

# NEHEMIAH

return + rebuild



## NEHEMIAH: REBELLION AND REFORM

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### Scripture Reference:

Hi, my name's Amy Lathrop and I'm a Deacon on staff here at Doxa. I give leadership to women's DNA and gospel shepherding. This morning, we're going to be reading from God's word. So if you have your Bible, please grab it and turn to the book of Nehemiah chapter 13, verses 4 through 14. Please stand for the reading of God's word. "Now before this, Eliashib 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 thirty-second 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 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 grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses. And I appointed as treasurers over the storehouses Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah of the Levites, and as their assistant Hanan the son of Zaccur, son of Mattaniah, for they were considered reliable, and their duty was to distribute to their brothers. Remember me, O my 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." This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Hello, I'm Jeff Vanderstelt, one of the elders here at Doxa, and we are now coming to the end of Nehemiah. And I don't know about you, but I like happy endings. I mean, most movies tend to end in a way that feels good. It's hopeful. It's kind of the conclusion you long for, but I don't

know if you know this, but there are many movies that originally had sad or depressing endings. For instance, Toy Story 3 originally doesn't end with the toys being rescued from the incinerator by the claw coming down from the sky, but rather they are left to fall to their demise. Another movie that was changed was Frozen. Originally it wasn't two sisters who overcome a fear with love, but rather it was an evil villain, Elsa, who was going to bring the coldness of her heart to bring destruction to a town.

And the end of the story, though, there is some good news, still doesn't end with two sisters, but rather a villain whose heart is changed. Return of the Jedi is another one. I know that was one of my favorite movie series growing up. And originally it didn't end with a big celebration with a bunch of people dancing around, but rather it ended with Luke when he discovered that Darth Vader was his father, that he took on the mask himself and became Darth Vader himself, and Han Solo ends up dying. Some of you are old enough to remember a movie called Pretty Woman that had Richard Gere playing Edward and Julia Roberts playing Vivian. And in the story that we all know, it ends with a super, you know, happy ending, kind of like the dream that you hope would always come true for a really broken, hurting person.

But in the original, Richard Gere, Edward, takes her back to the streets, throws her out on the street with a wad of cash, and she returns back to her life of prostitution. Now here's what happened. When they showed the movies to the screening groups, people gave them feedback that they didn't like the ending. So they rewrote the ending to better please the audience so that they actually would have a happy ending. And the reason why is because we don't want things to end badly. We have a hope that things will turn out well. If we would have ended Nehemiah in chapter 12, we would have got a happy ending, but it doesn't end in chapter 12. It ends in chapter 13, and it's not happy. It's depressing. What we heard in chapter 10 when Tim taught is that the people renewed their vows to the covenant

God had made with them. To take care of the temple, to give the tithe, to be faithful to observe the Sabbath, to not intermarry in such a way that would lead them away from worship of Yahweh. They made that commitment. Then in chapter 11 and 12, you heard Ken teach about the dedication of the walls and the great celebration that was so amazing that the joy of Jerusalem was experienced all around the region. But it doesn't end there. It goes to chapter 13. Nehemiah heads back to serve the King of Babylon. And so his leadership is no longer present and the people break covenant, go back to their evil, wicked ways and rebel against God. In the absence of spiritual leadership, they go to spiritual atrophy and spiritual apathy. I wonder, in this season Doxa, as we've not been able to be present as much with each other, or you haven't felt the physical presence of spiritual leadership.

I've wondered if that hasn't happened to you as well. That maybe you have fallen into a kind of spiritual atrophy or apathy. I want to make sure I assure you, if you're a Christian, you have the spirit of God, which means you have this ultimate spiritual leader in your life, Jesus, but we still need the reminder from one another to submit to Jesus as leadership. And so I have wondered as I've thought about how you're doing, if we ought not to end Nehemiah examining whether or not we, like the people, have gone back to some things that we wish we hadn't. Maybe experienced atrophy or apathy in areas that we need to return back to God, we need to repent and invite him to rebuild those areas of our life. So before we look at the text, I want to ask the spirit in prayer to reveal that to you today. Let's pray. Father, I ask that you would minister to our hearts through the spirit

as we look at this story, your word, about what happened to Nehemiah and your people, would you give us hearts to receive what you have for us? Would you give us ears to hear? Would you give us a quickness to want to respond in repentance so that you might rebuild any area of our life where we've given into spiritual atrophy or apathy? Help us, we pray, in Jesus name. Amen. Well, what I want you to do as we go through the story is ask where might you align with where they also experienced atrophy or apathy in your spiritual life? We're gonna start in verse four. "Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the chambers of the house of our God, and who was related to Tobiah". We're going to find out later that both Tobiah and Sanballat have their kids marry children of the priest.

So there's this weird connection between the political powers that are against Israel and the spiritual leadership colliding together in union in marriage. And that's one of the reasons why there's going to be a concern about that brought up. But he goes on, he said, he prepared Eliashib "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." So the first thing we see here is that there is a desecration of the house of God. Eliashib, as a priest, was in charge of the chambers where the necessary articles for worship, where the tithes and offerings were kept, so that they had everything they needed to exercise the worship in which God wanted them to engage in as his people.

But what he did instead was he cleared out the chambers of all the articles of worship and the tithes and the offerings used to support the worship. And he gave that space to the enemy, Tobiah, to live in. So not only are the former services that are needed not available to be taken care of by the offerings and the articles of worship, but the very space that was set apart for worship of God is now being filled with an enemy. I want to just stop and ask you about the chambers of your temple. If you're new to the faith, we believe that our very bodies are now the living temple in which God by his spirit dwells. Paul says it this way in confronting the spiritual immorality of the church in Corinth, in 1 Corinthians 6, he says, "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So, glorify God in your body." Now, when I ask that question again, how are the chambers in your temple? In other words, the capacities of you and your own body to give yourself fully to God for his worship and to others as an expression of God's love for you. How are you doing? You might say Jeff, well, I'm not struggling with immorality, though many of you may be, but it may be your struggle isn't immorality, but just like the temple chambers here were crowded with things that were pushing out worship. I wonder if during this season, you haven't found the chambers of your heart, the chambers of your temple, crowded with busy-ness, consumption, maybe with entertainment, or fear or worry. And as a result, you have very little room to be present with God and very little room for God to be present with you. How is your temple? How are you doing?

And I want you to consider Nehemiah's response. He says, "I was very angry.

I threw all the household furniture out that Tobiah had put in the chamber. I gave orders, and I told them to cleanse the chambers. And I brought back all the vessels of worship in the house of God, with the grain offering and the frankincense." Now, if you're familiar with Jesus, you know this is a preview of what Jesus is going to do when he shows up in John 2 at the temple and he cleanses it so that it can once again be restored to be a place of worship and prayer for

God with his people. Now, if you remember that story, you remember the disciples as they watched Jesus clearing out the tables and all the money, and that all the people were taking advantage of filling the space that was meant to be for God and his people. They said this, they remembered it was written zeal, which is passionate anger, zeal for your house will consume me.

And family, I don't know about you, but I know in my own life, I have found that I need to have a lot more zeal, a lot more passionate anger for this temple. I need to actually want this temple, this body, this mind, this heart to be healthy, to be cleared of anything that's keeping me from living the life God would have for me and living a life of worship that is somehow being crowded out by something else. I think a lot of you have already heard that this last year has been for me a year of getting this temple healthy. I'm so thankful for a body of elders that love me enough to tell me what they're seeing and help me understand that I needed to get help this year. And it wasn't just because I lost my friend to suicide. That was one of the worst things that's ever happened to me, but it tripped a bunch of other trauma, abuse, things that have happened to me all through the years that have actually wounded me deeply. As a result, they encouraged me to get into counseling. I've been doing that every week since February. And just a few weeks ago, I went into a four day intensive to do the hardest work I've ever done to have zeal, passionate anger, to get this man healthy. And I want to just tell you I'm thankful, not only to our elders, but to our church, that cares enough for your pastor, for me, to let me be angry for me and my own health so that I actually have something to give back to you that looks a whole lot more like a healthy leader should. So I want to ask you, where do you need to get passionately angry about your temple right now?

About the temple that God has purchased with his own son's life so that you might have a healthy ability to worship him, to engage in loving relationships, and to give the best of yourself in the most healthy way possible to others. How might your temple need to be cleared out right now? What's in the way? Where does it need to get reordered? Where might it need to be cleansed of impurity? Where might you need to experience healing like I've been experiencing so that you have room for God to dwell with you and you with him and for you to show up in life with people in such a way that you can give the very best of what God's giving you. So I want to start with that family. Where does your temple need cleansing? Where does it need reordering? Where does it need healing right now? He goes on. "I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them." This is the tithes, the offerings. "So that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field." So in Nehemiah's absence, not only has the temple been crowded out and corrupted and desecrated, but the very offerings of God have not been brought in.

The people stopped giving to support God's work. Now, the Levites and the singers are really the Bible teachers and the worship leaders of Israel.

And now they all have to go back and find another job because God's people in their atrophy, in their apathy, have stopped giving to support the work of the Bible teachers and the worship leaders. I don't know how that's working for you right now in COVID and us not being all together all the time, but I know for certain, one of the signs of spiritual apathy and atrophy in your life will be a lack of generosity. I want to say that again. One of the signs of your spiritual apathy or atrophy will be a lack of generosity. And Jesus had a whole lot to say about money. And the reason why, and not just money, but just generosity in general, giving. And the reason

why, is he said this, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. You want to know how you're doing at a heart level? Pay attention to the generosity level of your life. I know for me, one of the ways that I know that my heart is full of love for God and love for people is that I have great joy and generosity and giving. When I'm overflowing with God's love, and I'm experiencing the fullness of his presence, my giving overflows. And I'm not talking about just money. I'm talking about time. I'm talking about presence. I'm talking about compassion. I'm talking about deep affection for other people. That I have something to give when I've been receiving from God himself.

So I want to stop and ask you to examine right now in your own heart, are you generous with your time? Are you generous with your resources? Generous with your money? Are you generous with your heart? Your compassion? Your care? Or are you feeling empty? Worn out? You feel kind of a poverty or a need for God to start filling you up so you have something to give? And either is fine in terms of, be honest about where you're at, but at least acknowledge where you're at. Because if you don't have a generosity of spirit, you won't have a generosity in giving. It just isn't possible. So how you doing there?

Nehemiah does something about this. He confronted the officials. He said, "'Why is the house of God forsaken?' And I gathered them together and set them in their stations." He says. "Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses." In other words, they responded to the rebuke with generosity. They realized they had forgotten how God has been so generous to them. So they responded.

And then Nehemiah says what he's going to say several times. "Remember me, O my God, concerning this, don't wipe out my good deeds that I've done for the house of my God and for his service." Now we're going to hear that kind of desperation in Nehemiah's leadership increase as we go through the story because what's going to happen is we're going to become very aware at Nehemiah's limitation to change the hearts of people. But he does do something good here. He reorders what's lacking and out of place. He calls people to refill what's not in place by giving. And I want to encourage you to maybe consider this question in prayer. Where do you need to invite God's spirit to reorder the temple in your life, but also to refill it so that you can be generous? In my own journey, like I've shared, I've grown to see that I was generous in giving money. Like that was something my parents brought me up to do. We always set 10% aside whenever we made money and always gave it to the church. That's just been a part of my regular kind of unfortunately, religious activity at times, not always the overflow of joy and fullness of spirit.

More recently in my journey with my counseling, I've begun to realize in my own shame story, and just to be clear about what I mean by that is for me I had a toxic level of shame, which said, Jeff, you're not enough. You need to do more to become bigger than you presently are. And so I've just been climbing the shame ladder, comparing myself all my life. Which led to a level of workaholicism and just unhealth.

And so what I've been realizing is my lack of generosity of spirit, my lack of generosity of presence, my lack of generosity of compassion, my lack of generosity of love for people was robbed because I was so caught up in the shame cycle that I had to be a workaholic. And so I could not say no to work, to say yes to people. I know I'm not alone here, family. I know there's a whole bunch of you, especially that are on the Eastside, but this is probably true of most of Doxa that has probably given into a workaholicism that doesn't have time for people. Doesn't

have time to be generous with your compassion, with your love, with your attention. And I know for me, in my own story, I had to face the fact that I had a lack of generosity because I was empty. I was starving. I was poor and I needed God to pour into me what I was lacking. Now, I want to give you some good news, because if you were to talk to Janie, she would say a few weeks ago, we had a very significant painful conversation after I came out of my four day intensive, where she finally felt the freedom to tell me what its been like on the other side of me for almost 28 years and how she's felt like she's chasing after me and has seen the back of my head as a normal place of what she's looking at. That I'm always running, always working, always ahead. In a lot of ways, she felt very neglected, and very left behind. And she was able to be really honest with me about that. And I felt deep sadness and sorrow over what I've done over the years, but it's starting to change. And I want to give you an encouraging piece of news, how this message is applying to me personally.

I had a call just a few weeks ago. My wife and I got a call from our family, her side of the family. And there was some significant emotional trauma that took place. And this is a Saturday. And then Sunday morning, this is just a couple of weeks ago, Sunday morning, she was very distraught and she wanted to go be with the family in Tacoma. And I said, sweetie, what do you need? And she said, man, I would love to ask for what I need, but I know you've got Sunday, you've got ministry stuff. You've got elders meeting. I know that you can't help me. And I said, no, no, no, no stop. What do you need? And she said, well what I need is for you to be with me. What I need is for you to go to Tacoma and be with my family. And thankfully, because of the way that I am getting zealous, passionately angry for this temple to be healthy, I was able to say no to work, so I could say yes to family and I called the elders, I let them know, and they applauded it because they have been wanting to see me do more of that for a long time and to die to my workaholism and to give my heart to my wife, to my family.

And so I got to spend the day Sunday just being with, being generous of spirit, because I am getting zealous about the reordering of this temple. Well, the people we're going to read about needed the same kind of word toward their workaholism. Look at what happens next. In verse 15. "In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses 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." We know that that's the day sunrise Friday night, or sorry, sunset Friday nights, to sunset Saturday night is supposed to be set apart, no work done. That's Sabbath. And he warned them on that day when they sold the 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, in Jerusalem itself! Then I confronted the nobles of Judah and said to them, 'What is the 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 our city? Now you're bringing more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.'"

The people were refusing to rest from their work. And this is the epitome of rebellion in Israel. This is what brought destruction on the walls, the city, and the temple before, was their failure to obey God's call to rest.

The point is that God didn't just call them to a 24 hour rest because it was good for them, but it was also his way of reminding them that they could trust him to be the provider. That he would work while they're sleeping. That he keeps things together, even when they feel like they can't. In fact, he told them in Jeremiah 17, that they would observe the Sabbath. That they could trust

God to actually bring to their very walls, to their gates, to their city, all that they needed. They would never have to worry about it. And so fundamentally, for Israel to violate the Sabbath, to keep working and not rest, not trust, was fundamentally a slap in God's face. It was a way of saying, God, we don't trust you. You're not good. We don't believe that you're capable of taking care of us. You won't. You haven't. And so we have to take matters in our own hands. We will be our own God. This is huge. And I wonder, if any of you are in a similar situation in your own hearts. Not able to rest. Striving because you don't believe God cares, or that God can help you or will help you. Maybe it's around financial provision right now, or a job, or the future. In light of all the unrest, all the uncertainty that we're going through, maybe it's your children or wanting children. Maybe there's striving or unrest there. Maybe it's the election results. And there's a fear and anxiety in you one way or the other around what's going on. I don't know where it is for you. Where are you striving? Are you at rest? And how far are you willing to go to practice rest? To be zealous, passionately angry for your own good, learning how to rest. Look at how far Nehemiah is willing to go.

It says "As soon as it began to grow dark," which is the beginning of Sabbath, "at the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors would 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." So now Nehemiah is getting militaristic about protecting the Sabbath. We're going to see he's going to go a little extreme, but he knows how important it is. "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.'" So now physical threats to protect the Sabbath. Okay. A little too far to be clear, but passionately angry, zealous to protect God's people. "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." Once again, he says to God, remember this also in my favor, O my God. And spare me, according to the greatness of your steadfast love. Notice that, first of all, he's talking about the good things he did. God remember them. Now he's talking about like, will you just spare me? Will you just be merciful to me? Because he knows how bad this is getting and how much he feels out of control. And so now he's just saying, God help me. Now. I needed to practice a zealous anger around Sabbath just a couple of weeks ago. Like I shared with you, God gave me the grace to say no to work so I could stay home with Janie and be present with her family.

The next day, that Monday morning, I woke up and my first meeting was a zoom call. And as many of you probably experience when you're looking at a Zoom call, you see yourself, not only the person. And I saw my eye just starting to twitch while I was having the meeting. And I've learned enough now about my body that my body will tell me when I've gone too far. And I knew it was telling me, you need a rest, Jeff, I know it's Monday and it's a day of work for you, but you need a Sabbath today. And I looked at the guy on the other side of the screen and I let him know what's going on. He said, you need to take a day off. And I knew that was the day I was going to get together with all the Saturate the Sound cohorts, we were going to celebrate what God's been doing the last couple of years as the big C Church has been working together in these 10 different cohorts.

I was going to cast vision for it. There was going to be two hours of just celebrating God's grace. I'm thinking I can't miss that. That's the thing I've been working on for almost five or six years now. And the Lord said, it's time to say no. It's time to rest. So I called up Jessica and asked her to cancel all the appointments I had. I called the team and let them know what was going on with the stuff in my family, the stuff in my own life. And I just said, I got to take care of me today.

And I stayed home and I rested. I took care of this man, this body, and I trusted God that he could do what he wants to do without me. And I wonder about you family. Can you say no? Can you rest? Can you let God do his work without you? Do you believe he can? Maybe your repentance in the season is to be so zealous for your own health, for your family, for your friends, to care for them enough, that you start caring for you first.

And give yourself a rest, take a break. Temple needed cleansing. The people needed to start giving. Everyone needed to rest because they couldn't give and they couldn't reorder if they weren't rested. And the last thing we see is that they became unequally yoked with unbelievers. Verse 23. "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," Hebrew, "but only the language of each people."

The reason why this is a problem is because their scriptures are in Hebrew. And if they can't understand Hebrew, they can't actually hear the truths about who God is, what he's done and who they are as his people. So fundamentally what we have is we're about a generation from another massive rebellion because they won't even know the word of God again. And just hear this. This has only taken a few years for this to take place. And historically, whenever God's people intermarried, not that it's wrong to marry other races, Tim made that clear. They already had. That's not the problem. The problem is marrying people who do not believe in Yahweh, who will lead them away in their faith to another God. And Nehemiah knows how serious this is. And he reminds them of what happened in their past. Verse 26. "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like Solomon, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him King over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin." I mean, even Solomon who loved God and God loved him, and he was faithful to God. Once he married foreign women, foreign women who did not follow Yahweh, he was led away as God's leader.

"Shall we then listen to you?" Now, Nehemiah is talking to the priest because they've done the same thing. They've been marrying off their kids to people who don't even share their faith.

"Shall we listen to you and do all the great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?" Nehemiah asks, and of course the answer is no. This is why Paul later commands the Christians in Corinth in 2 Corinthians 6, "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." He's using this concept of oxen, carrying a yoke together. Two oxen going together with the same yoke being equally yoked. And so he says, "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 I know there are some here at Doxa who you would sadly say are married right now with an unbeliever. Maybe you got married before you became a follower of Jesus and later you did, or you were young in the faith and didn't realize how important that



would be. But I've talked to many of you and it's so hard I know for you because you don't share the same fundamental convictions about the world, about God, about yourself, about how we engage, how we handle money, how we handle parenting, relationships, morality. I mean it's hard, I know, for many of you. And you feel like you're doing this walk with God by yourself, sometimes even feeling opposition in your own home. And then if you're single and thinking about getting married someday, I would encourage you to listen to those who are married in these situations and ask them what that's been like and how hard that's been. And I would encourage you to take Paul's word seriously. Do not be unequally yoked in marriage with an unbeliever.

Now it doesn't just apply to marriage. It can apply to partnerships or agreements we make. I remember the day when my dad came home to the dinner table and wept in front of us because his business partner who did not share his same convictions, was not a follower of Jesus, had walked away with a quarter million dollars from my dad. Robbed him. I know in this last season, we've seen unequally yoked situations where we've, unfortunately in many cases, married religion with politics. And unfortunately, whether it's democratic or Republican, we've seen the damage it's doing because even in the church, it's dividing us.

Do not be unequally yoked. Don't yoke yourself with your political party. Yoke yourself with Jesus Christ and his church and the kingdom of God. So now Nehemiah is really angry. He says, "I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair."

Horrible. See Nehemiah feels so out of control and wants to change people that he can't change that in his anxiety and his fear, he wants to control, which leads to rage. Which is happening all over the place right now. So we don't want to follow his example, though we want to have a zealous, passionate anger for our temples to be cleansed, to be ordered, to be full of God's presence, to be given in generosity as we rest and yoke ourselves with him. He goes on, he said, "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 for your sons or for yourselves.'" Now we see how bad it gets. He's trying to force them to obey God. Parents, you know this doesn't work with your kids. Family, we know this doesn't work with one another. I do love what he says at the end, because I think it is a bit of a recipe that we could follow.

He says, "Thus I cleansed them from everything foreign." We know he didn't cleanse them, but the word cleanse is something to capture. "I established the duties of the priests and the Levites." So you reorder things. "And I provided for the wood offering at appointed times, and for the firstfruits." Cleanse, reordered, gave what's lacking. I do think we could follow that. Cleanse our hearts, cleanse our temples, reorder our lives, make us a generous people, God. And then he ends with this, and you could just hear the exhaustion. "Remember me, O my God, for good." Which is another way of saying, be merciful to me. He no longer asks God to remember what he did. He knows he's failed. He knows he didn't change the hearts of the people. He knows he can't even hardly deal with his own heart. In fact, maybe that's the best thing we could take from this is that at the end of this sad, sad story, Nehemiah realizes he can't change people and he can't even change himself apart from God's help.

It is a sad story. I wonder if you're going, "That sounds like my story. I have a sad story, Jeff. I wish there could be a new ending." I want to encourage you, there can be. See, thankfully, it doesn't really end in chapter 13. It looks forward to another chapter, to a better ending. We have a better leader, a better builder, better screenwriter, because there is a better Nehemiah.

One who doesn't threaten others with physical abuse if they don't obey, but instead was physically abused in our place. One who doesn't chase us away in anger, but chases after us in love. One who doesn't curse us, but was cursed for us so that he might speak a blessing over us. See this story points to Jesus who didn't just give a portion, a tithe of his life, but gave his entire life for you and me. Suffered and died on a cross for our sins to cleanse us, purify our temples. Rose again from the dead so he could fill this temple with his very living presence through his spirit. And he accomplished the work for us of righteousness so that we could forever rest in the work he's done for us. And then he yokes himself to a people who wrongly yoke themselves to all the wrong things so that we can be yoked with the one who can carry the burden for us, so we can ultimately rest in what he's done. Family, we can't change people's hearts. We can't even change our own heart. But he can. And he will. Come to Jesus if you never have. Invite him to cleanse you and reorder your temple. Ask him to fill you with his presence to make you at rest and full so that you can be generous in giving your life. Family, if you've already done this, do it again. Today, again, is a day for you to experience the salvation of God. The story of Nehemiah is sad, but it leaves us longing for a better story. It leaves us longing for the Advent of the King. And next week, we're going to kick off Advent. We're going to celebrate that we have a better king in Jesus, and we have a better leader, a better builder, and there is a better story. Let's pray,

Father, I pray if there's anyone right now listening that needs a better story that they would believe that Jesus can cleanse, reorder, fill, and write a story that's better than the one they have. Lord, would you draw people to yourself right now to rebuild their lives? Lord, for all of us who already have experienced that, we come to you again today, desperate, knowing that you need to work in us, you need to cleanse us, you need to reorder us, you need to direct us, you need to fill us, you need to help us again to rest in you so we can be generous in how we give our lives for others. We want this. We want a better story. And this world needs a better story. We ask that you would do this in Jesus name, amen.

