

## SERMON TRANSCRIPT

05.17.2023 | Distractions and Discernment | Nehemiah 6:1-14 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible, I want you to turn with me to Nehemiah chapter six. We're walking through the book of Nehemiah. We're seeing how Nehemiah is leading the people of Israel as they've come back to Jerusalem from exile to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, and particularly to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. And as they've been doing this work, we've seen over the last couple of weeks that there are a number of obstacles and opposition that comes when we seek to do the work of God. We saw a couple of weeks ago that often the opposition will come from outside, that people and things from outside the people of God will often oppose the work of God being done. We saw that there was discouragement and there was doubt trying to be put into the people of God by the opposition, by the enemy, but yet the people of God continued on in the work. But then we saw last week that so often, the opposition and the obstacles don't come from outside the people of God, but come from within the people of God. That so often we are our own worst enemy. We saw the wealthy and the influential in Israel taking advantage of and even oppressing the poor in their community, those who are at a disadvantage. And thankfully Nehemiah gave us an example of what it looks like to confront injustices within our community, what it looks like to be generous as we lead.

Now as we come to chapter six, we revisit some of the same themes from chapter four two weeks ago. In fact, you'll see some of the same characters that we saw in Nehemiah two and then in Nehemiah four, be at work in Nehemiah six. But their approach is a little bit different. You see in Nehemiah chapter four, the approach of the opposition was very outright. It was very strongly opposing trying to discourage the people of God with threats, with taunts. But here the approach of the opposition is much more subtle. Comes not so much through seeking to discourage, but really seeking to distract. And as we the people of God seek to do the work of God, we need to be prepared for both. There'll be times when the opposition comes in such an outward blatant way seeking to discourage that we need to have courage that is based on our faith in God. But there'll be other times when we face distractions and what we need, yes is courage, but we also need discernment to know what is true, to know what is right, to know what we should be focused on and what we shouldn't be focused on. And that too comes from our faith in God.

So today as we come to Nehemiah chapter six and we study the first part of this chapter, we just want us to consider the distractions that likely will come to us as we seek to obey God and how we could have discernment to see through the distractions and continue on in the work that God has called us to. So let me read to us from Nehemiah chapter six. We're gonna be looking at verses one through 14 this morning. Nehemiah writes, "Now when Sanballat and Tabiah and Geshim the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and there was no breach left in it, although up to that time, I had not set up the doors and the gates. Sanballat and Geshim sent to me saying, come and let us meet together and hakaphurim and the plain of Ono. And they intended to do me harm. And I sent messengers to them saying, I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you? And they sent to me four times in this way and I answered them in the same manner. In the same way, Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. And it was written, it is reported among the nations, and Geshim also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel. That is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports, you wish to become their king. And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem, there is a king in Judah. And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together. Then I sent to him saying, no such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind. For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking their hands will drop from the work and will not be done. But now, O God, strengthen my hands. Now, when I went to the house of Shemaiah, the son of Deliah, son of Mehed table, who was confined to his home, he said, let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night. But I said, should such a man as I run away, and what man such as I could go into the temple and live, I will not go in. And I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tabiah and Sanbalat had hired him. For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me. Remember Tabiah and Sanbalat, oh my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess, Noah Diah, and the rest of the prophets who wanted to make me afraid.

You know, there's been quite a few times whenever I've told one of my sons to go in to do something. Just to be honest, at this stage of life, we're not asking for anything big usually. Like it's pretty simple tasks. Like, can you just go and change your clothes, or can you go and brush your teeth? Can you go put your shoes on? We're about ready to leave. And oftentimes what will happen is about five minutes go by and I'll go into the room where I've sent them, and they've not done one thing that I've told them to do. Instead they're maybe playing with a toy, or reading a book, or doing just something totally different. I'll say, hey, wait a minute, what happened, well, what I told you to do, is just asking you to change your clothes. Why aren't you doing that? Oh, sorry dad, I forgot. You forgot, it's been five minutes and I told you to do one thing, how do you forget? And essentially, they may not always put it like this, but essentially say, dad, I just got distracted. I saw this and I just wanted to play with it, and I forgot about what you told me to do. A lot of times in the moment I get frustrated, because I'm trying to leave, or I'm trying to go do something.

But usually after the moment, I start to realize how much I see myself in them. How often I get distracted very quickly? How often God has told me to do something, and on my way just to go do it, I quickly turn to other things. Sometimes I'll turn to good things, just should not be having my focus right then, but they are good things. Sometimes I'll turn to sinful things that I should not be thinking about or focusing on at all. Yet I get distracted, maybe you can relate to this. Maybe even as we've been talking about throughout this series, God wanting to do a work of rebuilding and renewal in your life or in our church. Maybe you've sought to begin that and the enemy has distracted you in some way. Something has come up that's taken your focus off of God and what he wants to do in you and through you. I think that's what Nehemiah 6 is helpful to teach us about. What we see in this part of the story is a number of distractions that come Nehemiah's way, and they give us a picture of the way that distractions often come in our lives, the forms that distractions often take. So quickly, let me just show you three examples we see in this part of the story of the way that distractions will often come so that we can identify them in our own lives.

First, distractions will often come through personal diversions. Distractions from the work of God, the work of rebuilding, of renewal, of what God wants you to do, distractions from that will often come through personal diversions. What I mean by that is that so often the enemy will come to us in a personal way and draw our attention away from God and what he wants to do, they're distractions that just come to us personally. You know, before there was these taunts that went out to the whole people from Sanbalat and Tabayan from others. They were taunting them, jeering at them. Everybody was hearing it. But now what happens in this part of the story is they start to come to Nehemiah much more personally. And they come with a much more subtle approach. Rather than outright taunts, they come with invitations. So just notice what happens in the beginning part of the story. In verse two it says, "Sanbalat and Geshem sent to me saying, "'Come and let us meet together, "'Hakufurim in the plain of Ono.' "But they intended to do me harm."

Notice that there's subtlety here in their approach. This isn't an outright opposition to Nehemiah and the work that he is doing. This is a personal diversion. This isn't a blatant confrontation. This is a subtle invitation. Hey, we know we've been against you, but why don't you just come and why don't you just talk with us? Nehemiah sees through this. He knows that they mean him harm. We'll talk about how we can have that discernment a little bit later, but just see the personal diversion that they are bringing Nehemiah's way. And he refuses it, but it comes time after time. Notice what he says in verse four. "They sent to me four times in this way, "and I answered him in the same manner." Four times they try to distract Nehemiah in this way. They try to divert him from the work that he is doing by saying, "Hey, why don't you come and meet with us "and let's talk about things." The Bible does tell us that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us, but we can't think that that's just gonna be a one-time thing. We can't think that we will just resist a distraction or resist the opposition, and that's the end of it. So often the enemy will come time after time in repeated attacks to discourage us, or in this way distract us from what God has called us to do.

I think we especially need to be mindful about this as we live in an age of distraction. I mean, the enemy has so many resources he can use to distract us from what God has called us to do. Just an ironic personal illustration for myself. As I was writing this portion of the sermon, I was typing it out on a Google Doc, I saw an email come through, and I thought, "Oh, that looks important." And I stopped writing the sermon, and I started reading the email. And I responded to the email, and when I got to the end of responding to the email, I thought, "Okay, where was I?" Oh, that's right, I was writing a part of the sermon that's on distraction. Let me get back to that. Like there was just a moment-by-moment example in my own life of how I'm seeking to do something that God's put before me, and technology allows a distraction right into my line of thinking, and I allow it to take me away from what I was focused on just a moment

before. How have you been distracted, personally diverted from what God wants to say to you, do in your life, do through you this week? I mean, how has your phone distracted you this week? How has your phone made you not listen to God because you were listening to someone else? How has your phone kept you from being present with your family, with your friends, at work?

Maybe it's not just always our phone. Distractions come in so many different forms, but how have you seen the enemy come to you personally and begin to divert your attention from God, from what he is wanting to do in your life, what he is wanting to do through you, that work of rebuilding and renewal that maybe you started, but the enemy is distracting you from. We have to know that sometimes the opposition won't be so blatant and outright, but it'll be more subtle. Sometimes it'll happen through personal diversions. Four times, Sanbalat and Tabiah come in this way, and the fifth time, they change their tactic. Notice what happens in verse five. It says in the same way, Sanbalat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand. Here comes not a personal invitation for Nehemiah to stop the work, but an open letter. It's making a big announcement to everybody in the community. This shows us another form that distractions will often take. Distractions will come through personal diversions, but sometimes distractions will come through public accusations. Sometimes the enemy will seek to distract you from the work that God is doing in you and through you by bringing other people into it or bringing social pressures, involving more people than just a personal diversion.

So an open letter is different than what was happening before. An open letter is read in front of people. As a leader especially, this is important for Nehemiah to consider because now what's happening is not just a personal invitation that could distract him, but it's something that might distract or discourage the people that he is leading. And notice what the open letter says. Verse six, it is written, and it was written in the letter, it is reported among the nations and Gesham also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel. That is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports, you wish to become their king. You've also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem. There is a king in Judah. And now the king will hear of these reports. So now come, let us take counsel together. So he refused their invitation to come and talk with him, so now they try to put some pressure on Nehemiah. And what they say is, hey, we've heard some rumors going around. Rumors that you're not just fine being the governor of Jerusalem or of Judah, but you actually wanna become king. The reason you're building up this wall is that you want to rebel against King Artaxerxes. You want to establish your own kingdom. And in fact, I've not just heard this in Samaria, but in Gesham they're hearing this as well. And if this word is spreading, certainly it's going to one day reach Artaxerxes. And how is he gonna respond?

And actually there's some precedents for this. I told you before that Ezra and Nehemiah kind of tell the same story, little bit different times, different perspectives, but really the work of rebuilding. If you go to Ezra chapter four, you'll find that the enemies of that time, they actually sent a false report to the king of Persia, saying the people are going to rebel. And the king actually sends word to the people of Israel and Jerusalem to stop the work. So this type of tactic has worked before. And Sanbalat and Tabiah are banking on Nehemiah knowing this and so they make these kind of public accusations, saying we're sure that this word's gonna reach the king, so won't you come and talk to us? Take a break from that work and join us in this distraction because of this public pressure that you're facing.

Now listen, probably most of us aren't maybe out front leaders like Nehemiah, so maybe public accusations won't take such a public form. I mean maybe they will in your life, depending upon the role that you have. But as I just think about this, I was thinking about the way that so often the enemy will work, not just through a personal diversion, but through public and social pressures. So often other people are brought in to distract us from the work that God is doing in our lives. I mean maybe you're just seeking to be a faithful Christian in your workplace and there's social pressures on you to not speak about or live out your faith. Maybe you share what you believe, what the Bible teaches. Maybe especially you share just what you believe about the Bible teaches on sexuality, something that would be maybe a bit controversial in our city and in our culture. And now people won't talk to you or they treat you differently. Maybe you seek to share the good news of Jesus or just what you were doing at church this weekend and somebody reports you to HR. I don't know what kind of social pressures, public pressures you might face in your workplace, but I have to think that the enemy will often probably use other people to distract you. Not to outright discourage you, they may not be mean to you, they may not say rude things to you, but maybe they'll just start to ignore you. Maybe there'll just be some pressure for you to conform to the world, for you to leave the work that God wants to do in you and through you. So often it won't just be just a personal thing that comes your way, it might be a public accusation, rumors that go around, gossip that has spread.

Distraction can take many different forms. The last one that I wanna just point out to you from the story is that sometimes it doesn't just come personally or even kind of through public people, but sometimes it gets really subtle and it gets really deceptive because it takes the form of false piety.

Sometimes distractions will take the form of false piety. And when I use that phrase, part of me just wanted another P word to put in there with personal and public. So I use this phrase false piety, but it communicates this idea that there's the appearance of righteousness, there's the appearance of goodness, of you doing the right thing, but it's actually immoral, it's actually unrighteous. It actually is against what God wants you to do, but it's very deceptive, it's very subtle, it seems like it is true, it is good, it is righteous. So notice what happens in the last part of the section that we read. Nehemiah says he goes to visit somebody. Says in verse 10 that he went to the house of Shemaiah, the son of Deliah, son of Mehed table, who was confined to his home. Now what we can probably best ascertain is that this guy Shemaiah is a priest there in Jerusalem.

We don't know exactly why he's confined to his home. It doesn't seem like he's homebound because he wants to go to the temple, but maybe he actually uses fear as he's trying to make Nehemiah afraid. Maybe he says I'm afraid to leave my house, so Nehemiah you need to come to my house, come meet with me in my home, and then when Nehemiah gets there, you have to imagine Nehemiah's coming to a priest, a man of God, expecting to hear a word of God, this is what he hears. Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple. Let us close the door of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night.

Now you think about this. This sounds somewhat similar to what Nehemiah's heard before, threats of violence, threats of someone wanting to do him harm. I mean in some ways Shemaiah is just there trying to instill fear in Nehemiah, as has been done before, those attempts have been done before, but now it's much more subtle. Listen to how good it sounds. Nehemiah, let's not just meet in my house, but let's go to the house of God. I mean the house of God, that's a place of refuge, of safety, let's go find safety there. You say, well what's wrong with this invitation? Why is this false piety? Well see, it was wrong at this stage in Israel's history, for anyone but a priest to enter the temple. Nehemiah is a leader, he is a governor, he seems to be a man of God, but he is not a priest. It would be unlawful for him to enter the temple. And there were some exceptions that were made. Certain times when people's lives were at risk or there was threats against them, they could enter the temple and maybe that's what Shemaiah is trying to play on, but what's going on in Nehemiah's life and his situation doesn't meet those requirements. For Nehemiah to go into the temple at Shemaiah's request would be to be breaking the laws and the commandments of God in order to protect himself.

Think about how deceptive this is. A man of God telling you a word that he has received from God, a word that is going to protect you. So often distractions will come in this form. You'll find people who claim to be Christians, who claim to be pastors, claim to be theologians, church leaders, you'll find them online, you'll find them in person, all sorts of different places, saying things that sound good. Saying things that might even quote some scripture. Giving the appearance of goodness and godliness and righteousness, but seeking to distract you from what God is doing. They'll say things, well, you know, the Christian thing is, and they'll try to make you think that you have to do that in order to be a Christian. Or they'll say the loving thing is, and if you don't do what they're saying, then you're not living in love.

People will use this type of approach all the time to support their own agendas. I think we see this especially politically. I mean, just if you look at the political parties on both the right and the left, you'll find people claiming the name of God, claiming the name of Jesus, but presenting a false piety, saying this is what Christians should do, but actually giving you something that goes against God's word. You see, distractions come in many different forms, and they're very deceptive. It's not always so outright like taunts and jeers and just threats to try to discourage. It's just trying to get you to take your focus off of God, off of the work that he wants you to do. What we need here is we need discernment. Nehemiah, he sees through the lies. He sees through this false prophet who has sold himself out. He sees through all the deception that is being brought before him by using discernment. We need the same discernment, and I wanna just walk through this passage and show you how Nehemiah gives us an example of discernment.

But before we look at three specific examples, just a brief word, something that kind of underlies all of it seems Nehemiah's life and this discernment, and that is the importance of prayer. One of the things that's just kind of hidden in

this passage, and we won't spend a lot of time on because we've looked at it throughout this series already, but if you wanna discern what is true and what is not true, if you wanna keep your focus on God and the work that he has called you to do, there's an importance on continual communication with God. As Nehemiah faces these distractions, he says in verse nine, right in the middle of the passage, "For they all wanted to frighten us, "thinking their hands will drop from the work, "and it will not be done." And then there's this brief prayer, "But now, O God, strengthen my hands." We've seen Nehemiah do this before, just lift up a quick prayer. Here the prayer is, "God, give me the strength "for what you have called me to do." Shouldn't that be the prayer of every Christian each and every day? God, strengthen my hands for your work. Would you just be committed to lifting up that quick prayer throughout this week? Just write it down, type it in your phone, just remember the quick prayer for God to strengthen you. When you start to get distracted, would you just pray that prayer? When you start to feel weak, would you just pray that prayer? God, strengthen my hands. Strengthen me for the work that you have placed before me.

What underlies all of Nehemiah's ability to discern, to continue on the work that God has given him is this attitude of prayer. He just keeps praying to God. He even ended this section that we read with a prayer. Verse 14, "Remember, Tabiah and Sanballat, oh my God, "according to these things that they did, "and also the prophetess, Noah Daya, "and the rest of the prophets, "who wanted to make me afraid." Nehemiah doesn't feel the need to respond. He doesn't feel the need to get back, to take revenge. Why? Because he trusts that God's in control. So instead of saying things back to them, instead of trying to get back at them, he just prays to God that God would settle things, that God would handle things. The more you are in an attitude of prayer, the more you're in communication with God, the better you will be able to discern how you should respond, how you can ignore distractions. But particularly, in each one of these distractions that come, Nehemiah gives us a picture of what discernment looks like. So let me just walk through this passage briefly with you, and I just wanna help you see how we can exercise the same discernment. One, we see in the story that discernment requires remembering the importance of God's work.

In order to discern what is something good for us to be focused on and what is not, what's just a distraction and what's worth our attention, we need to remember the importance of God's work. The same Latin to Nehemiah, they come to Nehemiah and they say, we want you to come and want you to meet with us, come and take counsel with us, and I love Nehemiah's response in verse three. I sent messengers to them saying, I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you? I mean, isn't that just such a great response from Nehemiah? I'm doing something far more important than you could ever bring to my attention. Why should I stop doing what God has called me to do to engage in this conversation with you? I remember a few years ago, back when I was still on Twitter, I was reading a Christian pastor on Twitter saying some things that God was doing in him and through him. He was just kind of speaking the truth out there. And just like so often happens on social media, all these people showed up in his replies, wanting to bring up different things, wanting to have different conversations, and he just responded with this verse. I'm doing a great work that God has called me to do. Why should I stop that work to focus on this conversation that you want to have?

One of the keys to knowing what is worth our attention and what's just a distraction is remembering that what God has called us to is vastly more important than anything else we can do in this world. Why? Because the work of God has eternal significance. What God has called you to in being a disciple, a follower of Jesus, and in making disciples is far more significant than anything else you can do in this world. What God has called you to, to love and live for Jesus and to lead others to do the same is far more important than anything else you could spend your time on. I'm not saying our jobs aren't important. I'm not saying our relationships aren't important. They are. They just all need to serve this end of what God has called us to. To honor him, to follow him in your singleness and in your marriage, as you raise kids and as you care for aging parents, as you're in the workplace and as you're at school. Wherever you are, whatever situation God has placed you in, remember that what he has called you to is of eternal significance. Use whatever season of life you're in, whatever relationships you have, whatever interactions you have, to make eternal investments. Don't get distracted with all the things around you, but rather use the things that are around you. The people that are around you, don't use them, but have conversations with them that are of eternal significance. Keep your focus on what God wants you to do, where he has placed you.

Remember the importance of the work of God. Allow that to push away the personal diversions. So often the things that we are looking at on our phone, our computers, the things that we're talking about or thinking about, won't matter in all

of eternity. The things that we accumulate in this world, the things that we accomplish in this world will not matter in eternity. Make eternal investments. Remember the importance of the work that God has called you to, and allow that to bring discernment into your life as to what's worth your attention and what's just a diversion or a distraction. The discernment requires remembering the importance of God's work. Secondly, discernment requires trusting that the truth will prevail. Discernment requires trusting that the truth will prevail. It can be tempting sometimes to want to respond to every rumor, every gossip, to give in to every public pressure. We need discernment to know, what do we actually need to respond to and what should we just ignore? Sometimes we can discern that by just trusting that what is true, what is right, will show in the end. Maybe it won't show in this conversation, maybe it won't even show while I'm still at this job, maybe it won't even show in my lifetime. But we can trust that in the end, God's truth will prevail. That gives us discernment to know how we should respond. Nehemiah exhibited this for us in verse eight as they bring these accusations and this open letter against him. He said to them, "Those such things, as you say, have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind." Nehemiah says, "I don't need to come and talk to you because I know you're just making things up in your mind." He trusts that there is something that is true and the truth will prevail. So many times we can block out public pressures, social pressures, things that are said about us by just trusting that the truth will prevail.

When Elena and I first moved to Las Vegas and we got to our church there in Las Vegas, there was some church conflict that was just coming to a head. In fact, it came to a head just like upon our arrival or like about a month after we got there, there was almost this church split. And part of it was there was this small group of influential people who really wanted to see the pastor of that church step away. And they really didn't have good reason for wanting that, but they began to circulate emails. They began to write their own open letters, accusing the pastor of certain things, saying certain things about him. And what I was even just early on in my time there was my pastor not respond to any one of those rumors, not send out his own emails, not accuse the people or say anything bad about them, but just trusted the process the church had to get to the truth that the truth would prevail. He acted in a godly way, seeking to honor the Lord and trusting that God would provide and work things out as he wanted them to be. So many times this is how we can respond. If we would just trust that God is in control, that his truth will prevail, that what is right will be right in the long run. Again, maybe we won't see it in our lifetime. Maybe we won't be able to feel the freedom or the victory of being proven right, but God, his truth will prevail. You don't have to respond to everything. You don't have to get distracted by every pressure, by everything people say. Sometimes you can just ignore it, trusting that the truth will prevail.

We need discernment to know what is worth our attention and what's not. Remembering God's work and the eternal significance of it will help us in that. Remembering that God's truth alone will prevail will help us in that. And then lastly, discernment requires the fact that we need to reject spiritual compromise. Discernment requires rejecting spiritual compromise. In other words, sometimes we can tell what is just a distraction by asking ourselves the questions, the question, is this having me compromise on what God has told me to do? So many times we can block out what is gonna distract us from the work of God by simply saying, am I going against what God has commanded me to do in his word or what he has called me to do in this season of life? We can have discernment by rejecting spiritual compromise.

There's this situation with this priest when he says, come on Nehemiah, let's go to the temple. And what Nehemiah does is he shows he not only knows the truth of God, but he trusts that what God has commanded is good. Listen to what he says in verse 11. I said, should such a man as I run away, and what man such as I could go into the temple and live, I will not go in. Nehemiah knew that it was wrong for him to enter the temple by God's command. He knew stories of how people had unlawfully entered the temple before and they had developed leprosy or they had gotten sick and died. He knew that what was being proposed to him to go into the temple for protection was actually gonna bring just the opposite into his life. So he knows the truth of God and he believes the truth of God is what will actually protect him.

Listen, God will never call you to do something against his commands for your own protection. If what you believe is going to provide for your needs causes you to go against what God has called you to do, it's not from God. If you believe what's really going to satisfy causes you to disobey one of God's commands, go against his design for your life, it is not going to be the satisfaction that God wants for you. Reject this idea that in order for us to be protected, we need to go against what God wants us to do. It's a lie from the enemy that he's been using from the beginning. Believe that God's word is what is good. Know the truth of God's word and believe that is what actually protects and provides and satisfy.

Nehemiah believes this. This is how he knows and responds, verses 12 and 13. He says, "I understood and saw that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Dabiah and Sanballat had hired him. For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way and sin, so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me." Nehemiah sees through it and he says, "I will not sin against God."

I heard one pastor say, Nehemiah was more afraid of sinning than he was of death. Their threat is somebody's coming to kill you, just break God's command, make an exception for yourself this time and you'll be safe. Nehemiah feared sinning more than he feared dying. Is that true for us? Shouldn't that be even more true for us? I mean, if we look at the cross of Jesus Christ, shouldn't it lead us to fear sin more than we fear death? When we look at the cross and we see Jesus laying down his life, experiencing the wrath of God because of our sin, how could we take our sin so lightly? When we see him bearing our sin in this way. But because Jesus died on the cross, we know that we will never experience true death, that we will live with him forever. Why would we fear death more than sin? Mrs. Y, each time as we come to the end of a part of Nehemiah's story, I want us to, yes, look at Nehemiah so often as a good example, but let us look to Jesus because what he has done is of infinitely greater value. I mean, Jesus faced plenty of personal diversions. It wasn't just Sanballat coming to him, wanting to meet with him, it was Satan himself coming to Jesus, saying, "Come, talk with me." Jesus refused. Jesus faced all sorts of different public pressures. He faced public praise and public accusations. On Sunday, they were saying, "Hosanna, "let's crown him the king of Israel." Then they were saying on Friday, "Let's crucify him and kill him as a criminal." Guess what? Jesus ignored both of them. He set his face to the cross, the Bible says. Jesus rejected spiritual compromise at every turn.

He could have pursued the crown without first going to the cross. He could have let the people make him king. He could have brought himself down off the cross and saved himself, but he rejected the spiritual compromise. Why? Because he had set his face to the cross because he knew what he was called to do. He knew what his mission was. And because Jesus fulfilled his mission, we have the ability to fulfill the mission that he has given us. We have the ability to block out distractions, to ignore threats, to continue on in the work that he has given us. Because Jesus not only went to the cross, but he rose from the dead and he now reigns and he is coming back again. And guess what? Because we believe Jesus is reigning as king and he is going to one day return as king, we know where all of history is headed. We know what really matters. We know what's going to last in the long run. We know what has eternal significance. Because Jesus has died and risen from the dead, because he reigns as king and is returning as king, we can ignore distractions and give ourselves to what eternally matters.

We know that this mission will be accomplished and we've been invited into it. And not only that, but he has given us his spirit who indwells us to have the discernment, to know his word, to be able to apply his word, to know what is true in our lives. So would you keep looking to the cross, the empty throne to our king who reigns in one day return? Would you keep relying on the spirit that he has given you for discernment, that you might know what is true, that you might continue on in the work that God has called you to?