



# Message **Transcript**

## Choosing Hope

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Our Father in heaven, we give you all the glory, honor and praise for who you are. We thank you for your son Jesus and your Holy Spirit who indwells all of us who have repented and believe that he is our Lord and Savior. Father, we thank you for your living and active word, and we gather here today because we believe that every time your word is faithfully and accurately proclaimed that you are speaking, that means Lord, for anyone who has gathered here, they can hear your voice speak directly to them. So our prayer this morning is speak Lord, for we are ready to hear. And so now for all those who have gathered who desire to hear the Lord Jesus Christ speak directly to you, who will believe what he tells you, and who will by faith put into practice what he shows you, will you agree with me very loudly this morning by saying the word, Amen.

Amen.

Our God is alive. And as we've been studying the Book of Nehemiah, we've watched how our God moves on the hearts of people to accomplish his purposes. In the Book of Nehemiah, God calls Nehemiah when he's cupbearer to the king in Persia, asks him to go and rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. This wall had been torn down for over 130 plus years. He gets the assignment, he leaves his comfort, he follows the Lord. He does exactly what the Lord shows him. He gets resourced for it. He gets blessed by doing it, but guess what? He starts facing increased opposition and he also starts facing internal conflict. Anytime that you begin to follow the Lord, those two things will always accompany you. If you truly live for Jesus, anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. There will always be external opposition

and internal conflict.

But what do we do when those things happen? When God has shown us specifically in the word what we need to do and what it looks like to do the very things he wants us to do, sometimes we get thoroughly discouraged and we give up and we say things like this, "Well, we lose here, but we win there." I've read the end of the book, we win. And it's almost as if what we're trying to say is it's not going to get any better now, so don't expect it to, but I've got a word for you this morning. I want you, if you're a believer in Christ, to choose hope. I want you to choose hope because hope is a future certainty, and by future certainty, it's not just a future certainty for when you die and meet Jesus for those of you who are in Christ who have repented and believed, but there's a present hope that what you see in your lifetime can get better despite all the narratives that you hear out there.

I want to tell you something this morning. Jesus Christ is Lord and he's the same yesterday, today and forever. And everything that you've ever read about Jesus Christ's doing is the same things that he's willing to do today. And this morning as we're thinking about and studying the Book of Nehemiah and what Nehemiah's calling looked like and how he was being obedient to the Lord, how he chose to be hopeful, how he chose to face forward and continue doing the work, I want you to think about what God's called you to. In other words, let's make it a little more personal. Some you guys are like, "Well, God hasn't called me to build a wall. God hasn't called me to direct the nation." But what have been the specific things in the word that the Lord has

called you to do? Like, perhaps, you're single and you need to choose hope in your singleness.

Or, perhaps, you're married and you're like, "It's been a really challenging marriage," but perhaps, you need to choose hope in your marriage or, perhaps, you're a child and the Bible says, "Be obedient to your parents," but it's been super difficult to be obedient to your parents. How do you be obedient to your parents? How do you choose hope in that situation? Or maybe school's been difficult, or your job's been difficult, but God makes it clear, in whatever you do in word or in deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I mean, what are the specific ways in which following the Lord that would cause you discouragement do you need to choose hope this morning? And if you're looking for a word of hope, I believe God has a word for you today. I want you to open your Bible up to Nehemiah 6.

Nehemiah 6, and as we're beginning this chapter, what we've just come out of is he's faced external opposition and now he's faced internal conflict among the people because they're scared that things aren't going to go well, and here they are ready to get close to finishing this wall. And sometimes when you're close to seeing the fulfillment of God is when the enemy works harder to try to get you to quit. I find that the longer I walk with the Lord and the closer I walk with him, that the enemy will double down if you're really going to do it God's way, and you'll see all these things come up, and in the middle of it, he's going to give us ways to choose hope. Now, while you're turning to Nehemiah 6, let me give you some scriptures as a backdrop. We know from Hebrews 11:1 that faith is the assurance of things, what? Hoped for,

the evidence of things not seen.

Hope is a future confidence that things are going to work out according to God's plan. Proverbs 13:12 says that hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life. When you're hoping for something and it's not being realized, it's thoroughly discouraging on the inside, isn't it? You're hoping to get married. You're not married yet and you've been waiting along, thoroughly discouraging. You've been wanting to have a baby, it hasn't happened yet. You're thoroughly discouraged. You've been wanting to get this job, you're thoroughly discouraged. You've been overlooked on a sports team, you've been overlooked at school. You're thoroughly hope deferred. "I really felt like the Lord was leading me this way and it's not happening that way," hope deferred makes the heart sick. When you have to wait to see it, it's discouraging. But desire fulfilled, when you see Jesus come through, it's a tree of life. There's something about seeing God come through.

And let me tell you about God's track record, just so you know. It's a hundred percent faithfulness. It's a hundred percent faith. You don't need to worry if God says it in his word, he is faithful to his word. Not some of the time, but how much all the time. Amen. And so as we're turning to Nehemiah 6, I want to talk about how it is you can choose hope because most people think of hope as an emotion like, "I'm not feeling very hopeful right now. I'm not feeling like it's going to happen. I'm a Rockies fan. I'm just not feeling the hope right now." So it's not a feeling. There's some choices that we need to make in order to experience the hope God wants us to experience. Because for many of us, we relegate the gospel to fire insurance.

We think that the gospel wrongly is just the idea or notion that God sent his son Jesus, he died on the cross, he rose from the dead. If you just cognitively believe that truth, it doesn't need to affect your life, it doesn't need to change who you are, just believe that and you'll go to heaven and that's all you need to know, and that's not the gospel. The gospel is that you're a sinner, and that because you're a sinner, you're blind to the fact that you're a sinner. Worse than that you're actually dead, but you can't see that you're dead and you actually think you're alive, and you're going to rebel against the very thing that's going to make you alive. But God in his great love for you sent his son Jesus to die on the cross for all of your sins. He was buried in the grave.

He rose from that grave, and for anyone who would repent, anyone who would turn from their sin and be a follower of Jesus, they could then have eternal life. That's why Jesus said, "Anyone who comes to me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. I'm inviting you to come and die to yourself and to this world, and to the devil, I'm inviting you to come and live with me," that's what he's saying and that is the gospel. And so when it comes to the gospel, God gives us the ability to choose hope. That when we're walking with him and we have every reason to think we can't see it, that we can still choose hope. We can still choose hope in our nation. You can still choose hope in your family. You can still choose hope in your marriage. You can still choose hope in your singleness.

You can still choose hope in your job even when all of the components look like, "I've got nothing to be hopeful about, this isn't going to work," because that's exactly

where Nehemiah was. For 130 plus years, this wall had been destroyed. The Jews had been repudiated by all the other nations of the world even though they were God's elect nation, they still are God's elect nation and God wanted to show the world his glory through them. So there's four choices I want to talk about that you can make today when it comes to choosing hope. And the first is this, choosing hope means you remain focused on the mission rather than distracted by your adversaries. Choosing hope means you remain focused on the mission rather than distracted by your adversaries. Anytime you begin to walk with God and do what God wants you to do, there will always be adversarial people toward the very thing God called you to do.

Why? Because you have an enemy, the devil that prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. And who does he choose to use in the same way God chooses to use people? Satan tries to find his little minions to follow after him, to be adversarial to you. Notice what happens here in chapter six. "Now, when it was reported to Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem, the Arab," who have been our characters in the story who have hated Israel and the Jews rebuilding the wall, "and to the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and that no breach remained in it, although at the time I had not set up the doors of the gates."

Here's what happens. So when word gets out to their enemies, the ones who had said, "You'll never rebuild this wall. It's been down 130 years, and oh by the way, look at you rebuilding it. It's not being built very well. If a fox were to jump on that wall, it would break and fall down. This is a terrible wall. But when they got word that it was all done except the doors being put on, then Sanballat and Geshem sent a message to

me saying, 'Come let us meet together in Kephirim in the plane of Ono,' but they were planning to harm me." So now that they realize all they're taunting, all their threats, all they're saying, "We're going to assassinate you, we're going to kill you, we're going to kill your people," all that hasn't worked, and they realized the wall's actually getting built, and now they're like, "You know what? We should all get together and have a little picnic. Let's reason together here," but Nehemiah realized, "They were trying to do me harm. So I sent messengers to them saying, 'I am doing a great work and I cannot come down.'"

Don't miss this. What's he saying? Why is he doing a great work? Because when God calls you to do a work, it's a great work. I can't leave what God called me to do to come spend time with my adversaries. I can't come down off the wall because this is what God asked me to do, to come spend time with you when I know all you're trying to do is distract me from getting done the very thing that God called me to do. Quit pretending right now like you're my friend when all along you've threatened me, wanted to kill me, wanted to harm me, spoke bad about our mission, spoke bad about me, spoke bad about our people. I'm not dumb. This is a great work. I don't have time to come down in fellowship with my adversary. I'm just going to stay about the work.

When God calls you to do something, stay about the work, stay about the work, stay about the work. He said, "This is a great work. Why should I come down and leave it and come down to you? They sent messages to me four times in this manner and I answered them in the same way." Your adversary will always be relentless. If you begin to walk with the Lord, I promise you, I promise you, if you begin to do things



God's way, there will always be those who are against you. It's a fact. You have an adversary, the devil that prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. He is putting people in your path when you say, "I'm going to walk with God, I'm going to do this thing right. I'm a single and I'm going to honor God and my singleness, and I'm going to give him glory. I'm going to prioritize church. I'm going to evangelize. I'm going to do this."

I promise you, you'll have adversaries that come into your life and say, "Now, let's think about this. You're getting a little too radical." You're in a marriage and you say, "You know what? As a husband, I'm going to prioritize laying down my life for my wife." I promise you the enemy will send some men and be like, "She ain't worth laying down your life for." Wives, "I'm going to submit to my husband as to Christ." Promise you the enemy will send some women in your life like, "He ain't worth submitting to because he ain't Jesus." Kids obey your parents, honor them. It's a first commandment with a promise. Guarantee, he'll send other kids in your life like, "I wouldn't honor my parents. I'd definitely not honor your parents. My parents are way cooler than your parents."

I mean, no matter what you choose to do, the enemy will always have a dissenting voice in your head. He'll always send people. You don't have time for that. You want to be about the mission of Christ, then be about the mission of Christ. If you're married, follow the words of Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3 and others. Follow the word of God that says, "If you're married, lay down your life for your spouse. If you're married, respect your husband." Follow it no matter what anybody else says. And by

the way, don't have time for people that don't support the word of God. If you're a single person, you've been waiting to meet your mate and somebody's like, "Never going to happen, you're so old-fashioned, you don't even really date. You're not sleeping around, you're not going to party, and you're never going to find that person."

Don't hang out with people like that. Hang out with the people that are like, "No, you are doing it right and you are honoring God," and you're wanting God to bring you your mate anyway, so keep doing it God's way. If you're married, guys, I don't hang out with guys that don't honor their wives or don't at least try to honor their wives because I don't want to be around their wives. You shouldn't hang out with people that bash their husbands. It's just a bad practice. You say, "Well, you know what, Pastor Jeff? This is not about building a wall. I wasn't called to build a wall. I wasn't called to lead a nation. What am I called to do?" I'm so glad you ask. I'm so glad you asked. Before Jesus Christ left this earth, he said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore," what?

"Go make disciples of all nations." What is the work of every single Christian? You're an ambassador for the Lord Jesus Christ to do one thing and one thing only. First and foremost, what you're going to be judged on is how well did you make disciples. Make disciples of all nations? That means you're going to share the gospel. When people get saved, what do you do? You baptize them in the name of the Father, son and the Holy Spirit so they can take that step of faith and identify themselves with God. And then what do you do? Then you teach them to obey everything that he

commanded you, and he promises to be with you until the end of the age. Well, how long is that going to take? Your lifetime. Because the gospel is not just get saved and get baptized and go your way.

No, get saved, get baptized, and now you can begin the journey of learning everything Jesus taught and you can begin to do everything that he wanted you to do, and then you're on mission to go out and do that for other people too. That's what you're about. And by the way, anything that gets in the way of that needs to go. I mean, that's your most important mission, and then your marriage comes under that. And that's your most important mission, and your dating life comes under that. That's your most important mission, and your vocation falls under that. Honoring the Lord Jesus Christ and what he wants, that's your mission. Everything else supports that, and if it doesn't, then your life's out of order. And if you're going to experience hope in this life, not just in the one to come, you have to make a choice that you're going to be focused on the mission rather than distracted by your adversaries.

I mean, I can only imagine the things that were being said, 130 years. I mean, we got to read some of the stuff that Sanballat and Tobiah were saying. I mean, this is miserable. You guys are never going to get this done. It's an exercise in futility, and even if you do get it done, nobody's going to respect you because you're Jews and nobody likes Jews. Nobody liked them then. Nobody likes them now, but they were God's people then and they're God's people now, so you should love the Jews. That's free of charge.

But the enemy, what I find is he throws these weapons of mass distractions in

your life. I mean, the moment that you decide, "I'm doing it God's way," you'll have every opportunity to do it a different way. I don't know how many times somebody says they've been praying about a job, sometimes it's within the church, sometimes outside the... Been praying, been praying, been praying, God's opened this door and they begin to step. And as soon as they do it God's way, guess what? Even though for two years they haven't had any other opportunities, all of a sudden, "I can make more money doing something else." I'm like, "Is God in that?" "Well, no, but it'd be really cool to make more money." I mean, he always throws it in your way. You get engaged and that's when even if you've never dated in your life, you get all these other opportunities.

Why? Because the enemy, the adversary hates you going after God. So don't be surprised when those things happen. You choose to stay on mission for the Lord Jesus Christ. You choose to do it his way no matter what. You choose to stay about the work and you say, "I can't get involved. I'm doing a great work. I can't get involved in that." "I can't get involved in this because I'm married, and so I'm going to be about my great work being married. I can't get involved in all these other conversations." Do you see what I'm saying? You stay focused on the mission. The Bible says, "Here's the way you beat the devil." Everybody always tries to do all these different things to beat the devil, "Devil I bind you." You can't bind the devil. You can't bind him. He's a supreme being. I mean, he's under the authority of God.

You can't bind him. What you can do is resist him. You resist the devil, he'll flee from you. You do it God's way, he's like, "I can't do anything here. They're not listening to me. He's not listening to me. She's not listening to me." I mean, you can hoot and

holler, and jump and shout and do all sorts of things, but the way you get the devil to leave is you stay focused on the mission rather than being distracted by your adversaries. And by the way, this is a full-time job. This is a full-time job. The devil doesn't sleep. Did you know that? He's got game film on your life. He knows just when to lob a grenade in there. He knows just when you're tired. He knows just when you're spent, he knows just when to put the words in somebody else's mouth they're going to irritate the living dickens out of you so that it comes back out of your mouth.

He knows. He knows. And by the way, he's working full-time. He works full-time in our media. He works full-time in our schools. He works full-time in our government. He works full-time in our entertainment. He works full-time in industry. He works full-time in business. I mean, you can't come to church for 60 minutes on a weekend, or 90 if you go to BRAVE, you can't come and do that and think, "Well, that's enough." It's a full-time job for you. You can't just clock in and out of your Christianity. You're either going all in with the messaging that God has and the way God wants it, or you can't have hope in this life because you'll always be distracted by people saying, "That can't happen. That can't happen. It's not going to happen." And in Nehemiah's day it was the wall, "That can't happen. It's not going to happen. It hasn't happened and it'll never happen."

What about in our day? "You can't fulfill the great commission in your day. It hasn't happened. People have been talking about it for 2000 years. Never going to happen." Says who? Not God, not God. He chose you for such a time and place as

this to give your all. And when one generation decides that we finally want to give our all to the Lord Jesus Christ, I'm not talking BRAVE church, I'm talking the church globally, like, "We're going to go for this. It's going to happen," and God's going to finish his work and I want to be part of that. So number one, if you're going to choose hope, it means you remain focused on the mission rather than distracted by your adversaries, and we're talking spiritual things, but you know that's true of anything else great that you go after in your life.

You're going to focus on this, you're going to have friends who say, "Do that." You stay focused on what's right. Second is this. Choosing hope means you remain fortified in your identity rather than disturbed by the world's narrative. Similar to the first you say fortified in your identity rather than disturbed by the world's narrative. You choose to be fortified in your identity of who God says you are rather than what other people say about you. Notice verse five, "Then Sanballat," one of his enemies, "sent his servant to me in the same manner, a fifth time with an open letter." So he's been sending messages, it's not working. Now he sends a messenger with an open letter for the fifth time. And on it was written this, "It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu says," and Gashmu is the same guy as Geshem, just so you know, it's just spelled differently.

"Gashmu says that you and the Jews are planning to rebel, therefore you are rebuilding the wall and you are to be their king according to these reports." Here's what he's doing. He's lying or else he just genuinely doesn't know. And he says, "Nehemiah, I know the real reason you're rebuilding this wall." How would Sanballat know? He's an

enemy of God? He's an enemy of the things of God, and so now he thinks he actually knows what God's trying to do. He doesn't know. He's saying, "Here's what we've heard. We've heard that you're rebuilding the wall because you're trying to be the most powerful nation and you yourself are going to be the king. And when you're the king, you're going to overthrow King Artaxerxes. He's the one that sent you here. We know that, we know what you're really up to. We know what you're really about."

That's not what they're really about. They're really about being obedient to God and rebuilding the wall so they can be a light to all the other nations of the world, so they're lying, "And you are to be their king according to these reports." Notice verse seven, "You have also appointed prophets to proclaim in Jerusalem concerning you, a king in Judah." So he's saying, "We've heard about these prophets in Israel, they're always talking about this coming king." Well, they've been talking about a coming king since Genesis 3, right? Who's the coming king? It's Jesus coming in the future, but they're getting wind of this in Judah. A coming king is coming, and here's how they interpret that in verse seven, "A king is in Judah and now it will be reported to the king according to these reports. So come now, let us take counsel together."

They're saying, "That king that's coming, you think that's going to be you? And we're going to tell King Artaxerxes on you. We're going to tell on you. We're going to tell the government on you. The government's going to find out about this. They're going to find out that you have bad intention for the government." They didn't have bad intention for King Artaxerxes. He's the one that sent them and blessed them. So they're making up all this stuff. So they're saying, "Hey, let's come counsel together." So what

does Nehemiah do? "Then I sent a message to him saying such things as you are saying have not been done, but you are inventing them in your own mind." That's all he said. Like, "I don't have time for this conversation." I mean, you can't have conversation with somebody that doesn't know God about the things of God. They're spiritually blind to them.

So these people are saying, "No, no, we really know what you're going to do. You're going to become the king. They're prophesying that you're going to become the king," that's not true, "and then you're going to take over all the other days," that's not true. So instead of fighting back and forth and arguing with a bunch of non-Christians, what are they saying? People outside the covenant community, they're not arguing with them. They're just like, "Yeah, the things that you're saying are not true. You've made them up in your own mind. Let's just leave it at that. No need to argue, no need to debate, no need to have another conversation." Why? "For all of them were trying to frighten us thinking they will become discouraged with the work and it will not be done." What were they trying to do? They were doing all of this distraction and all of this discouragement and disturbing them all over.

Why? Because they don't want them to do what God wants them to do. Non-believers do not want you to do what God wants you to do, that's why the narrative is so loud and getting louder all the time, but we choose hope. We choose to be resolved in our identity. Nehemiah knew who he was. Do you know who you are? As a Christian do you know who you are? You're holy, you're righteous, you're good. You're loved. You're a child of God. You're his ambassador. The devil cannot touch you. I mean, do



you know that about yourself? You don't need to fight for your identity. You already have your identity. You don't need to fight for victory. You already have the victory in Christ. I mean, that's who you are. And so notice what he says when they say it's not going to happen, what does Nehemiah do?

He prays, "But now, oh God, strengthen my hands." How specifically does he pray? He doesn't say, "Lord, overthrow them. Lord, do all this stuff." What's he pray? You're not going to get the work done. What's he doing? "I'm building a wall," so what's his prayer? "Lord, give me strength to build the wall. I need strength for my hands." What is the mission God's called you to? Ask strength for that. Ask strength for your marriage. Ask strength for your friendships. Ask strength for your children. Ask strength for sharing the gospel. Ask strength for knowing the word. Ask strength for standing on the word. "Lord, give me your strength to accomplish what you put in me to accomplish," that's what he's praying. I'm not going to get distracted by them. I don't care what they're saying. I don't care what the world's narrative is. The world's narrative, since Genesis 3 has always gone against God as a majority, it'll always go against God.

Noah may have been the greatest preacher or one of the greatest preachers of all time, maybe top 10. I don't know how they rank him, but I would rank him in the top 10. He was a preacher of righteousness, and he preached faithfully without fail for 120 years, only eight people got saved, including himself and his wife and his three boys and their wives, that's it. And he had some animals that looked on too, that was it. You

talk about a faithful ministry, who do you know that's faithfully preached for 120 years? I don't know him, and people don't live that long anymore. He was preaching that long. So it's not about what the world's saying, and in his world, nobody agreed with anything he was saying except one, and that one was God. So don't care about the world's narrative. The world's narrative is crazy. It's just crazy all the time, and it's relentless, and if you listen to it's going to be really, really annoying. And it just comes and it comes, and it comes, and it comes.

And they say this, "If you don't agree with us, we'll cancel you." "Well, then cancel us. We're cool with that." I mean, you study... I mean, the louder narrative gets the more I think I know it's wrong, even if I don't know much about it. I mean the anti-Semitism in our culture is crazy. Why? Because God loves the Jews and Jesus Christ is Jewish and God is for the Jews, not meaning that the Jews have always done everything right because they clearly haven't, because I have a Bible right in front of me that shows all the things that they haven't done right, but it doesn't change the fact that God's in covenant with Israel and he's going to graft them back in. So why all the anti-Semitism? Because the devil hates God's plan and he hates the Jews, and he always has, and no people group has suffered more than the Jewish people. In every generation, they suffer more than anybody. And guess what? They're still around. Why? Because God is. Amen.

Amen.

Or just go through the Bible. I mean, if you believe Genesis 1 and 2 you're going to tick off everybody in our culture. You will, because what you're going to discover is

that if you believe the authority of the Bible, then God created everything out of nothing, and he's the author of life. So life started with God, and God created the world in six literal days and he rested on the seventh, and it doesn't take more than a fifth grade education to read that and understand that's what happened if you believe the Bible to be true evolution is not science. Evolution is a theology to disprove that God is who he is. Nobody's proved evolution. Ask any evolutionist, "Well, we came from this protoplasmic ooze billions of years ago. Then we got..." "Okay, then tell me how the cell got started. When did life begin?" And there's not one evolutionist that can tell you. "Well, something had to happen." Yeah, it did. God said, "Let there be," and that's what happened. Amen.

Or then the race. How many races are there? There's one according to God. It's called the human race. And people have different skin colors based upon where you live and how your genetics and all those different things, and so we're all different shades of brown. I mean, I've never met a pure black person. I've never met a pure white person. We're all shades of brown. Why? Because God created the human race from two people. And by the way, there's only two genders, male and female. I mean, if you just believe that you're going to tick off everybody.

And they'll lob names at you and throw stuff at you. The biggest term out there now is that Christian nationalist. I don't even know what it is. Nobody can define it for me, so I don't know if I am one or not. But when I listen to it, people are, what they seem to be pushing back upon is that this group of people actually believes the authority of God's word. That he's more authoritative than government and he's more

authoritative than schools, and he's more authoritative than anyone, and you've got to listen to him over everyone else. And these people actually believe that God should have a say in every part of culture. And I'm like, if that's what a Christian nationalist is, that's what a Christian is. And if that's the case, I'm not a Christian nationalist. I'm a Christian globalist. I want to go into all the world and preach that gospel. Amen.

But I don't even know what it is because all they are is just verbal grenades to say, "Shut up and stop obeying the authority of God's word. We want to be the authority in your life." The government wants to be the authority in your life. "We're the authority over your kids. We're the authority over your life. We'll tell you when you can open your church, we'll tell you what you can believe. We're even going to tell you what you can preach and how long your services can be." Oh, no, you won't. Not as long as Jesus Christ is Lord.

And the problem that I see is that there's too many people that are choosing not to be fortified in their own identity and are scared to death about it rather than just standing firm in what the Lord says that you are. I mean, just think about it. I mean, if you answer these questions biblically, who are you? Who are you? Well, I'm created by God. I'm fearfully and wonderfully made. My Bible tells me that in Psalm 139 and Genesis one, he's the one who created me. He's the author of life. Why am I here? Because he placed me here. He gave me the dates and times and places as to when I would live. He chose my birthdate. He already knows the day I'm going to die. What's my mission while I'm here? Well, I'm to be on mission for God, to love him and to serve

others, that's my mission. I'm in his ambassador to represent him till I meet him.

Who do I serve? I serve his people specifically. But I'm called to love all people, but especially those in the household of God. Well, where do I find people to serve? It's called the church, you all. The church is a gathered group of those who have repented and believe that Jesus is the Christ, that come together so we can serve one another in love and build one another up in love, and help one another so that we can go advance his kingdom. And then how will you serve? That probably depends upon your passions, your personality, your supernatural gifts that you received at conversion. And how long are you going to do that? Well, until you meet Jesus Christ face to face. I mean, that's simple. That's why we're here, and yet we don't realize that, and so when people tell us, "No, you need to figure out what you're good at and then go find a job, and then go get married and then go have a family, and then go have all this stuff and then build more stuff and then get insurance to protect all your stuff.

And then you've got a lot of stuff, and then when you get a lot of stuff, you're really going to be miserable, but you'll think you're happy. And then you can go out and speak about how happy you are when you're really miserable. And that's our world, because the goal of our world is independence. Because then I can be by myself and I don't need anybody. I don't need God and I don't need you, but the Bible is like, no, I'm dependent upon God and I need to serve you because I'll never be more fulfilled than when I'm honoring God and serving other people. So I'm totally interdependent and dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the gospel. It's totally opposite.

So when you hear things in the world, if you just start hearing things and the world's saying it and it's not coming out of the Bible, which is 99% of what you hear on media news and everything else, just listen to what they're saying and you can almost assuredly say, "I know it's wrong. I just don't know why," and just go back and read your Bible and you'll see it. "Your way right away," where's that in the Bible? "You get it your way right away. You get it quick, you get it cheap. You get it easy. It's all about you," where is that in the Bible?

I mean, when we read about the Bible and we see all the miracles in the Bible, do you know why we see all that? Because whether it's Old Testament or New Testament, you see people standing up in their own identity, whether it's young boy David, the little shepherd that has no business being on the battlefield that's bringing his brother's bread and cheese and they're making fun of him, and he's like, "Who's that Philistine over there, that uncircumcised Philistine? He's not even part of our covenant. God, why are you all chicken?" "Who do you think you are?" "I'll take him out myself because I'm not coming at you with sword or javelin. I'm coming at you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the Lord's army, and today you're done, and all I need is a slingshot and a stone, and I'll cut your head off with your own sword."

And when you see somebody stand up with that kind of resolve, courage begets courage. And not only did David slay Goliath, Israel wiped out the Philistines that day because, "If he can do it, I can do it. His God's not good. We love our God." But what happens in our culture when they tell Christians, "Shh, keep it in the church. Shh. That's a little radical. Shh. Not all denominations believe that. Shh. Don't get involved

politically, that's politics." Really, we're supposed to just hang out in a small group in our church and talk about who Jesus is?

That's not a mission. It's silly. When the world tells you what to do, you need to run it through the grid of scripture and say, "Is this what God is saying?" If he's not, then you stand firm and you don't do it because courage begets courage. Be fortified in your identity rather than being disturbed by the world's narrative. Don't get disturbed by what people say. They don't know God, and that's why they're speaking the way they're speaking. Third is this, if you're going to choose hope in this generation, if you're going to choose hope, you must remain firm in God's word rather than deceived to compromise your integrity. Remain firm in God's word rather than deceived to compromise your integrity. Never, ever, ever compromise your integrity, ever, ever. This is the lie. The enemy will say, "God forgives. He forgives everything. It doesn't matter. You can do that. It's no big deal. Don't even worry about. Nobody's going to know." That is him deceiving you to compromise your integrity.

Every time you compromise your integrity, you're going to pay a price, every time. Commit adultery, you'll pay a price. Fornicate, you'll pay a price. Steal at work, you'll pay a price. "Well, nobody's going to know." Well, the Bible tells me, you can be sure of this, that your sin will find you out. And by the way, it's tough to go to the God of the universe who you're asking to bless you when you're not doing the very things he wants you to do and doing just the opposite, so don't compromise your integrity. Notice what happens here in verse 10, after he gets done praying, it says, "When I entered

the house of Shemaiah, the son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel who was confined at his home, he said, 'Let us meet together in the house of God within the temple and let us close the doors of the temple for they're coming to kill you. They're coming to kill you at night.'

So I don't know who this Shemaiah was, but he probably had some relationship with Nehemiah and Shemaiah tells him, "Hey, come to my house. It's urgent. We've got to talk." So this is a guy on the inside. And oh, by the way, when you're doing God's work, he'll always have people on the inside that are supposed friends that will say something contrary to what God's word is saying, you better know what God's word is and what God's called you to do so you can follow God no matter what. So he goes to Shemaiah's house, and here's what Shemaiah says. He's like, "Hey, let's go into the temple. Let's shut the door. Here's why, they're coming to kill you, man. And I know when they're coming. They're coming tonight. So let's go right now. Let's go into the temple. Let's shut the door."

So Nehemiah's got the word, "You're going to get killed. You're going into the house of the Lord. Shut the door." There's a problem with this though. Notice what Nehemiah said, "But I said, should a man like me flee, and could one such as I go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in. I've got two problems with what you're saying to me, number one, what I know about my God is if he's called me to do something, he didn't call me to leave it," so I will stand firm for what God called me to do. If I'm in a marriage, I'm standing firm for my marriage, I ain't leaving it. If God called me the pastor of the church, I'm standing firm in it. I'm not leaving it. If God



called me to whatever it is, I'm doing it, I will not back down no matter what.

Number two, the Bible gives clear instructions and the Pentateuch that he's not allowed to go into the temple and do that. So if he goes into the temple and takes the role of the priest, then all the nation of Israel is going to say he doesn't believe the word of God. And if he says he does, he certainly doesn't obey it. He's not doing what the word says, so he's going to compromise his own integrity to save his own skin. Never compromise your own integrity to save your own skin. Let me tell you something, you can't control your reputation, you cannot. You cannot control what other people say about you. What other people say about you is none of your business anyway. I mean, people can say about you whatever they want. The only thing you can control is your integrity, and if you fear the Lord, that's what you should care about.

You should live in such a way that you know that each and every day when you're getting ready to go to bed, "Lord, I did this for you. I lived for you. I spoke for you. I wanted to be yours. Where I haven't been right, Lord, I'm confessing that because that's wrong, but I fear you, and even if people are saying ill and all these kind of things, I'm not going to get involved in it." By the way, did Jesus have anybody during his ministry that spoke ill of him? I mean, how was his reputation? His reputation was so bad that on the very last day of his life, everybody was yelling, "Crucify him, kill him," spitting on him, beating him. Reputation wasn't so good. How was his character? How was his integrity? Impeccable, never sinned. That's what God asked us to do. If you're going to have hope in this world, don't have hope because you're looking at, "What do other people think of me? What do other people say of me?"

Don't hold a mirror out to say, "What do you think of me? What do you think I should do?" I don't know if I should tell you the story, but Kenny Hatfield was a coach of Clemson a number of years ago. It was at a FCA Banquet. He told this story and he said, "There's two different kinds of animals, mustangs and jackasses," and he said, "mustangs, the way that they stay alive is when their prey comes, they put their heads together and they kick out." He said, "Jackasses turn their ear out to hear what everybody else is saying and they end up kicking themselves. Don't be a jackasses," is what he said. You say, "Well, why are you saying that on Sunday?" Because so many of us act like that, "What are you saying about me? What do you think about me? Do you like me? Am I good? Did you tweet me on social media? Did you like what I had to say? Do you care?" Who cares what other people think? You should care about what God thinks about you. Amen.

Be firm in the word, don't be deceived. If people are telling you, "Hey, you can break this law, you can do this. You can bend it here, you can..." Don't do that. Because notice what he says in verse 12, "Then I perceive that surely God had not sent him." How did he know God hadn't sent him? How did he know it wasn't a correct word of prophecy? Because it went against the Bible. It went against the clear teaching of scripture. When somebody tells you something, regardless of their personality or position, if it goes against the Bible, it's not from God, but he uttered his prophecy against me because why? Because Tobiah and Sanballat, two of his enemies had hired him. He was hired for this reason that I might become frightened and act accordingly in sin so that they might have an evil report in order that they could

reproach me.

What was going on? Hey, we're trying to get you to do something wrong because we're going to take pictures of it. We're going to post it on social media. We're going to show everybody else why you don't have any integrity. That's why we're giving you this prophet. I mean, just beware. So what does he do? Oh, he prays again, and I love how he prays this time, "Remember, oh my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs," you know what we're called to do when people speak ill of us? Here's what the Bible says. It says to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. So you're to love them, number one, and then you're to pray for them, number two.

Ask God to bless them. But here's how you can ask God to bless them, "God bless them according to the works that they're doing that honor you. Bless them like that. Lord, remember what they're doing and bless them according to that. Lord, they're in your hands. I forgive them, I love them, but bless them according to what they're doing with you, and also Noadiah, the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who are trying to frighten me." Here's what you do, when people are coming against you and you're doing God's work, just put them back in God's hands. When Jesus was going to the cross when he was spoken ill about, 1 Peter 2:22 and following, say exactly what he did. He didn't get angry. He didn't turn people into frogs or perform wizardry, or make people like whatever.

Here's what he said, "He had committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his

mouth, and while being reviled, he did not revile in return. While suffering he uttered no threats but kept entrusting himself to him who judges justly." When people were saying all sorts of insults, he didn't return insults. When people were reviling him, didn't revile back. When people were saying, "You say you're a savior, but you can't even save yourself," what was he saying? "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. Dad, into your hands I commit my spirit. I'm doing what you want. I'm doing it your way" that's what he was saying. That's what you can do. When you're doing God's work, just expect it.

There will be people from time to time that speak ill of you. Did that ever happen to Jesus on the inside? I mean, was there anybody close to him that deceived him? Anybody close to him that made it difficult? There's a guy by the name of Judas Iscariot, one that Jesus called the devil, one that would say, "It was better if you hadn't even been born," that was on the inside. And yet, what did Jesus do on the night he was betrayed? He washed his feet. He loved him. He was part of the worship service that they had. He told him, "What you're going to do, go do quickly."

He didn't revile them back. He didn't hate him. I believe to this day if Judas Iscariot had repented rather than hung himself, he would've had every opportunity to come back to God, he didn't. The devil entered him. He didn't have an opportunity to respond at that point in time, he'd gone too far. He said, "Well, what do I do?" Because your mama might've taught you what my mama taught me, which is sticks and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you. Nothing could be further from the truth. For those of you that have words hurled your way, for those of you in the public

sector that have had words hurled your way, you'd rather get hit by stones and sticks sometimes than the words. But here's a place you can go that'll give you great comfort.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:11-12, "Blessed are you," that means happy are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Meaning if you're going to follow the Lord and you're going to do what the Lord wants and there's a group of people or a person or whatever that says bad about you because all you're trying to do is honor the Lord, then you should be happy. "Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great from the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." You cannot escape this life without people saying bad things about you if you're going to live for Jesus, it's impossible. If you want to be liked, you don't want to be a Christian. Jesus said, "If they persecuted me, they'll persecute you." Anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

I mean, it's going to happen, but when it happens, choose hope. When it happens, choose joy. When it happens know, "Great is my reward. Lord, I'm rejoicing in this season because you're doing some great things. Praise you for that." So be firm in the word. You can't control your reputation. The only thing you can control is your integrity and you can't make other people see your integrity. Time and truth go hand in hand. One day at the judgment seat of God, that's where you want your integrity to be put on full display. And then finally is this fourth one. If you're going to choose hope in this present age, it means that you're going to need to remain faithful to God today

rather than discouraged when you're betrayed. You need to be faithful to God today. When you're discouraged, there's a tendency to want to quit.

I mean, have you ever noticed how many times in the Bible it talks about persevere, persevere, persevere, persevere, persevere, remains steadfast, stand... Why does it tell you that? Because everything in your flesh wants to turn tail run and be like, "I'm done with this." I mean, it's one thing to go through next steps and become a member of our church and get involved in serving, and I'm so excited, and you are until you're with people and then it's like, "Why did I sign up for this? They don't appreciate me. I'm trying to serve them and they're not on time, and they say mean things. I'm out."

I mean, everything in us says that. We get married to the person that we love, that we cherish, that we honor, and then we hit some rough patches sometimes or whatever and we're like, "This is so hard," and we want to go see somebody who will side with us because... No, you stand firm in the word and you don't get distracted by that stuff, like, "This is who I'm going to be. I'm not changing who I am based upon my circumstance. I'm going to still stand firm." And if you wonder why when we read in the Bible, all those things, story in the Old Testament of David, story in the New Testament with the apostles, why is it that the church was doing all these great things, and they had problems in the first century like we do. I get all that, but we were seeing great things happen.

What was going on? Well, you had a group of apostles that were saying stuff like

this, "Okay, Jesus Christ is Lord, you can't speak about him anymore." "Well, we're going to. So you decide what's right in your own eyes. You want to punish us, you want to beat us? No problem. We're still going to preach. You want to kill us? That's not a problem either, because that's the goal of our faith. But if we live for us to live as Christ, to die is gain. We don't care what you say or think." Now, when you have people standing up like that in mass, things begin to happen, versus, "You can't have your church open. You can't have more than 50 people. I'm sorry, I mean 10 people. You can't have than 10 people." "Okay? Whatever you say, we just want..." Say what? Say what? I remember during 2020 when I was reading about all of the people in the Bible, I was reading about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego that stood up to King Nebuchadnezzar before getting thrown into a fiery furnace.

I thought about Daniel getting put into a lion's den. I thought about Paul being imprisoned and getting beheaded. I thought about John the Baptist being beheaded because he called out King Herod for his immorality. And I thought about all these martyrs, the 70 million that have been martyred since the time of Christ until now, and that one day I was going to meet all my brothers and sisters in Christ. And I was going to say, "But you didn't have COVID," and it pained my heart to watch the church fold like a lawn chair, because had the church of Jesus Christ said, "No, no, no. We love you and you can choose whatever you want to do and we can't do anything about that, but we love our God and we love our people and we will not stop meeting because that's what God invited us and told us we must do in all the more as we see the day approaching," that thing would've ended really fast.

Be faithful to God today because some of us want to be faithful to God tomorrow. So notice what happens when you're faithful to God today. Now listen to this. Listen, listen. Listen. 130 plus years, it didn't happen. The nation's been just a disgrace for 130 plus years. I have people talk about our nation's been a disgrace for a long time. All those kinds, and it's a great nation that we live in, by the way. But people will say, "Well, there's no hope. There's no hope. There's no hope." Listen to this word. This is probably one of the best verses in the entire Old Testament Nehemiah 6:15. Notice this, God said he was going to do something. He called a man to do it. He rallied the people around and notice this verse. "So the wall, which hadn't been built in 130 plus years," so for generations nothing had happened, so the wall was completed on the 25th of the month of Elul in 52 days, not even two months.

This is a little over seven weeks. "Well, we can never turn our nation around. It's gone too far now. We can never get the church back. It's gone too far now," 130 plus years, and in seven weeks it's back. What could happen if the church of Jesus Christ stood up and stood firm, and stood on the word? I'm not talking about outwardly, I'm not talking about doing anything other than what God calls us to do. Love people radically, honor God faithfully and stand firm on the truth of God's word. What might happen? I believe God can turn his church around. I believe God can turn a nation around. I believe God can do everything that we read about in his Bible, and instead of wallowing in our tears like, "Oh, it's so bad. And look at my kids what they're into today."

And it's different because when I was growing up people were like, "Our kids



listening to Guns N' Roses and AC/DC. It's so bad." And now it's like our kids are having sex and doing drugs at the age of seven and being taught that they're the wrong gender, and they're getting mutilated without parents' recognition because the government says we own your kids and can kidnap them and do all that to them. It's abominable. But I choose to have hope because my God, the Lord Jesus Christ is still on his throne and he's the same yesterday, today and forever. And if his church stands up, he'll change it.

Amen. So let me conclude by saying this. Notice this, "When all our enemy has heard of it and all the nations surrounding us saw it," so they're hearing it and seeing it now, they lost their confidence. Now they're scared. When people come against you and you're doing the works of the Lord, they're just a paper tiger. They can't do anything to you. I mean, the worst thing they can do is kill you. And if they do, it'll be the greatest day of your life if you're a Christian, I promise you that. "They saw it and they lost their confidence for they recognized that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God. We don't know your God, but your God did this because there's no way you all could do it." That's what they saw. Now in these last three verses, he's going to give an account of what this era was like.

Now listen to this. This is really important. This is really important. "Also, in those days, many letters from the nobles of Judah to Tobiah and Tobiah's letters came to

them." I'll read it again. "Also, in those days, many letters went from the nobles of Judah to Tobiah and Tobiah's letters to them." Tobiah is the enemy. Tobiah has been yelling at them, threatening them, threatening to kill them, knock them down. But guess what? While all that's going on, there's leaders in Judah that are corresponding with Tobiah. Nehemiah is like, "I ain't coming off the wall," but some of his leaders are corresponding with him and notice what's going on. Why is this? "For many in Judah were bound by oath to him because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah, the son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam, the son of Berekiah." What happened? His son married a Jew.

So Tobiah's father-in-law and daughter-in-law were Jewish, and so he was using that relationship to get in, and even though he didn't want anything to do with the things of God, he was using his personality and his position and his perspectives to let people know he was a good guy and he was for him, but not really, even though he was trying to destroy everything that they were doing. Moreover, they were speaking about his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him. So not only were they getting together, the nobles were like, "This Tobiah guy is actually pretty good. He's a good guy." And Nehemiah's like, "I'm not coming off the wall. He's not a good guy," and then they're going and telling him that. So there was this internal thing that was going on. Why?

Because the devil always uses any kind of deception and lies to start that truth, "And then Tobiah sent letters to frighten me." That was the era that was going on. Here's what I'd say. When you follow a leader, follow somebody that has a long

spiritual track record of fearing the Lord that goes after God. Follow somebody that you've seen have integrity over. Now, you won't find anybody other than Jesus, that's perfect. Trust me. Find somebody that's willing to say, "I was wrong." Find somebody that's willing to say, "I was sorry," but find somebody that has that track record, because if all you do is sympathize with people that have personality, position and perspectives, they're like, "Well, this person's a leader, this person's this and they said that," don't follow people unless they have a long track record of being obedient to the Lord. Because Tobiah, you're going to read it in chapter 13.

He ain't a good guy, but he was posing as one. And the enemy always puts people who pose around the works of God so that people that are doing the work of God, "Well, you should listen to this guy's perspective. You should listen to her perspective. They have some..." No, this is God's perspective because the word declares that we're going to do this. And if they don't want to do that, they need to move on to what they need to do, and that's okay. And here's how you know. You know because God spoke it, so be faithful to God today. Don't wait and say, "Well, maybe one day God can do something." God can do it now. God can do it with us. God can do it in our generation. By the way, the hope for the whole world is the local church. I'm not talking BRAVE.

I'm talking all local churches that are centered upon the same Lord Jesus Christ as we are. Amen. That's the hope. And if all the churches stand up, and I've gotten to meet more and more pastors across the country now that are standing up, and the more and more we do that, the more and more we're going to see the hope of Jesus,

and we're all part of this. And I'll just give you a final point. It's not even in your notes, but I'll do it really quick. But the ultimate way you choose hope, it means repenting and believing the gospel. Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. If you really want to have hope in this life and in the life to come, let Jesus Christ be the Lord of your life. He's already Lord, he is all that. So it's not like I'm going to make him Lord.

He's Lord, you don't make him anything. It means I'm going to repent and believe that he's Lord, I'm going to allow him to be Lord of my life. And what you're about ready to hear in these baptism testimonies on all our campuses are people who were once dead and who are now alive. Nothing that they did on their own accord, it was Jesus Christ that saved them. They were in the kingdom of darkness and now they're in the kingdom of God's beloved son by no work of their own, but by the grace of God. And if you're here today, maybe you're here today and say, "You know what? I don't know anything about religion. I don't know anything..." I would say it's cool. You don't need to know anything about religion.

Here's what you need to know, that God loved you so much that he sent his son Jesus to die for all your sins and you can be completely forgiven and completely washed of all your sins, and you don't need to carry around guilt and shame anymore. Anything you've done, he took care of on the cross when he said, "It is finished, I paid for it in full." He died on the cross. He rose from the dead. If you'll turn from your sins and turn to Christ, he will save you in this very moment I'm going to pray and then I'm going to have you watch this short little video. And then on all our campuses, those that

are getting baptized will be up and we're going to have a special moment.

Father in heaven, we just give you praise, glory and honor for who you are. And Lord, I just ask here this morning, if anyone wants to give their life to Christ that they would. Lord, that they would be willing to repent and say, "I'm a sinner. I know I am. I know I'm dead. But this morning I realized that Jesus Christ is Lord. Lord, I confess you as my Savior. I confess you as my Lord. Come into my life and let me walk with you." Father, we pray during these baptism testimonies and during this time of baptism, that it'd be an awesome celebration of who you are. And as we watch this video, prepare our hearts for all you're going to do in Jesus' name, Amen.