

All right. Well, good evening again, everybody. Good to see you all as we're going to open God's Word together here in Nehemiah. Chapter 13, so we're at the end of this book that we've been looking at for a few months. But let me begin with prayer, and then we'll open the scriptures together. Gracious God in heaven, we do want to give you thanks, Lord, on this day, and Lord, we are grateful for the opportunity to come together around your word, and Lord, to hear you speak to us through that word, this word that you have given us that is profitable for life and faith and all things, Lord, that we might be built up in the grace and knowledge of Christ. And we pray, Lord, that you would do that tonight, that as we open your word, you would work in our hearts that your spirit and word would work together to conform us to the image of your Son and our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, give me the words to speak and give us the ears to hear that you might be glorified through this time. We pray in Jesus' name, amen. So Nehemiah chapter 13, and we'll read the first 22 verses. This is the word of the Lord. On that day, they read from the book of Moses in the hearing of the people, and in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, for they did not meet the people of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them. Yet our God turned the curse into a blessing. As soon as the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent. Now before this, Elisha, the priest who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God and who was related to Tobiah, prepared for Tobiah a large chamber where they had previously put the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes of grain, wine, and oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests. While this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes, king of Babylon, I went to the king. And after some time, I asked leave of the king and came to Jerusalem. And I then discovered the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, preparing for him a chamber in the courts of the house of God. and I was very angry and I threw all the household furniture of Tobiah out of the chamber. Then I gave orders and they cleansed the chambers and I brought back there the vessels of the house of God with the grain offering and the frankincense. I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them so that the Levites and the singers who did the work had fled each to his field. So I confronted the officials and said, why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses. And I appointed as treasurers

over the storehouses Shalamiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Padiah of the Levites, and as their assistant, Hanun the son of Zechar, son of Mataniah, for they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers. Remember me, O God, concerning this, and do not wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for his service. In those days I saw in Judah

people treading wine presses on the Sabbath and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys and also wine, grapes, figs and all kinds of loads which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them on the day when they sold food. Tyrians also who lived in the city brought in fish and all kinds of goods and sold them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah and Jerusalem itself. Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, what is this evil thing that you are doing profaning the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers act in this way and did not our God bring all this disaster on us and on this city? Now you are bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath. As soon as it began to grow dark at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut and gave orders that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. And I stationed some of my servants at the gates that no load might be brought in on the Sabbath day Then the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside Jerusalem once or twice. But I warned them and said to them, why do you lodge outside the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time on, they did not come on the Sabbath. Then I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves and come and guard the gates to keep the Sabbath day holy. Remember this also in my favor, oh my God, and spare me according to the greatness of your steadfast love. Well, this is the word of our God. Thanks be to God for his holy and inerrant word. Well, some of you may remember

the movie Dead Poets Society. And you might remember the very moving end of that film where Dr. Keating, who's played by Robin Williams, walks into the classroom to get his personal effects. And the headmaster, who's now teaching the class, asks him to leave. And the boys, of course, in that great moment, one by one, begin to stand up on their desks and salute Dr. Keating, saying, oh, captain, my captain. And it's a very touching moment. And he walks out with this very emotional music playing in the background. But you may not know that the original script did not end that way. Apparently in the original screenplay,

the movie was going to end with Dr. Keating in a hospital bed dying of leukemia. That this disease was apparently part of the original story. I don't know if that would have been the last scene per se, but nevertheless, the script was that the story would end with Dr. Keating fated to die in a

hospital, and the boys left to continue their studies without him under the tutelage of the headmaster who was now teaching the class. Dr. Nolan was his name in the movie. So not exactly a feel-good story, is it, for it to end in such a way. Not that it's the happiest ending, necessarily. It's a moving ending, the way that it was ultimately filmed. But it was, we might say, an improvement from the original script. perhaps you're hearing this and you're wondering, well, okay, so why didn't Disney go through with the original manuscript or screen film or at least the original writing

of the movie? Right? Why not end the story with the original script? Why not end the story with the main character dying in a hospital bed and the boys faded to misery in an English class with a teacher they didn't like. Well, I think we all know because we need to have a happy ending, right? I, for one, am glad for happy endings, you know, whether it's a book or a movie. I mean, life is difficult enough, so who needs, you know, more tragedies in our lives? But more importantly, right, the value of a true happy ending is the redemptive value of the story is often communicated through that happy ending. Now, certainly, right, not all

secular films and literature do a good job of capturing that redemptive aspect, but in other words, I think you get the idea. But when we look here at the

ending of the book of Nehemiah, We do not end on a happy note, right? After navigating through all the ups and downs, of the plight of God's people, right? In returning from exile and returning now to the land. And right after having struggled through, you know, the pattern of sin and repentance and renewal over and over again, we come to chapter 13, perhaps expecting that we're gonna end on this high note with God's people restored in the land and true worship in the land. and so on, a happy ending, we might say. And Drs. Thomas and Evers talk about this expectation in their commentaries, but that's not what we find here in Nehemiah chapter 13. Rather, we find the reminder of an important truth that I think we all know, And that is that this side of glory, the cycle of sin, repentance, and renewal will continue and that God's people will continue to struggle against the enemies of God, the world, the flesh, and the devil. But also, it points us to the fact here that Nehemiah 13, though it is the last chapter chronologically in the Old Testament, is not the end of the story. Rather, it sets the stage for and shows the need, we might say, to the true climax of the story. the ultimate happy ending, we might say, which is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, His redemption of sinners, His life, death, resurrection, and final victory over sin and death. And so, As we look at chapter 13, really it begins on a fairly positive note. I mean in verses

1 through 3, we see how the book of Moses, right, is being read in the hearing of the people, it says, and in it they read that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God. So most likely they're reading the scriptures, Deuteronomy 23, perhaps. Commentators speculate that that is probably the passage that's being given because that's the instructions that are given in Deuteronomy 23. with the result here that the Israelites separated from themselves all of those of foreign descent. And of course, right, the important point about that, it's not a racial issue, it's a religious one. Because the Ammonites and the Moabites were those who worshiped false gods. And so, right, it wasn't appropriate. It wasn't glorifying to God for those who worshiped idols to be in the assembly of God's people, at least not until they repented and entrusted in the God of Israel, Yahweh, the one true and living God. And so since that was not the case, here we read, the Israelites separated themselves from all those who did not worship the true God. So far, so good. But then the story continues.

And in verses four and following, we begin to have Nehemiah explain to us or walk us through, really, a series of realities that portray a decline in the spiritual vitality of God's people. And we see here in the years following the renewal of God's covenant, right, at the end of chapter 12, which we looked at last week, and the joy that came from this renewal and this worship of God at the end of chapter 12, in verses four to nine, we read a disappointing reality. we hear that Tobiah the Ammonite, note Ammonite, is given asylum among God's people. And not just among God's people, but in the temple where worship was to happen. Now you may remember Tobiah from

earlier in the book of Nehemiah back in chapter six. He was someone who was well-connected within the community of God's people. He had married into the people of God, of course contrary to what God's people were instructed to do, to not marry. people that did not worship the one true God. But back in Nehemiah chapter 6, verses 17 to 19, we read that Tobiah did this. It says, in the days of the nobles of Judah, I'm sorry. In those days, the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shekiniah, the son of Erah, and his son Jehonanan had taken the daughter of Meshulam, the son of Berechias, his wife, Also, they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him, and Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid." Nehemiah is speaking about his own interactions here with Tobiah, but we see here in this passage that Tobiah, right, again unbiblically married into a key Israelite family, and he, not only he but his son did, and so he's using his connections here in chapter 6 to really throw his weight around, to try to intimidate Nehemiah who was trying to make biblical reforms in the community of God's people. And I'm not going to

spend too much time on Tobiah tonight, but It's important for us to understand who this is and what he's doing, and more importantly, what his presence in the community of God's people represents, and particularly within the temple represents. And ultimately what it represents, what it communicates is that the reality that compromise among the people of God leads to apostasy within the people of God. And we see it in a few different ways, not just with Tobiah, certainly we do see it there that in verses four and following we see this enemy of God's people, allowed to set up shop, if you will, in the temple. We see, we read it also, the neglect of the Levites in verses 10 through 14, this group of people that the people of God were supposed to take care of because they hadn't been given an inheritance among the tribes. They were to live off of the 10% that was contributed from the community to support them. And so we read here that they also are being neglected. And also in this passage in verses 15 to 22, we see the people of God had basically forgotten. about remembering the Sabbath day and keeping it holy. And next week, or two weeks from now actually, we'll see their intermarriage with foreigners and so on. But that's next week. So, what was going on? How do we go from this place of renewal and joy and hope to a place of apostasy, really. Well, for one thing, Nehemiah had been gone for 12 years. It's an important or an easy thing to miss but an important fact as we read this story and really it's only when we carefully look at it to see because it's only when we compare verse six to the rest of the story that you notice Nehemiah's been gone a while. You see, with the story of Nehemiah, the first 12 chapters and three verses, occur within, I'm sorry, the first three verses of chapter 13 occur within a seven month period of time. It's in the 20th year of King Artaxerxes, which would have been around 445 BC, but in verse six, We read that while this was taking place, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes, king of Babylon, I went to the king, and after some time, I asked leave of the king and came to Jerusalem, and then I discovered the evil that Elishab had done for Tobiah. Okay, so what happened was, once Nehemiah had finished the work, The covenant renewal had taken place. There is great rejoicing among God's people. Nehemiah goes back to the capital to resume his duties with the king. And so this, what we read in verses four and following, is happening 12 years later, at least his return. And upon his arrival, he is seeing everything that went wrong while he was gone. Now, perhaps Nehemiah is culpable, in a sense, in this situation. Perhaps he didn't train up proper leaders to take things forward while he was gone, returning to the Persian capital. But ultimately, right, this points

us to a problem that persists among God's people throughout scripture. And that is that God's people, and it's true in the church today, that we are quick to forget the priorities that God has given them and replace them with our own desires. our own preferences, our own agendas. We're quick to forget the importance of God's truth as our ultimate standard and rely too much on the wisdom of the world, the currents of our culture, and sometimes the preservation of our relationships with others to determine how we live and how we worship. And so really there's two sort of specific ways that we see this compromise played out in these verses that I'll talk about briefly tonight. The first is the compromise of resources, and secondly, the compromise of time. And really both are very important because how we use our resources, how we use our time ultimately point in our symptomatic of our view, our relationship with God Almighty. And we see these truths illustrated here in this passage. The first being the compromise of resources. As I've already talked about, Tobiah was not a good guy. He was an enemy of God's people, and it had been revealed as such. Certainly an enemy of Nehemiah, but nevertheless, we find this enemy of God's people being given refuge or asylum within the temple of God. And notice it was Elishab, the priest, who should have been protecting the sanctity of the temple, Who let him in? It's always a bad sign when the men who are called to lead the people in the worship of God compromise the sanctity of it for their own interests. And if it wasn't bad enough that this Assyrian was allowed in the temple, we read in verse five that the chamber he was given was where they were to store Such things as the grain offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the ties of grain, wine, and oil, it says, which were given by commandment to the Levites, singers and gatekeepers, and the contributions for the priests. And so the very things, the very space, if you will, that was reserved for the preservation of proper worship for God's people was now being used for the promotion, yeah, the promotion of that which was contrary to God. the very provisions that God had made for His people, and particularly for His Levites, were now being used for the advantage of individuals who had no interest in the proper worship of God. That the needs of the Levites, the servants of God, were not being provided for. the things that were used. I mean, when we read that list, it seems just like some things that used to be stored there. Well, these things were needed and necessary, in fact, prescribed by God to be used in the worship of God in His holy temple. And so all of these things are being pushed out. of the space that God had given for His people to give honor and glory to Him. And we know that ultimately Elishab, who was a priest of God and was unwilling to stand upon the truth

of God's Word, The bigger issue that is described here is that those who were to be committed to the people of God and the worship of God were using those things for their own interests, unwilling to stand on the truth of God's Word and giving in to the cultural pressures around them or even the relational pressures around them. They preferred rather to misuse God's resources and neglect the needs of God's servants for their own personal gain. And of course, these aren't just things that happened long ago in a faraway place. These are the realities that God's people in every age in the church today still contend with. That we too can be willing to compromise, to give the things of God a lesser priority if it will gain us better standing with our peers, or even our family members, or to gain us comforts in this life. When it comes to the use of God's resources for the glory of God, I had a pastor who used to say, give me five minutes to review your checkbook ledger and I'll tell you what's important to you. The point being that we use our resources, the things we have on the things that matter most to us. and how we use those things is ultimately a reflection of our faith and trust in God. So first, the compromise of resources. Secondly, the compromise of time, and I'll be brief, because I'm short on it right now. Verse 15 and following, we read that the people were treading wine presses on the Sabbath. They were bringing in heaps of grain, it says, And ultimately they're just treating the Sabbath day as any other day of the week. And obviously this is a gross violation of the fourth commandment to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. They are neither remembering it nor keeping it holy in this passage. And I'm not gonna get into the specifics. Okay, what does it mean to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy and so on? But really, this passage points us to the necessity for God's people to use our time, and really it's not our time, it's his time that he gives us for his purposes and his glory and not our own. God has designed our week in such a way that he has given us one day in seven to be free, to rest from all our worldly cares and vocations, and to focus solely upon him. and worshiping Him and resting in Him. It's a blessing that He has given His people, not a burden. And of course, that's not what we see happening here in Nehemiah 13 right there, using the Sabbath for what they think is their own advantage, buying and selling and doing everything they want. And of course, while we may not be doing the same things that the Israelites are doing in chapter 13, the reality is that we too can fall into this same trap, can't we? We can fall into the idea of neglecting the Sabbath day. Again, not to get into specifics of what that looks like, but of course the biggest thing being the priority of worship on the Lord's Day. That God has given us that day to come into His presence with God's people to rejoice and worship Him and to not be concerned about all the other things out there,

right? Because what are we saying when we don't give priority to worshipping the Lord on the Lord's day, when we neglect to rest? Well, in some sense, we're saying we know better than God, right? We're saying, yes, Lord, I know you've designed time in this way that we might have one day and seven to rest, but you know, I actually know a little better than you do of what's good for me. Or we're saying that even though I know what I ought to do, these other things are actually a greater priority for me today or this week. than the priorities that you have given us. In other words, my priorities, my agenda, my relationships, not yours. Right, to put a twist on the checkbook example, we might say show me your calendar and I'll show you what's truly important to you. Worship is a priority, not just because God commands it as though that weren't enough, but because God designed us for that. God designed us to worship Him, and it is only when we do what He has designed us to do that we truly know that the joy, the blessing, of worship of the Lord's day. And so, we see here in this chapter 13 of Nehemiah, the reality, the struggle, the danger that when we neglect the means of grace, it doesn't take long before we forget the Lord altogether. In Nehemiah 13, it was 12 years. But the reality is that when we neglect the means of grace that God has given us in our lives, it takes much less time than that. before we find ourselves in a dry and barren land, spiritually speaking. Rather, we must have the hearts, as it were, of Nehemiah. Now, we don't want to condone, we can't condone all of Nehemiah's behavior in this chapter, but the zeal by which he pursued the things of God, right? We read how he threw all the furniture out of the chamber. In verse 11, when he finds out that the Levites aren't getting their portions, he confronts the officials, he appoints faithful men. to take care of the Levites, and when he discovers the Sabbath is being ignored completely, he shuts all the doors, he turns away those who are trying to do business, he drives them from the camp outside the gates, so the true worship might be restored. Brothers and sisters, it's a call for us to be zealous for the truth. It is a call for us to root out sin in our lives and in our hearts, putting to death those things that take us away from God and to look to Christ. the one who was zealous for righteousness, who drove out the money changers from the temple, but who himself bore the consequences for our unfaithfulness, for our selfishness, for our neglect. of the blessings that God has given us in His means of grace, our neglect of His grace, so that we might have the opportunity to worship and serve Him with all that we have and all that we are by the power of His grace. All right, well, I've gone way over time. Sorry about that, but we need to spend some time praying for our church. So let us, let's



actually go right into praying for our missionaries. You should have the sheets there, and we can Go ahead and just pray out from where you are tonight. We're gonna be praying for Annie Kenyon whom some of you know, but maybe not everybody knows one of our newer missionaries in Austria Keith and Rhoda Ackerman who work with the Christian Hospital Cywall in Pakistan a moment of hope one of our local ministries Haiti under God Daily break, ministry, and one of our unreached people groups. So why don't we pray for these from our tables out loud so all can hear.