

# Why Is the House of God Forsaken

by Steve Zehr

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of prioritizing God in our lives and avoiding the consequences of sin and guilt by seeking forgiveness and restoration.*

**Duration:** 51:28

**Scripture:** Nehemiah 13:1

**Topics:** "Discipleship", "Stewardship"

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## Description

In this sermon on Nehemiah chapter 13, the preacher discusses four main points. The first point is about the importance of being disciplined and prioritizing the things that God wants us to do. The preacher emphasizes the need to focus on God's purpose rather than getting caught up in busyness. The second point highlights the principle of sowing and reaping, explaining that those who suffer in the flesh will bear fruit. The third point addresses the issue of materialism and the danger of accumulating possessions without considering their true value. The preacher encourages gratitude for not having certain things yet and emphasizes the importance of a disciplined life that pulls the heart towards heaven. The final point is a call to action, reminding listeners that there is still a king in a faraway land calling all believers to rise up and build the church of God. The sermon concludes with a closing song.

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## Transcript

Well, it was already a blessing to be here. You know, there's something very cleansing about a confession, Sister Cierica. And I just want to say, you know, when we get into these murky situations, where, you know, like we were talking about Sunday school, where we hardly know, sometimes, the difference between a life of sin and I really want out of it, but I'm not, I'm not just above this thing.

And I'll tell you what, you just keep repenting, and confessing, and repenting, and begging God. And God's going to be honest with you, if you're honest with God. And I think it'll become more clear, you know, and I still struggle with things.

I, I believe, I, you know, I get out on the road, and constantly I think that the Spirit of God made the motto, Impatience Possess Your Soul, my motto for this summer. I believe I am the most impatient person in this building. But I am going to keep repenting of that, and keep confessing it to my wife, to my little boy, until God changes something in my life.

I believe it's a life of repentance, that we need to live. God is faithful. Well, I want to go on to Nehemiah chapter 13.

This is the last chapter of Nehemiah, and I think it'll kind of wrap up this study here. I have four points, and I thought, seriously, I need to preach on all four of those points, just a separate sermon on each point. But I'm trying to move along, and kind of combine this all.

And, uh, hopefully I can do a good job, and a gentle job. I could spend one whole sermon just trying to be gentle, and preparing you for some of these things I feel like I need to say. But I, I want you to know that I am here in love, and so I just need to get to the point and move on.

I'm going to read Nehemiah chapter 13. I'm going to read it once. It's a little bit long.

And I want you to follow along if it's possible for you. Try to just absorb this, and we might refer back to it. We might not.

But, uh, at least in, uh, in, uh, in the text here. But I'll refer back to it for sure, just, uh, in the sermon. But we'll try to, try to get the picture of what's happening here in this, uh, last chapter of Nehemiah.

Okay, so it says there in Nehemiah chapter 13. On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people. And there in the sound written that the Ammonites and the Moabites should not come into the congregation of God forever, because they met not the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, that he should curse them.

Howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing. Now it came to pass when they heard the law that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude. And before this, Eliashib the priest, having oversight of the chamber of the house of our God, was allied unto Tobiah.

And he had prepared for him a great chamber, whereupon they laid the meat offerings, the frankincense, the vessels, the tithes of the corn, and the new wine, and the oil, which was commanded to be given to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters, and the offerings of the priests. But in all this time was I not at Jerusalem, for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes, king of Babylon, came I unto the king, and after certain days obtained I leave of the king. And I came to Jerusalem and understood of the evil that Eliashib did for Tobiah in preparing him a chamber in the courts of the house of God.

And it grieved me sore. Therefore I cast out all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber. Then I commanded, and they cleansed the chambers, and thither brought I again the vessels of the house of God with the meat offering and the frankincense.

And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them for the Levites and the singers that did the work were fled every one to his field. Then I contended with the rulers and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together and set them in their place, and brought all Judah the tithe of the corn, and the new wine, and the oil, and of the treasures. And I made treasures over the treasures.

Shalliah, the priest, and Zadok, the scribe of the Levites, and next to them was Hanan, the son of Zakor, the son of Madaniah. For they were countenance faithful, and their office was to distribute unto their brethren. Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God and for the offices thereof.

In those days saw I in Judah some treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves and laden asses, as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all manner of burdens which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I testified against them in the day wherein they sold vituals. There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah and in Jerusalem.

Then I contended with the nobles of Judah and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do and profane the Sabbath day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, upon this city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath. Then it came to pass that when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the gates should be shut, and charged that they should not be opened till after the Sabbath. Some of my servants said I of the gate, that there should be no burden be brought in on the Sabbath day.

So the merchants and sellers of all kinds of ware lodged without Jerusalem once or twice. Then I testified against them and said unto them, Why lodge ye about the wall? If ye do so again, I will lay my hands on you. From that time forth they came no more on the Sabbath.

And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, O God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy. In those days also saw I the Jews, that had married wives of Ashdod, and Ammon, and of Moab.

And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jewish language, but according to each language of each people. And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among them nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel.

Nevertheless, even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Shall we then hearken unto you, to do all this great evil to transgress against our God, in marrying strange wives? Now one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib, the high priest, was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite. Therefore I chased him from me.

Remember them, O my God, because they defiled the priesthood, and covered the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites. Then cleansed I them from all strangers, and appointed the wards of the priests and the Levites, everyone in his business, and for the wood offerings, and at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.

Okay, we get the title for this message in verse 11, and that is, Why is the house of God forsaken? The question Nehemiah had for the people, I want to do a little bit of history just briefly. We'll go back to the time when Nebuchadnezzar came down and destroyed Jerusalem, destroyed the temple. This was in the last chapter of 2 Corinthians, right before Ezra.

And you see that Nebuchadnezzar came down and destroyed it. By the time you get to Cyrus, Cyrus was the next king there, and it says that the spirit of God stirred in this king, this great monarch, and he said these words, he said to the Jewish people, he said, Who is there among all you, his people? Beautiful words of this heathen king that was capturing the people of God, but the spirit of God had him say these things. Who is there among you of all his people? And he said, His God be with him.

Let him go to Jerusalem and rebuild the house of the Lord. And you know the story there. You don't get very far into Ezra, the book of Ezra, maybe the third chapter, and they've rebuilt the temple.

They've rebuilt the place of worship for God. And it says that by the time you get to Nehemiah chapter 9, Ezra got up there on that pulpit of wood and he began to preach the law to those people and they began to see what it was that caused the captivity to begin with. And these people all repented of this awful sin that they had done.

They could see themselves, and it says that God gave them his good spirit within these people. And they made vows and commitment. They made promises to God.

In verse 10 of Nehemiah, they said, you can just imagine these people, you know, they're excited with this, what's happening. And they said, We will not forsake the house of God. What grand words they had to say.

We will not forsake the house of God. Never again will this happen to us. And by the time you get to chapter 13, this last chapter we read, nice new church, nice new city.

And Nehemiah comes back and he says, Why is the house of God forsaken? Why? He had just left for a few years. He had went back to the king, back to Babylon. And he comes back a few years later and he says, Why is the house of God forsaken? I'm sure these were a busy people.

I'm sure they had lots of stuff to do. They had grapes to press. They had sheaves to carry in.

They had all manner of things to haul around on their donkeys. They were an extremely busy people. They had all kinds of important business that needed to be done.

And I'm sure that somehow it never occurred to these people that they had ever neglected the house of God. There they sat inside of this brand new city, inside of this brand new church. And somehow it never occurred to them that they may have forsaken the house of God as the number one priority in their life.

That's the first thing I'd like to think about in this chapter. I have four points of why the house of God is forsaken. He is forsaken in priority.

And that can be in our lives. That can be on the church level. But the house of God was forsaken with these people in priority.

You see that it led to so many other sins. It led to them marrying other people. It led to them doing all kinds of things on the Sabbath day.

And when Nehemiah came and asked these people this question, Why is it that the house of God is forsaken? I don't suppose that until this moment it even crossed their minds that maybe the house of God was forsaken. They didn't even realize it. They had just built the house of God.

And if you go back into Nehemiah, you see how they had defended the house of God. You see how they had been so regimented in their defense of the house of God. They wore a sword and you know how they built the wall and they all did their jobs.

And now here they were in their brand new building. And somebody asked them, Why aren't you here? Why aren't you doing what you're supposed to do? And so here are the religious of that day. They didn't

even realize that they had abandoned God's house, God's purpose, God's plan for their life.

And maybe it'll surprise us as a contemporary people of God. I think it should surprise us a little bit with that question. If you think about all the activity that we have as a people at times, our ordinations, our baptisms, our almost monthly integration of more people into our midst, our talk about outreach, our track passing out.

And perhaps it would come as a surprise to us if the Lord God Almighty would come down, if Jesus Christ would come back to earth. And He'd come into our midst in the midst of all this activity. And He'd say to us, Why is the house of God forsaken? And that happens when God isn't number one priority in our life.

When God isn't number one priority in the midst of all your business, your plans, your interests, all that you have to do. And there's a very real possibility that the house of God is forsaken in your life. And you and I should stand in amazement.

This last chapter of Nehemiah should serve notice to the people in America, to the Mennonites of America, that God is not fooling around, that just because we have so much going on, that we have so many plans, that we can go out and pass out tracks, that we can be busy all the time. It should serve notice to us that God expects His people to keep Him number one in their life at all times. You know, I was thinking that after all that we went through, all the busy summer.

Well, busy summer aside, I'm thinking for myself. Busy in my mind as I thought about Romania. As earlier, we went through all the outreach activity and you know, people are still trying to sort that out.

As you've come all from Harrisburg and all manner of... all over, you know, from Valley, from all the places you've come from as churches. With all this going on, have you felt closer to God? Have you felt like you've had more time to do the truly important things that God wants you to do than you did before? Or do you just feel busier? And sometimes, you know, when I stand still for a moment and I just watch all the activity, all the noise, all the thunder and lightning that goes on, and I wonder, are we really accomplishing God's purpose? Okay, for you, are you really finding more peace in your walk with God than you used to have? You know, our churches are full. Praise God for that, I guess.

You know, but our churches are full of people. Leonard Ravenhill said this. He said, you know, he said, Sunday morning attendance tells us how popular the church is.

Sunday evening attendance tells us how popular the preacher is. And Wednesday evening attendance tells us how popular. Praise God we have such a popular church in Tangent, Oregon.

Praise God you have such popular businesses and popular houses and popular vacations. Praise God you wear such popular clothes. But I wish we had a popular God.

You know, the most popular, and it's amazing to me when I think about it, the most popular athlete in Beijing, China this year was a man that was on trial for rape just a few years ago. In a land that denounces anything to do with Christ, Kobe Bryant was the most popular athlete in Beijing. And I wonder, what's the most popular thing in your life? What is the most popular thing in your life? Why is it that we feel more pressure sometimes? I just want to ask you, why do we feel as a congregation more pressure to support the church than we do prayer? More pressure to support the church school than we do prayer? You know, if we made that a requirement that we had to be at prayer meeting to go to church.

And here again, I'm not talking about maybe just... You know, this is what Leonard Ravenhill observed this. I'd like to think of that even as a broad doubt in worship in your heart. You know, we do find that in 1 Corinthians there, 2 Chronicles, when the captives had come, one of the judgments that came upon them was because they ignored this part about the Sabbath day keeping.

And we find this so prominent now as Nehemiah comes back in this last chapter, that he said for every... I guess it was for every year, every day, that you skip the Sabbath, that you did not make me a priority in your life. The Lamb's going to rest. The Lamb's going to be at ease.

For every year that you didn't do this. And they had built up a tremendous deficit. And for 70 years they got to remember what all had happened.

They got to remember how they had violated... I suppose that would equate to 700 years of violating this principle of keeping God number one in your life. But I want to ask you, brothers and sisters in the church, what kind of deficit... When I look across the church in America today, when I look at my life and your life, when we look at our churches, what kind of deficit are we preparing for ourselves? What kind of deficit do you have in your life of keeping Christ number one in your church? And for 70 years that laid deficit. And I wonder what the bride of Christ, what the deficit is going to be.

You know, I would just like to say, if we have that inner childish joy that we missed another church service, you're playing a game. You're playing the devil's game. Somewhere around 12, 13, 15, you need to get over that.

And I miss church. I miss church. But I'll tell you what, we need to have a desire to be with the people of God.

We really do. Forsaken in priority. Second thing I'd like to put, point number two here, is that these people were a lusting people.

We see that. We don't get very far into this problem of the people going into captivity. And we find out that one of the major problems was that they were a lusting people.

Just like the generations before them in Nehemiah. And for the millennia that has been after them, these people, like all of us, they had this terrible, strong desire for other things in their life. They could never stay within the parameters that God planned for them.

Just like Eve. Adam and Eve. All of us are that way, but these people somehow could not maintain a disciplined life when it came to what God had laid out for them.

And somehow these pretty ladies of the nations around them, even though they had been warned and told. In fact, when Ezra came back to build the temple, the Jews that were left there that hadn't gone into captivity, this was one of the first things that Ezra had corrected among these people. You've got to get rid of your strange wives.

And now we get back just a few short years later after they've built the temple, after all they've gone through, they're right back at this same game. And I'm guessing these people, Nehemiah used an example, but I'm guessing these people, these young men, these older men, these lustful men, I'm guessing they knew about Solomon. They knew about his 700 wives and 300 concubines.

They knew that he was the wisest man that ever lived and he was beloved of God and there was no king like him in all the nations round about. And I suppose they somehow decided that if Solomon could do it, there'd be some way they could get by with it. But I'd like to let you think a little bit about Solomon.

I don't know why on earth how a guy would get to the place where he has 700 wives and 300 concubines other than the fact that somehow the one that's coming next always looked a little better than the one that you just had. And somehow he was never satisfied with committing himself to one. There was always something new out there.

There was always something different. There was always a new wife, a new lover that he had to try out. But there was never one husband, one wife relationship.

Never any commitment in the life of Solomon. Wise man. Wisest man that ever lived.

And he could never get committed to anything. And I'd like to propose to you, dear people this morning, that the church of God in America is suffering in our people and the antipathetic is suffering from forsaken commitment. We are people that are not used to commitment.

We don't like commitment. We've got nothing to do with commitment. Wise men.

And it constantly amazes me to no end as I see people, many of you out here are far superior in intelligence to I am. But these people that have been saved from sin, saved from drunkenness, saved from the world, saved from things that I have never experienced, saved from drugs. And these people in a matter of a few short months know their Bible, their memories, they know doctrines of the Bible that I'm just now getting to.

And you have people that know everything there is to know about church history. You have people that know everything there is to know about the early church. You have people that know everything there is to know about all kinds of things.

Doctrine. Wise men. But they don't know how to get committed to a body, a local body of Christ.

Forsaken in commitment. You say church membership won't save you. And I say, well, fine.

You can say that, but talking down church membership isn't going to save you. Talking down the body of Christ isn't going to save you. I have something here.

The Anabaptists. Some of the things that separated the Anabaptists. And I see that there's quite a bit.

This is especially one sermon. At one point, I could preach a whole sermon on this. I'm going to have to move along here.

But Robert Reitman, he wrote this. And he wrote a lot about the Anabaptists and different things. But he said this.

Now then, the central idea of Anabaptism, the real dynamite of the age of Reformation as I see it, was this. That one cannot find salvation without caring for his brother. That this brother actually matters in the personal life.

This interdependence of man gives life and salvation a new meaning. It is not faith alone which matters, for which faith no church organization would be needed, but it is brotherhood. This intimate caring for each other as it was commanded to the disciples of Christ as a way to God's kingdom.

That was a discovery that was made by Anabaptism so forcefully and outstanding in all of church history. And many people find it convenient, very convenient, to never integrate themselves into the local body of Christ and still claim the fullness of Christ. But nowhere in the New Testament do you ever find that.

When they repented, they always made themselves a part of the body. They always made themselves one with the church that was there. To be a part of Christ is to be a part of Christ's body.

If you're not a part of Christ's body, you're not a part of Christ. And so what happened back in a few centuries later, what happened to fix this problem that many people perceive as an impure church? Pietism came out. And I could preach another sermon on that because that is one of the most misunderstood doctrines that I know of.

But Pietism came out and that was people that were stuck in a dead church. You say, well, what should I do with that? Well, what they did, what the Pietists did, is they said, well, there can be no such thing as a pure church. God knows who are His.

You're going to raise the wheat with the tares. And so we're just going to be good Christian. God knows the heart in this corrupt body.

And so what they began to do is they coined the term the invisible church. So I'm part of the invisible church. Many people don't even know what they're saying when they say that.

And I get in these discussions about people that don't want to be a part of the church. They're part of the invisible church. Let me tell you what the part of the invisible church is.

The invisible church on earth is the visible church in hell. There's no such thing as the invisible church when it comes to Christ's kingdom. It is as visible as you are today.

Okay, so then we'll talk about the universal church. Okay? There's something called the universal church. I'd like to ask you how you can be a part of the universal church if you're not part of the local church.

And we need to think about these things. The universal church is made up of people that are submitted and they're committed to each other. And basically what Robert Reitemann was saying is that we're looking at Christianity.

We're looking at the bride of Christ as something that is so fundamentally important. It is crucial to your salvation. And the best way I can describe it is to say this.

You say, I don't need to be a part of the local body to be a good Christian. Just do it myself. I'm just part of the invisible church.

I say, fine. There's people that went to heaven that were never baptized. Let me tell you something.

You don't get baptized on it. If you live in disobedience to the very clear directions of the Bible, then you're not going to make it into the body of Christ. And it's the same way when it comes to this local body that Christ so clearly set out.

To be buried with him and baptized. And I suppose that is one of the most unthought through, misunderstood doctrines in Christianity today is about baptism. To get baptized without submission to the body is a close thing I can think of.

Long term anyway. It's like being saved and not forsaken sin. I mean, you can pretend it's working for a while.

But it's a fundamental. That's what it's all about. Being put under.

Being dead to self. Where I'm not making my decisions anymore. It was the body.

It was Christ. It was Christ in me. It was Christ in us.

And if I can't get along with them, I'm not going to get along with God. And I'd like to challenge you. We have a unique church here.

And this is where I should be kind. And I want to be gentle. A unique setting going on here.

I want to say I'm in love. That if long term, you can stir around and mess around and influence and change and push and tug. And never submit your own heart to the decisions that are made in the body of Christ.

You're a bad influence. You're a bad influence. I'd rather have ten people that came into this church that were not sure if this was exactly perfect.

We're not sure. In fact, we're quite sure that there's a lot of things that could be changed than one man wiser than Solomon that could not commit and submit and bow his heart to the body of Christ. And you can be as wise as Solomon.

But I wonder if you love what God loved. I wonder if you're committed to what God's committed to. Solomon, a man beloved of God.

A man, the Bible says, was not a king before, after, and like Him. And as wise as he was, this lack of commitment cost him a relationship with the bridegroom. And I just feel in my heart a deep sense that the heart of God grieves over the loss of such genius.

We have so much to add. You have so much to add with all that you know. And we fail in this one test of commitment.

Point number three. In the ensuing aftermath of a project like this, I guess my brother Leland, some of you are in construction, me in farming, the intensity of the summer to try and get everything done. You know, after all the busyness and after all the construction sites have been picked up and cleaned up and the tractors washed up and put away, you know, it's just mighty nice to just relax a little bit and get the hot dogs out, build a fire, go on a trip.

It's just awful easy to just let down your guard and kind of do what you want to do and relax for a few days and take it easy. After all that regimented repetition, I think we went back to that when we talked about surrender, how in that one chapter of Nehemiah there, how it says, and next to Him was doing this. And for I don't know how many verses it says, next to Him, you know, they had this thing going.

You get this assembly line look. You know, it's mighty nice just to take a break. But it was easy for these people.

And one thing they forgot was the discipline that had carried them all the way through the book of Ezra and Nehemiah and out of captivity and back to this wonderful sweet place in their relationship with God. The same discipline that had brought them through all these troubles with their enemies and that long journey back from Babylon and across the river there where they had to pray and trust in God and fast. That same discipline that had got them there was the same discipline that was going to keep carrying them forward and make sure that they kept this relationship that the house of God was not forsaken.

But when Nehemiah came back, he found that there were so many things that had gone wrong. They had stopped cleaning the things. The people that were supposed to take care of the treasure had stopped doing that.

You know, everybody had just kind of relaxed. Forsaken and disciplined. The whole place was starting to fall apart.

Brand new building. Nobody was taking care of anything. They were all forsaken the house of God in their discipline of their lives.

They didn't keep the gate. That's one reason they're coming in on the Sabbath day. Forsaken and disciplined.

I wonder how it is in your own life. You know, in 1 Corinthians 10, there's a lot of good things that were given to us for examples. One of the things, and I just want to pick out one of the things here, I feel is so prevalent in our church when we think about a church, a community, a nationwide denomination forsaken the house of God in discipline.

And in 1 Corinthians 10, it says that why those people, it says that, you know, they were adulterers. These people sat down to eat and drink and they rose up to play. Just taking it easy.

Just having a good time. I don't know, probably a lot of you heard about the wreck back east where that dad was truck driving his Kenworth truck, you know, and he's driving late at night. He had two little boys, just my boys' age, you know, 11 and 6 or 8. Late at night, one day, down the freeway, nice reefer, nice Kenworth.

11 o'clock. Get on the phone. I don't know what the children, maybe they're sleeping in the bunk.

And, you know, you get out the phone and you begin to talk and you begin to laugh. And you call up your buddies. My wife, some of you might have went to Bible school.

My wife went to Bible school with this young man. He was a young man. And I don't know his state.

I heard he was going through something. They really were concerned about his soul. But the story is, he began to, I don't know what happened.

He began to laugh. And something happened on the phone and it was so funny, you know, you laugh so hard after a while you can't really get your breath. And somehow this man, I guess he had done it before, this man passed out.

This big truck full of apples, 80,000 pounds, drifts off the highway. I suppose the little boy was asleep. Up the bank, you know where the overpass and the bank meets.

It's about half the size of a truck. And there he stuck that thing fast. Killed all three of them.

Literally laughed himself to death. And I don't know where he is in eternity. But proverbially, dearly beloved, proverbially, I'm afraid we are a people that are laughing ourselves to hell and have no idea what we're doing.

Because of forsaken and disciplined. You ever wonder, I've thought many times since that wreck, I thought, you know, I wonder what the joke was. I wonder what the joke was.

I wonder what was so funny. You know what the joke is? You know, I think the joke is 1 Peter 2, 1 Peter 1, 1 Peter 2, verse 11, says this, it's dearly beloved. I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, that you abstain from fleshly lusts that war against your souls.

And we often think of these fleshly lusts, you know, drunkenness, pornography, drugs. But dearly beloved, this morning, I believe that from the fleshly lust that war against our souls, the people can be summed up in the first five verses of Proverbs 23. And that is simply this, put a knife to your throat if you're given to appetite and labor not to be rich.

And we think no matter what we do, we're the dearly beloved pilgrims that Peter's talking about. But I'm afraid, dearly beloved pilgrims, that our cars, our trucks, our boats, our planes, our houses, our vacations, our businesses, all these things, our activities, stand as a mute testimony to the fact that we're a complaining, grumbling, we'd rather cry for what we want than die for who we love. You think of all the depression that's out there, all the murmuring, complaining, dissatisfied, forsaken, and disciplined.

OK, so the church is dead and it's stuffy and it's got to leave. It's a joke. OK, so you have to leave.

Don't leave for carnal things. Don't go to a church where they're going to give you more liberties. Don't find a church where you're going to have more freedom.

Don't do that. Like somebody said, you're half dead already spiritually. Why would you do that? You don't even realize you're half dead spiritually when you get ready.

You're like, you've got to go, you've got to go get this, you've got to go get this, I've got to get my music, I've got to get my this. You're already half dead. Why don't you pick a church that allows you more things? Listen, you take your family, you take your children, you take yourself to a church that allows you more liberties.

Nobody's ever saved their children by giving them more things. You've never saved your soul by allowing yourself less discipline. But I'll tell you what, the Bible says that he that has suffered in the flesh hath feathered from sin.

Now I'm not talking about a works religion, but the early Christians believed this. They were the persecuted one, it was very clear. Those that suffered in the flesh had feathered.

It's a Bible principle that works. And there's times, you know, when I really want something and I just have to wait one more summer and I can buy it. And I don't know, I don't know where to put all those things, but there's times in my life when I lay down in my bed, my single double wide trailer, and I tell God I'm so

thankful that I don't have that thing yet.

There is something that pulls the heart towards heaven with a disciplined life. We need to remember that. And like I said, there's all kinds of people in this country.

It's one of the things that bother me. I think I could preach a whole sermon on just this topic. But in the most Christian friendly, in the most food abundant nation in the world, I don't know if we live in a time when there's more depressed Mennonite Christians in the history of the earth.

I think it's coming to undisciplined life. I think it's from a lot of things. But I know it's not from God.

You may hate a disciplined life. You may not like a disciplined life. But it is a fact that at the end, there's many people.

All through history, there's many people that at the end wanted to have the fruit of what a disciplined life would bring them. You think about the banquet supper in the Bible. All those people had to have the robe on.

You think about the five foolish virgins that had to have their lamps trimmed and lit. You think about the people during the flood in Noah's time. You think about the Jews in Esther's time.

You know when that whole log got turned around and now it was the Jews on the attack. The Bible says many wanted to join themselves to the Jews. And Nehemiah found the same thing.

He found those that were counted faithful to put in charge of God's business at the end there. To take care of the treasures. Okay, the last point I have is forsaken in sanctity.

A church that has forsaken God in sanctity. We find here something in Nehemiah in a couple different places. I guess it just stands out so vividly to me as one of the first things that stood out in this chapter.

As I read about the tenants and the agreements and the thoughts and what they stood for in the book of Nehemiah. And this man, Tobiah, emerges as the man that mocked, the man that ridiculed and schemed and planned on how he could destroy the church of God. And when I got to the book of the last chapter of Nehemiah, and I find this very man, this man that had mocked and said, even if a fox was to stand on their wall, it would knock it down.

This man in the very courts of God, in the very inner chambers of God, making himself a part of God's people. A man that had no business being there. And something that a few generations back would have never been considered, never would have been allowed.

These people were now allowing, this priest, Eliashib, this priest, We find also that one of the high priest's grandsons, Eliashib's grandsons, had married one of Sanballat's daughters. So he had this inner marriage and this emotional attachment. I don't know, I suppose you would think that Eliashib would think better of this.

That he would have thought, had his history better. He would have understood even more clear than we do today. As he contemplated this unique situation of what was happening.

You think he would have thought thought changed his attitude about this. He would have thought about this. But somehow, because of friendship, because of relationship, because of fellowship and

intermarriage, he was able to ignore the fact that these people were still the enemies of God.

And had nothing, had done nothing to change their lives, to prove themselves any different. I think it's interesting to note that the fact that these men were able to come there, were willing to come there, I'm sure there's a few things they had to change, said something about the climate of what the temple was now. These men never would have felt welcome to come.

They'd have never felt welcome to just blend in and fit in. At the time when Nehemiah was there building the temple, they'd have felt that their very lives were threatened. But now, somehow the climate of this place had changed to where these people had felt welcome to just join in and fit in and make themselves. And that says something about the climate of this now church of God.

And I just wanted to say here that this isn't about people. All of you are welcome here. Every single one of you.

I hope you still feel welcome to the end of this sermon. And that's not the point. The point is, and I'm sure there'd have been some things Tobiah could have done and Sambalot could have done, but the point I'm trying to make is that they were bringing their baggage with them.

They're bringing their sin and their defilement. The same problems that they had. All of us have to leave those things. All of us have to forget and forsake those sins if we want to make ourselves a part.

But this Eliashib, I suppose one of the things that made him do what he did is that he was flattered with the attention. You know, these new converts coming in. These people coming to his church.

He's coming. I suppose he thought the numbers were swelling. The attendance was getting bigger.

Somehow they were the popular church in Jerusalem now. You know, one of the greatest and most tragic ironies of church life is, church history that is, is that you can find churches that once stood for Bible principles, vehemently defended these things. That now, those very same churches a few generations later are vehemently justifying and protecting these same devilish sins.

You and I all know churches like that. Probably all of you would know churches that for one reason or another have switched positions, have changed, have thought of things different than they used to think. And allowed things in their myths, in their place, that a few generations ago would have never been tolerated.

And of course, the bottom line isn't what a few generations ago would have thought. The bottom line is what the Bible would have thought. The bottom line isn't what the Anabaptists would have thought.

Although, it's interesting to see what the early church would have thought. The bottom line is what Christ thinks. And we always go back to that pattern.

And we take these people, these ideas, these plans, these people that are coming in, and it doesn't matter what anybody says. And it doesn't matter who grandfathered these ideas into our myths. They're still sinful.

And sometimes because they're related to us, or because our dad did it, or because, you know, all these things. Somehow, that's how these things get into our churches, get into our myths. And I would just wonder.

I have thought in fear and trembling, I have wondered, what it would be like to have the apostles come back, to have James come back, to have Jesus come back into our churches. Like, Nehemiah came back. And see, how many of these ideas, how many of these things, how many of these thought patterns would still be worth keeping around if you'd pitch them out of there? And I just want to be totally honest and blunt and straightforward.

I think, I think, and I want to be gentle here, but just for an example, you know, Hosea. Hosea really got my attention. Hosea said that, he said, My people ask counsel of their stocks and their staff and declare unto them for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused them to err and have done a whoring from under their God.

And, you know, just for example, I think one of the things that we need to really be careful about, I know, may be a little controversial sometimes in our circles, but the thing of water-witching, of these type of activities, we need to be really careful with. I call it sin. I call it witchcraft.

And I call it that because I have a deep, honest desire to understand God's word. And I'm just saying because your grandfather did it, because daddy did it, because further down the line somewhere, the Amish did it, does not make Tobiah in my chamber a sanctified man. That goes for masturbation.

That goes for covetousness. You know, the Bible says to withdraw yourself from a covetous man. So I'm assuming that's what it meant.

You know, it's all through history we get to this place in life. Is there ever a time in the history of our Christianity where this could be a problem than in America 2008? And yet I'm afraid sometimes we've ridiculed and scorned like Tobiah did the very people that try to bring their sins to attention. We need to be careful.

We need to be careful. And this forsakenness sanctity is the one reason I believe churches are on a one-way course. They get in a one-way, one ratcheted direction that they cannot, you cannot bring true revival on a corporate level.

It's because these ideas, because these things get grandfathered in one at a time and there's no reverse, there's no back lever, there's no break to draw that thing back. You're emotionally involved now. And with an unbiased heart, with all our pride, our prejudice gone, we need to look at these things.

You know, we can sing people of the living God, I've searched the world around, all we want to. But when that King comes back, all bets are going to be off. Either you've forsaken the house of God or you haven't.

One of the things I find so interesting in the book I told you, the book of Hosea just grabs me again. God told him to make an example and says, I want you to go out and marry a harlot. You know what happened with the family he raised? God named those little boys and girls.

One of the names meant the judgment of God is coming. The other one meant the mercy of God has departed. And the third one meant these are not my people.

See what happens? Do you get the picture of what happens to the church of God when a half-breed was allowed in? When a half-breed was allowed to marry in? Over time, this thing just evolves. First, it's stuck in a pacifier, it's sipped in a bottle, it grows up, it's a teenager. Now this idea is just the way we've done it.

And God said, that family is not my people. Forsaken in sanctity. I do find it interesting in Nehemiah chapter 13, he said, when these people married the wives of Ashdod, their children spoke half in the speech of Ashdod.

And they didn't even know the Jewish language. You see, we create our own terminology after a while. We create our own prerequisite and our own standard for what Christianity is.

And we're in danger of doing that if we forsake sanctity. But I want to end on a positive note. That there is still a king in a faraway land calling all of us personally.

Who is there? Ye of all his people that will rise up, that will go back to Zion and build the church of God. The Lord bless him, and keep him, and protect him. God is going to be with him.

God is going to be with the people that do not forsake. Let's have a closing song.

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