to win them over. It's not through a wrestling match or a boxing match or whatever Nehemiah was doing here. Though certainly you might see similarities here between Nehemiah's action and Jesus driving the money changers out of the temple. certainly is an interesting connection there. Although still, we don't wanna write, this isn't how we deal with sin in the church, driving people out with whips or anything like that. But it does point us to the need for God's people to deal with sin seriously and definitively. Because so often, right, we accommodate sin in our lives, right? We find ways to justify it or to minimize it, right? It's not that big a deal and I can work around it and deal with it later, right? We find ways to let it continue. But the scripture warns us about this, doesn't it? It tells us, you know, Paul writes, again, in Colossians chapter three, that we must put these things to death. Right, verse five, he says, put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you. And then he lists some things, sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. In verse eight, He lists some more, but now you must put them all away. Anger, wrath, malice, slander, an obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices. Now we could spend some time certainly talking about each one of those areas of sin and the sins of the mind, the sins of the mouth. Of course, all sins being sins of the heart, but the language couldn't be clear that these things must be put away, put to death, right? Theologians call this mortification, putting death, sin in our lives, right? As John Owen famously said, be killing sin or it will kill you. There's no neutral posture when it comes to sin in our lives. We need, as God's word tells us, to drive it out, and of course we do it by the power of God's grace, but it's not just driving this out. It's also, as Paul writes in verse 10, the putting on of the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. that we put on, as it were, our new identity in Christ, and we live in light of that truth of who He is and what He has done for us, and now, by the power of His grace, who we can be and who we reflect to the world around us, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. That is what we call the vivification, the other side of sanctification, if you will, living to the things of God. Ultimately, this is what Nehemiah

points us to here in chapter 13. But most importantly, Nehemiah points us to the one who enables us to put away sin from our lives and put on the things of God. In verse 30, after he summarizes what he has done, he says, remember me, oh my God, for good. Right, again, it is not so much about all the changes that Nehemiah has made, but it is the one to whom he looks that brings true and lasting change in his life, that brings true and lasting hope for Nehemiah and the Israelites and God's people in every generation. It is only by the grace of God that we successfully can put away sin and put on the things of God. It is only by Christ's redemptive work that we can be cleansed truly from unrighteousness and reflect the grace of God to the world around us. And so let us, as this passage calls us to, as God's word calls us tonight, to ruthlessly root out sin in our lives and look to him who began a good work in you, in us, and we'll bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus. Amen.