

# **Rise up and rebuild the church!**

**[Nehemiah]**

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# Introduction

The church is crumbling right now. The church is not only collapsing morally or ethically, but also biblically. In other words, the church now does not know God (Isa. 45:4, 5). The reason is because they rejected the knowledge of knowing God (Hos. 4:1). Not only the saints, but also the pastors rejected the knowledge of God (v. 6). As a result, the more we increase as we ignore the commandments of God (v. 6), the more we sin against God (v. 7). Also, the church is not preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the church. Rather, the church now preaches “a different gospel” (Gal. 1:6-9). And now the church is accepting that different gospel well (2 Cor. 11:4). Also, the church is not living a life worthy of the gospel of Christ (Phil. 1:27). In other words, the church does not stand with one mind and cooperate for the faith of the gospel with one will (v. 27).

Although the whole church should become a church that fulfills only the Lord's will with one heart, now each church is doing things according to their own will and their own opinions (Deut. 12:8, Judg. 17:6, 21:25). If this is not a broken church, what is it? Therefore, the church must collapse. The church must be thoroughly broken and destroyed. A church that is not centered on the Lord must collapse. The church that rejected the knowledge of God must collapse. The church preaching a different gospel must be destroyed. The church that does not live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ must be completely destroyed. And as we see the collapsed church, we must cry out to God who is full of mercy. We must tear our hearts and confess our great sins to God and repent. And we must return to God. Then God will forgive all our sins. God will restore us. God will use us to rebuild the Lord's church. With God's good hand helping us, we will rise up and rebuild the Lord's church. The Lord will raise up among us exemplary leaders like Nehemiah. The Lord will raise up the Lord's workers to build His church. The Lord is with all of us and will rebuild the Lord's church in the face of any crisis or adversity. Therefore, we must rise up and rebuild the Lord's church. We must participate in the work of the Lord building His church (Mt. 16:18). Join us, but especially we must return to the Word of God. And we must yearn for the revival of the Word. Therefore, we must experience the power of the Word. We must experience the power of the gospel again. And the power of the gospel must be revealed through our church.

As I began to serve Victory Presbyterian Church by God's grace, I preached on the book of Nehemiah among the 66 books of the Bible. The reason I chose this book is the Lord's promise to my heart, “... I ... will build my church...” (Mt. 16:18). The Lord brought me back to Victory Presbyterian Church with this word of promise and started the ministry. At that time, the Lord gave me a desire to meditate on Nehemiah. So, I preached it every Sunday and the Lord began to break me down first. Also, the Lord began to show breach in my heart and life (Neh. 4:3). In the midst of this, the Lord

gave me grace (5:19) and gave me the assurance that the Lord is accomplishing the work of building His church (6:16). With the conviction that Victory Presbyterian Church is the Lord's church, and that the Lord will build it (Mt. 16:18), I have started to serve the church, which is the body of the Lord, and have come thus far. I hope and pray that I will continue to hold on to the word of promise of the Lord and serve the church with faith.

Serving the Lord's church, Victory Presbyterian Church, which the Lord is building,

James Kim

(August 2015, Thinking of Victory Community)

# A man of prayer (1)

## [Nehemiah 1:1-4]

On the afternoon of Sunday, December 21, 2003, according to God's grace and guidance, I became the senior pastor of Victory Presbyterian Church. The following year, in January 2004, I chose the Book of Nehemiah among the 66 books of the Bible and began to proclaim the word of God. The reason I chose the Book of Nehemiah is because I had a heart that longed for the Lord to accomplish the work of rebuilding Victory Presbyterian Church through us while meditating on Nehemiah with the concept of "rebuilding". In particular, I wanted the Lord to build a "wall" again while tearing down our "walls" that had foundations but collapsed, or our "walls" that needed to be demolished. How should we rebuild the "walls" that have been or should be demolished in our church?

Pastor J. I. Packer, in his book "A Passion for Faithfulness: The Wisdom of Nehemiah," said: 'Nehemiah built the (Jerusalem) walls through God, and God built the saints through Nehemiah' (Packer). This word gives us two lessons: (1) The first lesson is that we must build the "walls" of Victory Presbyterian Church by relying on God and following His guidance. (2) The second lesson is, God's interest is to raise saints, that is, people, through us. This means that our church should do the ministry of building one person rather than a church building or program.

God built people through Nehemiah. What kind of person was Nehemiah? In today's text, Nehemiah 1:1-4, we meet Nehemiah, a man of prayer. While meditating on Nehemiah, "Man of prayer (1)", I would like to answer the question "Why should we pray?" I hope that each of us can be motivated in our prayer life. Why should we pray? In the book "Necessity of Prayer" by E. M. Bounds, Bounds says that there are two types of prayer: (1) The petition of faith and (2) The prayer of submission. The petition of faith refers to word-centered prayer (Rom. 10:17). This prayer of faith will surely be answered. The prayer of submission is not based on a clear word of promise, but is to hold on to God with a humble and broken heart and ask Him for what the prayer's soul desires (Bound).

This prayer of submission is not a prayer that God will always answer. If we think of

Nehemiah's prayer (Neh. 1:1, 7), it seems to be the second of the two types of prayers mentioned by E. M. Bounds, the prayer of submission (request). Nehemiah was born and raised in Babylon, a foreign land, because of his ancestors taken captive to Babylon. He was a Jew who served as "cupbearer to the king" (v. 11) in the palace of Susa (v. 1), one of the royal palaces in Media and Persia. Here, the king's cupbearer can also be said to be the Prime Minister in today's terms. His role was to taste the wine to see if it was poisonous or not. He was the one who held an important position in charge of the king's life. Furthermore, the cupbearer was a position where he could sit with the king and discuss state affairs with the king. In today's text, Nehemiah 1:2, he asked Hanani, his brother, and "some other men" from Judah about the people of Judah and the situation in Jerusalem. Then he heard about his hometown Israel, the rest of the Jews, and Jerusalem: "Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire" (v. 3). Interestingly, the name of Nehemiah's brother, "Hanani," means 'the Lord is gracious.' However, from a human point of view, Hanani did not bring God's gracious news to Nehemiah at all. Pastor Warren Wiersbe's book "Be Determined" summarizes what Nehemiah heard in three ways: (1) Remnant: The news that all the people of the nation of Israel, the protagonists of the Exodus, were all taken captive in the land of Canaan where they lived, and only those left were left, (2) Ruin: The news that the city of Jerusalem was destroyed and the gates were burned, (3) Reproach: The news that the remnant suffered tribulation and were humiliated (Wiersbe). When Nehemiah heard this, he sat down and wept and mourned for several days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven (v. 4). He went to God with a broken spirit and prayed. Hearing the sad news from his homeland, he wept and mourned and prayed to God. We can learn two lessons from this Nehemiah's prayer.

### **First, the lesson from Nehemiah's prayer is love for his country.**

Nehemiah was interested not only in his people, the Jewish people, but also in Jerusalem. He had always been interested in Jerusalem, which was the religious center, and the people of Judah, so he asked Hanani and a couple of people from Judah to Medo-Persia about their situation. If there is no interest, there is a high probability that prayers will be offered habitually rather than sincerely. If we know how we are doing with interest, what kind of situation we are in, etc., we will be able to pray more actively and concretely with our heart. Pastor Dong Won Lee said: '... Nehemiah was the person who could have lived and eaten well by closing his eyes and blocking his ears to all the circumstances of his own people that were happening around him' (Lee). This means that Nehemiah, as a cupbearer for the king of Media and Persia, a powerful nation at the time, lived by the king without any envy in the palace of Susa (the best palace among several palaces in Susa, the capital of the country) where the king was residing and was able to continue to live such an affluent life. He could have rationalized it like this: 'What would be different if I worried about the reality of my country here? I can't do anything here etc.' Therefore, Nehemiah could have ignored the news from his homeland, which was about 800 miles away (Lee). He was able to turn a blind eye to the reality of his homeland while being satisfied with his position. But why didn't Nehemiah turn a blind eye to the reality of his

homeland? The reason is because Nehemiah was a man of prayer who loved his country and prayed for intercession. Those who love their country intercede for it. But they do not pray habitually. But they pray with the same interest in their country and with all their heart. And those who intercede for their homeland hear sad news about their homeland and pray with pain in their hearts. Why do they pray for their country even when it hurts like this? The reason is because to love means to receive the other person's wounds (Lee). Nehemiah was a man of prayer who prayed with the wounds of the people of Judah, his homeland.

### **Second, the lesson from Nehemiah's prayer is love for God.**

Hearing the situation of the Jews and Jerusalem, Nehemiah did not go to King Artaxerxes, but to “the God of heaven” (v. 4) and sat down and wept and mourned and fasted for some days (v. 4). At that time, the country that held the greatest power in the world was Media and Persia. And King Artaxerxes, whom Nehemiah served, was the most powerful king in the entire world. Therefore, Nehemiah could have heard the sad news from his home country and went to ask for help from King Artaxerxes, whom he was serving, rather than going to God. However, he did not go to ask for help from King Artaxerxes, but rather to the God of heaven. Why? The reason was because Nehemiah, as a man of prayer, lived his life looking at God, the King of Kings, rather than King Artaxerxes. In other words, Nehemiah, a man of prayer, always looked at the Almighty God who gave him that power rather than looking at the king of Media and Persia, who boasted the greatest power at the time. That was why he went to the God of heaven in prayer. Pastor James Packer said this: ‘People who are close to God are more conscious of God than they are conscious of themselves’ (Packer). Nehemiah, a man of prayer, was a man of God who lived more conscious of God than of man. Therefore, he did not appeal first to the king, but to God first. The reason was because he knew that moving God was more important than moving a person. He knew that when moving a person, God must move that person's heart (Lee).

Nehemiah, a man of prayer, was a man who loved God and also loved his country with God's love. Therefore, when he heard the news of the devastation of Jerusalem, his home country, and the reproach of the remaining Jews, he mourned for some days and fasted and prayed before God. He embraced the wounds of his own people, looked only to God, and prayed to God. He moved God through prayer. Like Nehemiah, who moved God through prayer, we must become people of prayer. Also, just as Nehemiah loved Jerusalem, we must love the church, the body of the Lord, with love for God. And with that love, we must pray for the Lord's church. Hearing the painful news of the church, we too must seek God like Nehemiah. Therefore, I earnestly hope and pray that the work of being established as a person of prayer, like Nehemiah, will begin.



# A man of prayer (2)

## [Nehemiah 1:4-11]

A farmer encountered a huge bear in the mountains. He was terrified and collapsed on the spot. And he fervently prayed: 'God, change this bear's heart to meekness.' The farmer prayed for a while and opened his eyes. But the bear was also sitting and praying. The farmer was very moved to think that his prayer had been answered: 'God answered my prayer so quickly. My prayer touched the bear's heart.' Then the bear finished praying and looked at the farmer with a deep expression and said: 'I have no idea what you are praying for. I just prayed with food in front of me' (Internet).

What is the lesson for us in this amusing example of prayer? There are times when we, like the farmer, think we have received answers to our prayers and are mistaken. Then, how should we pray to God in order to receive answers to our prayers? I would like to think about Nehemiah's prayers in six ways under the title of "A man of prayer (2)" centered on the words of Nehemiah 1:4-11 (Lee). In the midst of this, I hope and pray that we can pray like Nehemiah.

### **First, Nehemiah fasted and prayed.**

Look at Nehemiah 1:4 – "When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven." For the Jews, fasting was to be done once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29). However, Nehemiah mourned and fasted for some days (Neh. 1:4). What is fasting prayer? When we hear 'fasting prayer,' the first thing we think of is starving ourselves. However, not eating or starving is not important, but praying itself is important. Fasting prayer is the most desperate form of prayer (Lee). Fasting in intercessory prayer is an effective way to further strengthen the power of prayer. The fact that Nehemiah fasted and prayed means that he devoted himself to praying, saving even the time to eat. In other words, he prayed wholeheartedly. And he prayed with his soul, mind, and heart in prayer, not decorative prayers or ceremonial prayers (Lee).

### **Second, Nehemiah knew the object of prayer and prayed.**

Look at Nehemiah 1:5 – “I said, ‘I beseech You, O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments.’” Who are you and me praying to? Of course, we will all say we are praying to God. But I wonder who the God we are talking about really is. The reason for the question is because the God we speak of is not the God of the Bible, but rather the God of our narrow minds. How we can know that is by looking at our lives after praying to God. The person who prayed to the God spoken of in the Bible prayed in faith, so he shows a life of faith. However, those who prayed to the God who prays with our hearts in the imagination have no choice but to show a life of doubt after prayer because they prayed a prayer mixed with doubt. Do we really know the God of the Bible and pray to that God with faith?

Then who is the God of the Bible? In today's text, Nehemiah 1:4-11, we can think of Nehemiah's God in three ways.

(1) The God of Nehemiah is “the God of heaven” (v. 4).

Nehemiah prayed to the God of heaven. As a Jew in the Gentile country of Mede-Persia, Nehemiah did not serve the gods of the ‘God of the earth’, that is, the Gentile nation. He did not worship idols.

(2) The God of Nehemiah is “the great and awesome God” (v. 5).

Nehemiah prayed to the great and awesome God. Hearing the sad news about the people of Judah who remained in Judah, Nehemiah, who had heard of Jerusalem, the people of his homeland who were in tribulation and reproach, and the city of Jerusalem was destroyed and the gates were burned, why did he pray to “the great and awesome God”? The reason was because he thought that the news of Judah was the result of God's justice due to the sins of his people. In other words, Nehemiah had no choice but to acknowledge that God is God, that is, “the great and awesome God” because he heard the affirmation that God, who was just, disciplined the people of Judah who had sinned but did not repent. We must realize God's greatness and awesome in the midst of adversity and suffering. Through that adversity and hardship, we must realize our smallness and the greatness of our sins. If we are experiencing great afflictions (v. 3) and must also do great things (4:19; 6:3), we will receive great power (v. 10), great blessings (9:25, 25) and God's great mercy. (9:31) is required (Weirsbe).

(3) The God of Nehemiah is a God who “preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments” (1:5).

This word means that God is a fearful God to those who sin and do not repent, but He is a God of love who shows mercy to those who repent and keep His commandments (Park). Nehemiah prayed to the God of the covenant, the God of mercy. William Carey left us with this famous

word: 'Believe in the great God. Pray to the great God. And expect the great God to accomplish great things' (Lee).

### **Third, Nehemiah confessed the Israelites' sins.**

Look at Nehemiah 1:6-7: "let Your ear now be attentive and Your eyes open to hear the prayer of Your servant which I am praying before You now, day and night, on behalf of the sons of Israel Your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against You and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses." Nehemiah interceded for the children of Israel. He not only confessed the nation's sins, but he himself confessed that he was responsible for the nation's sins. Like Ezra, he took joint responsibility for the sins of the Israeli community and repented of them as if they were his own sins (Park). Ezra did too. Look at Ezra 9:6 – "and prayed: 'O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens.'" Daniel did too. Look at Daniel 9:20 – "While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill." Why did Nehemiah confess his sins to God together, thinking that he was responsible for the sins of the nation? The reason was because he had a sense of responsibility for a communal sin. It was inevitable because God would not say, 'You are not responsible for anything' because Nehemiah was in Susa's palace [Ref.: Esther (Est 4:13-14) and Achan (Jos 7:1, 11)].

Intercessors who love God and love their homeland know that they are being punished by God for their country's sins, and weep bitterly and seek God's mercy while praying (fasting). In doing so, he has a sense of community responsibility to regard the sins of his people as his own and confess them to God. In this way, intercession prayer makes one with those who are praying for intercession in spirit.

### **Fourth, Nehemiah held on to God's word of promise.**

Look at Nehemiah 1:8-10: "Remember the word which You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful I will scatter you among the peoples; but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though those of you who have been scattered were in the most remote part of the heavens, I will gather them from there and will bring them to the place where I have chosen to cause My name to dwell.' They are Your servants and Your people whom You redeemed by Your great power and by Your strong hand." This is the prayer of faith, the first of the two kinds of prayers mentioned by E. M. Bounds. Nehemiah held on to God's word of promise, Deuteronomy 28:63-67 and 30:1-10 and prayed. What we need to keep in mind here is that Nehemiah not only held on to God's word of promise and prayed in faith, but also made a promise (commitment) to God to keep the commandments of the Lord, which is a life of faith. In this way, Nehemiah held on to the word of promise and prayed with patience. In other words, Nehemiah held on to God's word of promise and prayed for four months. As for how we can know that, we can find out by comparing Nehemiah 1:2 and 2:1. "Chislev" (1:1) refers to mid-November or mid-December in our time

as a Hebrew calendar month after the Exodus. And “Nisan” (2:1) refers to the middle of March or mid-April in our time as a Hebrew month (Park). In other words, Nehemiah held on to God's word of promise for about four months and prayed to God. His father's name is "Hachariah." The meaning of the name is "waiting for the Lord" (Park). The lesson this teaches us is to be patient when we pray to God. Nehemiah, the son of Hacharias, interceded for his country, and after praying, he waited with anticipation until his prayer was answered.

### **Fifth and last, Nehemiah wanted to take on the responsibility of prayer.**

Look at Nehemiah 1:11 – “O Lord, I beseech You, may Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant and the prayer of Your servants who delight to revere Your name, and make Your servant successful today and grant him compassion before this man " Now I was the cupbearer to the king.” Here, “this man” refers to “King Artaxerxes” (2:1). Nehemiah prayed with conviction. He was convinced that God would move the heart of King Artaxerxes to help him rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Pastor Lee Dong-won said: ‘In other words, after praying to God, he went to the king and tried to ask the king for help in building the city of Jerusalem, his hometown.’ However, before making a request to the king, it is to pray before God first. While praying, he believed that God would move the king's heart, and now he intended to go and talk to the king (Lee).

Our God is a God who answers prayers through people of prayer. Look at Ephesians 3:20 – “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.” In order to answer our prayers, God first works within us as people of prayers. In the midst of this, God wants to answer that prayer through us. Therefore, we must pray to God. The earnestness of our prayers also needs to be revealed in fasting prayers. Also, we must pray in the knowledge of knowing God, the object of prayer. And we must confess our sins. We must hold on to God's word of promise and ask for it in faith. I hope and pray that you and I will be able to take on the responsibility of prayer and practice prayer.

# **A man who had come to promote the welfare (1)**

## **[Nehemiah 2:1-5]**

In his book “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People,” Stephen Covey says this about “creating a ‘pause button’: There is ‘freedom of choice’ between ‘stimulus’ and ‘response’, but too many people often act reactively. Rather, hit the ‘pause button’ and give yourself time to think. During the ‘freedom of choice’ time, think ‘How will I respond to this stimulus?’, act according to principles and values rather than depending on feelings and circumstances. That is the first habit of the “7 Habits of Highly Effective People”: “Be Proactive” [Definition: ‘The ability to act on principles and values rather than reacting on emotions and circumstances’ (Covey). However, it seems that we are more likely to be ‘reactive’ than proactive. In other words, when we are stimulated, we often act based on situations and emotions. Of course, even proactive people are influenced by external stimuli, be they physical, social or psychological. However, they show choices or reactions based on principles and values.

If we look at Nehemiah 2:1-5, we see how Nehemiah, who was motivated by hearing about the Jews who remained in Judah and the situation in Jerusalem, took the initiative in attempting great things for the glory of the great God. Nehemiah, who prayed to God, is now demonstrating a life of faith in order to actively promote God's work in order to take responsibility for his prayers. Nehemiah, who knew that rebuilding God's people, the Jews, and the city of Jerusalem, the city of God, was more valuable than his personal success, wealth, and fame, and now he chooses to do God's work.

I would like to think about Nehemiah's inner world, that is, his mind, as the cause of his choice, in two ways under the title of “A man who had come to promote the welfare (1)” centered on Nehemiah 2:1-5.

**First, there was sadness in Nehemiah's heart.**

Look at Nehemiah 2:2 – “so the king asked me, "Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart." I was very much afraid.” What was the cause of Nehemiah's sadness? Look at verse 3: “but I said to the king, ‘May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?’” After the man of prayer, Nehemiah, prayed to God for four months, there was wine in front of King Artaxerxes, and he took it and offered it to the king. And the king saw Nehemiah’s face looked sad (vv. 1-2). Also, King Artaxerxes knew that Nehemiah's facial expression was not due to a physical illness. So, he asked if Nehemiah had any sorrow in his heart. At that time, in fear, Nehemiah confessed to King Artaxerxes the reason why his face was being sad. The reason is because Nehemiah heard that the land of Judah was desolate (1:3). From that time on, for four months, Nehemiah's heart was troubled. There was sadness on his face because he was concerned, not because of personal problems, but because of the fact that the community of Israel had become miserable.

Here we have to think about two kinds of sadness. Look at 2 Corinthians 7:10 – “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.” Based on this word, when we think about it, there are two kinds of sorrow: “God’s sorrow” and “worldly sorrow.” The cares of the world cease to be endless sorrows and eventually lead to death and regret. But spiritual sorrow according to the will of God leads to salvation through repentance. When Nehemiah heard of the condition of the people of Judah and the city of Jerusalem that remained in Judah, he felt spiritual sorrow. We can think of three lessons that this Nehemiah's spiritual sorrow gives us:

(1) It teaches us about human weakness.

Pastor Dong-won Lee said: ‘You don't know how comforting Nehemiah's sorrow in his heart is. He prayed and believed that God would work. Nonetheless, he was sad. If the Bible says that Nehemiah was not sad at all after praying, then we would think of Nehemiah as a person who is too far removed from our reality or as an inhuman and mythical figure’ (Lee).

(2) It reminds us of the lessons of the wise.

Look at Ecclesiastes 7:3 – “Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart.” This sorrow in Nehemiah's heart actually benefited him because it made him seek God more and more. For Nehemiah, a man of prayer who waited in anticipation of an answer to his prayer, the four-month period was a period that further fueled the vision of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem.

(3) Nehemiah's sorrow in his heart gave him an opportunity.

What opportunity? It is an opportunity to receive grace in front of King Artaxerxes (1:11). Seeing the sadness on his face, the king asked Nehemiah, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill?” (2:2). Now, Nehemiah was given the opportunity to tell King Artaxerxes the desire of his heart why he was sad. But what we must point out here is that the sadness on Nehemiah's face could have meant death to him. That is why Nehemiah was “very much afraid” (v. 2). The reason was because the Persian law at the time stipulated that if those who served in front of the king or all the servants who worked with the king showed sadness, they would be deprived of their positions from that moment on (Lee). He could have been not only stripped of his title, but killed if the king had angered him. However, God was answering Nehemiah's prayer through the sorrow of his heart that could not be hidden.

### **Second, there was a desire in Nehemiah's heart.**

Look at Nehemiah 2:4-5: “The king said to me, ‘What is it you want?’ Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, ‘If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it.’” King Artaxerxes saw the sadness on Nehemiah's face and the sorrow in his heart (v. 2). Nevertheless, God heard Nehemiah's prayer and was working in the heart of King Artaxerxes. How can we know that? He could have killed Nehemiah, who had a sad look on his face, but we can see that he was interested in him (vv. 2, 4). It is a very interesting work of God. God, who showed the interest in King Artaxerxes' heart through Nehemiah's sorrow, heard Nehemiah's prayer and was moving the king's heart. So, King Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah, “What is it you want?” (v. 4). In order to know more about the fact that God was moving the heart of King Artaxerxes in this way, we can understand it by considering two difficulties in moving his heart:

(1) King Artaxerxes was a very stubborn man who hardly listened to others.

It was almost impossible for Nehemiah to go to such a king and ask him to do his favor. He said such a thing, and if he made a mistake, he would not only lose his position, but also threatened his life (Lee).

(2) King Artaxerxes was a person who was always displeased with the construction of the city of Jerusalem (Lee).

Look at Ezra 4:11-13, the accusation handed down to him, and Ezra 4:18-21, King Artaxerxes' reply:

(accusation) “(This is a copy of the letter they sent him.) To King Artaxerxes, From your servants, the men of Trans-Euphrates: The king should know that the Jews who came up to us

from you have gone to Jerusalem and are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are restoring the walls and repairing the foundations. Furthermore, the king should know that if this city is built and its walls are restored, no more taxes, tribute or duty will be paid, and the royal revenues will suffer” (vv. 11-13).

(reply) “The letter you sent us has been read and translated in my presence. I issued an order and a search was made, and it was found that this city has a long history of revolt against kings and has been a place of rebellion and sedition. Jerusalem has had powerful kings ruling over the whole of Trans-Euphrates, and taxes, tribute and duty were paid to them. Now issue an order to these men to stop work, so that this city will not be rebuilt until I so order” (vv. 18-21).

Before Nehemiah rebuilt the city of Jerusalem, there was already a movement to build the city of Jerusalem among those who had returned to Jerusalem first. However, King Artaxerxes, who heard this news, stopped the work of building the city by force. The reason was because if the city was built, all the people of Jerusalem would unite and rebel against Medo-Persia, which had the greatest influence in the world at the time.

But Nehemiah wanted to ask King Artaxerxes for permission to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. So, when the king asked, "What is it you want?" Nehemiah first prayed to God (v. 4). He didn't habitually close his eyes and prayed, 'God who created the heavens and the earth and all things....' He was living a life of prayer to God. It must have been a prayer to know how to answer the king. When we are in the middle of a conversation with people, we must open our eyes and talk to them. As we do so, we must have a good habit of praying to God with our hearts. I think the habit of praying, 'God give me wisdom on how to speak at this moment' while praying, is a good habit. Then Nehemiah told King Artaxerxes his heart's desire. Look at verse 5: "and I answered the king, 'If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it.'" Here we can see the connection with the prayer that Nehemiah had already offered to God in Nehemiah 1:11b: "... Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man. ...." The connection is that God was answering Nehemiah's prayer to be favored by King Artaxerxes. So, Nehemiah knew this and told the king his heart's desire in response to the king's question, "What is it you want?"

God grants the heart's desire of the righteous. Look at these Bible verses: "... what the righteous desire will be granted" (Prov. 10:24b), "The desire of the righteous ends only in good ..." (11:23a), "He fulfills the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them" (Ps. 145:19). When we give all our heart's sadness and desires to God in prayer, God hears and answers our prayers. Therefore, God enables us to handle God's work. May this grace of God be upon you and me.



# A man who had come to promote the welfare (2)

## [Nehemiah 2:6-10]

In the book “Rut, Rot, or Revival” written by Pastor A. W. Tozer, he talks about “the greatest enemy of Christians” (Ch. 1). He describes it as three progressive stages of religious decay:

(1) The first step is the mechanical state.

This is a repetition of a religious activity without any feeling. Without meaning, without admiration, without any happy surprise or anticipation, just repeating the religious activity.

(2) The second stage is the habitual state.

If we go one step further from the mechanical state, we arrive at what we will call the habitual state. This is a state of enslavement to mechanical conditions. Spiritually speaking, the habitual state is the bondage of the mechanical state. But the greatest danger of the habitual state is that we are incapable of detecting or feeling this conditioned state.

(3) The third stage is corruption.

The church is always plagued by inward corruption. The best description of a corrupted state would be a state in which spiritual austerity sets in, a state in which people no longer expect anything new because they lack the ability to foresee better things or the desire to grow. When people in a church say that the church progresses when others change, but they themselves do nothing. This is a clear indication that the church has entered a state of inward decay. This is evidence of three sins: self-righteousness, criticism, and complacency (Tozer). A church with members in this state is like a cemetery. The whole church is in a state of

habit. In other words, routine rules church members. There is no growth and there is no atmosphere of unpredictability. There are no expectations. You can foretell what will happen next week. You can even foretell what will happen next month. This is because the past has become the master that determines our present appearance, and the present has become the ruler that determines our future. How about our church? Isn't the church like a cemetery in which the whole church is in a state of habit? Are you a community where you habitually go to church on Sundays without any expectations because you can predict everything? Or is our church, as those who experience the unpredictable works of the Holy Spirit, a community that seizes the opportunity given by prayer, expectation, and waiting for the Lord to build our church and serves with excitement and faith? Those who pray, like Nehemiah, expect. He goes to God with sorrow in his heart for the great and unpredictable work of the great God, and makes a desire in his heart. And he waits in anticipation for God's unpredictable work.

Nehemiah, a man of prayer and a man of prosperity, seized the opportunity given by God while praying with sorrow in his heart and spoke his heart's desire to King Artaxerxes. Today, I would like to receive God's grace while thinking about the plans and actions of Nehemiah's heart under the title of "A man who had come to promote the welfare (2)."

### **First, let's consider the plan of the heart.**

Look at Nehemiah 2:6 – "Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, 'How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?' It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time." Pastor John White said this in his book "Excellent Leadership": 'Prayer is where planning begins. Our primary goal in prayer is not to receive great power, but to discover what God wants. A plan that begins with prayer and is made with prayer is much better than a plan that is simply later backed up by prayer. God's plan, revealed to those who wait for Him, cannot fail to come true' (White). But what about our prayers? I think there are two extremes. One extreme is those who plan without praying. Another extreme group is those who pray hard but have no plan (Lee). If we pray hard to rely on God, why don't we make a plan? There are 3 reasons:

(1) The first reason is that we do not discover what God wants in the midst of prayer.

In other words, we pray to find God's will, but we cannot make a plan because we cannot find God's will.

(2) The second reason is that they think it is wrong to make plans while praying to God with faith.

In other words, if we have prayed to God in faith, we should leave it to God and we should not do this or that.

(3) The third reason is that while praying to God, we pray without dedication and determination to take on the responsibility of prayer like Nehemiah.

Nehemiah, who wanted to take on the responsibility of prayer, prayed for about 4 months and was making plans in front of God in his own way.

One truth we need to keep in mind here is 1 Corinthians 14:40 – “But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.” Our God is a God of order. Therefore, in the midst of the goal of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem like Nehemiah, he planned in advance how to achieve that goal during prayer, showing his orderliness. We should not pray blindly and then remain in a daze, but seek God's will in prayer and do our best to make plans. Then, what was the plan of Nehemiah's heart? They were 4 things:

(1) Nehemiah approached the best time to approach King Artaxerxes.

If you look at Nehemiah 2:6, the Bible says, “Then the king, with the queen sitting beside him, ....” Why is the Bible saying this? In Persia, the queen rarely attended official functions (White). But now, when Nehemiah approached the king, it was when the queen was with the king. So, it can be seen that Nehemiah approached the king in an informal situation, not an official one, that is, a friendly and private situation.

(2) Nehemiah deliberately showed the king a sad countenance at the best of times.

How do we know this? In Nehemiah 1:2-4, from the time Nehemiah heard the news of Judah for the first time, Nehemiah must have been sad to hear about the situation in his homeland. I wonder if he showed a sad face to the king after 4 months in verse 1. Why did he suddenly show a sad face to the king after 4 months? It is clear that Nehemiah deliberately showed her sad countenance in order to tell the king of his wishes from the friendly atmosphere of the queen and the king as she waited for God's opportunity in her prayer (2:2).

(3) Nehemiah set a deadline in his heart.

When King Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah, “How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?” (2:6), Nehemiah's answer was, “so I set a time.” He didn't just give a random answer. For example, “I have to go to know. I will stay as the Lord wishes and come back.’ Would this word have worked with the king?

(4) Nehemiah specifically told the king what he wanted.

It was none other than “letters”. What decree did Nehemiah request from King Artaxerxes?

It's 2 letters.

**(a) It was a letter that allowed Nehemiah and the Jews to pass through to Judah.**

Look at Nehemiah 2:7 – “I also said to him, "If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah?"” Nehemiah expected the enemies (Ezra 4:9-10; 5:3) on the 800-mile journey from Medo-Persia to Judah, where he was staying, and the king gave permission to the governors west of the Euphrates to go to Judah. It was a request for a letter.

**(b) It was a letter to give the beam timber to Nehemiah.**

Look at Nehemiah 2:8a – “And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy? ...” The second requested by Nehemiah is a letter from Asaph, the king's forest manager, allowing Asaph to give him the timbers needed to rebuild the gates and the city wall of Jerusalem and for his house.

How thorough was this plan? Nehemiah prayed to God for four months and made a plan in his heart. In the midst of that, he waited for God's time or an opportunity given to him. When the opportunity came, he boldly petitioned King Artaxerxes for a decree regarding receiving help from officials and even material aid. What did Nehemiah experience as a result of soliciting the letters from King Artaxerxes? He experienced God's gracious hand helping him (v. 8). Nehemiah, who experienced the mighty hand of the Lord (1:10), experienced the gracious hand of God (2:8). These words remind me of Romans 8:28 – “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” I also remember the first half of Psalm 34:8 – “Taste and see that the Lord is good ....”

Proverbs 16:3 says, “Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.” While praying for four months, Nehemiah had a thorough plan in his heart. Nehemiah, who made a plan in his heart while praying with the goal of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem, prayed while entrusting even the plan of his heart to God, so God fulfilled His plan. We must keep in mind the words of Proverbs 19:21 – “Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.”

**Second, let's consider the behavior of the heart.**

Nehemiah was a man of action. As soon as he obtained the approval of his plan from the king, he not only obtained the necessary supplies and arranged a safe journey, but also made a more detailed plan, put a lot of manpower into operation, and put a vast public works project in front of him and broke it up into small chunks to make it better and ran it. This is in stark contrast to Nehemiah, a godly man

of prayer, whom we met earlier. Because right now we see a capable supervisor busy at work (White). We see a man of prayer now appear as a man of action. We see Nehemiah, who waited in silence in prayer and anticipation, working busily to unfold the plan of his heart when given the opportunity. Nehemiah went to Judah. Nehemiah finally left the palace of Susa on the east side of the Euphrates River and headed for Judah on the west side of the Euphrates River. And he came to the governors of Trans-Euphrates (Neh. 2:9). At that time, Nehemiah delivered to them the letter that he demanded from King Artaxerxes ["If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah?" (v. 7)]. Interestingly, King Artaxerxes gave Nehemiah not only the letters he requested, but also sent army officers and cavalry with Nehemiah which he did not ask for (v. 9). The reason was not only to protect Nehemiah, but also to show that he was the one whom King Artaxerxes was delighted to honor. That is why, of all the king's servants, even the governors west of the river had to respect Nehemiah.

Nehemiah's actions were not without obstacles. There was a crowd against him. Look at Nehemiah 2:10 – “When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.” Here, Nehemiah's two adversaries come out as he rebuilds the city of Jerusalem. In verse 19, another adversary appears. Among these three, the main character was “Sanballat the Horonite.” His name is a Babylonian name, which means 'god (the moon god) gives life'. Nehemiah's adversaries referred to him as the man who had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites. In other words, they saw Nehemiah as someone who set a goal and tried to put it into action. So, they were “very much disturbed” (v. 10). So, they began to devise their own plans from then on how to keep Nehemiah from accomplishing his purpose. Therefore, it seems that they wanted to continuously control Judah. 37 years after this incident, Sanballat is said to be the ‘governor of Samaria’ in an ancient document. Looking at this, it seems that Nehemiah's opponents, especially Sanballat, who was the leading figure, opposed Nehemiah out of jealousy, fearing that Nehemiah would come to Judah under their control and rebuild the city of Jerusalem and take away the initiative.

For those who pray or those who promote other people’s welfare, ‘Opposition is Opportunity.’ What kind of opportunity is it? It is an opportunity to pray. It is an opportunity to reexamine God's will or goal. It is also an opportunity to test our patience or endurance. And it is an opportunity to experience the power of Christ. Pastor James Packer said: ‘Our prayers determine the quality of our work, just as our work reflects the quality of our prayers’ (Packer). As we prepare for the work of the Lord, we must make plans in our hearts while praying. If there is an evangelism meeting, we must plan how to reach out to the newly born believer and lead him to the church evangelism meeting while interceding for the soul of the newly born believer we have in our hearts. While praying for the church evangelism meeting, we must do our best to make plans for the heavenly banquet. We should start putting the plans of our hearts into action. We must personally approach the newly born believer and prepare for the evangelism meeting on a church level basis.

# **“And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me”**

**“And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king's forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?” And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests” (Nehemiah 2:8).**

Do you believe that God is good? Do you believe that a good God will work together for good despite the difficulties and adversity you are facing? (Rom 8:28) Are you experiencing the goodness of God even in the situation you are facing? (Ps. 34:8)

Last weekend while my father-in-law was in the hospital, my wife called me and told me what she was thinking. As I listened to her, I couldn't say anything because it was a very difficult situation. At that time, there were words that God the Holy Spirit reminded me of, so I exhorted my wife, 'Because our God is good, all these things will work together for good, so let's trust in our God'. Also, I told my wife that right now we do not know how God is fulfilling His good will, but let's acknowledge by faith that all of these situations are being done within God's good will. In doing so, I told my wife that surely God would allow us to taste God's goodness. How did this sound to my wife? If my wife is lacking in faith, surely she will not taste the goodness of God at all while seeing this and that situation with her physical eyes, such as her father suffering from illness and her mother suffering in one way or another. However, if my wife had stood firm in her faith, she would have agreed with me, even partially experiencing God's good hand in this situation. And my wife will persevere with her faith, praying and waiting for God's good will to be done.

If we look at today's text, Nehemiah 2:8, we will find Nehemiah who received the help of God's gracious hand. He prayed to God, “Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man (King Artaxerxes)” (1:11), and with God's gracious hand helping him, King Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah's request, and the king was pleased to send Nehemiah to Jerusalem (2:6). Furthermore, he gave Nehemiah two letters not only to have the governors on the west side of the river allow Nehemiah to pass

through to Judah (v. 7), but also to have Asaph, the overseer of the king's forest, clear the gates of the camp belonging to the temple in Jerusalem and beam timber was given for the Jerusalem wall and Nehemiah's house (v. 8). Having tasted God's goodness in this way, Nehemiah safely arrived in Judah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (v. 11). Nehemiah, who arrived safely in Jerusalem, had been living in Jerusalem for three days (v. 11), and because God had moved his heart (v. 12), he secretly looked closely at the walls of Jerusalem to rebuild them (vv. 12-16). Then he later told the people of Judah how God's gracious hand had helped him and what King Artaxerxes had told him (v. 18). When he did that, the people of Judah said, "Let us start rebuilding," and all tried to do this good work with all their strength (v. 18). The people of Judah, who were trying to do good things like this, had people who were doing evil things, opposing the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (vv. 10, 19). They despised Nehemiah and the men of Judah and also laughed at them (v. 19). However, Nehemiah was confident that the God of heaven would make him and the people of Judah prosper (v. 20). And according to his conviction, God helped Nehemiah and made Nehemiah succeed in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem (6:16). In the end, God's good hand helped Nehemiah, and God made him prosper.

When God's good hand helps us, we can prosper. Even if the adversaries arise and despise and ridicule us, if God's good hand is with us, we can do God's good work. Because God is good, He is the God who causes all things to work together for good. In the end, the good God helps us with His good hands to achieve His good will, so that we can prosper. I hope and pray that you and I can taste this goodness of God.

# “Let us start rebuilding.” (1)

## [Nehemiah 2:11-16]

Gordon Macdonald's book “Rebuilding Your Broken World” tells us what kind of people God is using to expand His kingdom. He is none other than people like Simon Peter, who failed God. God uses them as His instruments in His kingdom expansion ministry. Pastor MacDonald said three important things that happened in the “Sea of Tiberias” (Jn.21:1), centering on the words of John chapter 21:

### (1) Jesus came into Peter's world.

The rebuilders Jesus knew that Peter was too wounded to start on his own. In other words, after Jesus died on the cross, Jesus appeared to Peter (and the other disciples), who had returned to his old job as a fisherman in disappointment and discouragement, and asked, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?” (v. 5). And when Jesus said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some” (v. 6), Peter obeyed. In doing so, 153 fish were caught, and John said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” (v. 7). Upon hearing this, Peter jumped into the sea and swam toward the beach. What did he really expect Jesus would say? Did he expect Jesus say such words to him: "I'm here to say goodbye" or "Peter, I've been working really hard to make you a good apostle, but unfortunately you seem to be falling short" or "Where, let's sit down and talk a little bit about what you did wrong that night." But Jesus said nothing. Jesus was just preparing breakfast over a charcoal fire. It is His grace that Jesus was preparing breakfast for the crowd of losers. The gracious Lord came to the Sea of Tiberias to find Peter.

### (2) Jesus gave a chance to replace Peter’s three denials.

He gave me three opportunities to honestly confess his love for the Lord again. Jesus did not rebuke a word, but instead asked Peter the same question three times: ‘Do you love me?’ (vv. 15-17). At that time, Peter confessed three times, ‘Yes, Lord, you know that I love you’



(vv. 15-17).

(3) Jesus reaffirmed the mission he gave to His disciples Peter.

Every time Peter confessed his love for Jesus three times, the words Jesus told Peter, ‘Feed my lambs,’ ‘Take care of my sheep,’ and ‘Feed my sheep’. The first mission he received was still valid. Peter was not abandoned. He was restored. His collapsed world was rebuilt (McDonald).

The mission that is still valid, what is the mission the Lord has given to you and me? What is the sense of mission that needs to be restored? Centering on the words of Nehemiah 2:11-16, under the title “Let us start rebuilding.” (1), I would like to meditate on a sense of duty, the first of the three elements necessary for rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. In the midst of this, I hope and pray that we can be rekindled in the mission the Lord has given us.

**First, we must have a sense of duty.**

Look at Nehemiah 2:12 – “I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.” If we look at churches or Christian organizations these days, there is something called a mission statement. The mission statement of Victory Presbyterian Church, which I serve, is to expand the kingdom of God by raising up the leaders who pursue a Christ-centered vision. More specifically, we could refer to our church's statement of purpose: ‘Find and discover potential leaders, nurture them into worship-witnesses who worship God, and train them into committed disciples of Christ, mature lay leaders.’ Are you and I risking our lives for the motto or statement of purpose of the church we are serving and devoting ourselves to achieving that goal? Do you think it's worth it?

What was Nehemiah's mission? It was to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah, who is helped by God's gracious hand (2:8), left the Medo-Persian palace of Susa with the letters of King Artaxerxes and now arrived in Jerusalem (v. 11). After Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem and was quiet for three days (v. 12). The Bible says nothing in particular that he did anything to rebuild the city of Jerusalem in three days. We can guess in light of verse 10 why Nehemiah stayed quiet for three days without doing anything. Because of his enemies Sanballat and Tobiah, Nehemiah did not hastily jump into rebuilding the city of Jerusalem when he arrived in Jerusalem. If, as soon as he arrived in Jerusalem, he had busily revealed that he would take down the city of Jerusalem in front of the enemies' eyes, it would not have been a wise move. We must listen to Matthew 10:16 – “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” We must be as wise as snakes. The reason is that our enemies are always waiting to attack us. Then, when Nehemiah wisely arrived in Jerusalem for three days, we can imagine what he would have done

while remaining quiet in light of his past life. That is what he must have been praying for. Besides praying, what did Nehemiah, a man of prayer, do during those three days in silence? Henri Nouwen's "The only necessary thing: living a prayerful life" has this to say about silence: 'Silence means the heart of the mind and body. It is a rest in the presence of God. This is very frightening. It's like giving up control over your own actions and thoughts. It's not me doing creative things, it's being quiet so that creative things happen to me. ... When there is no silence, the Holy Spirit dies within us, and we are left alone, cold and weary, deprived of all creative energy for life. When there is no silence, we will become victims of people who are off center and constantly demand our attention' (Nouwen). I think Nehemiah, a man of prayer, must have found true rest while staying in front of God and praying for three days. In rebuilding the Jerusalem temple, he may have prayed for God's creative work to happen first in himself. What was the result of those three days of quiet time? Nehemiah 2:12 says this: "... what my God had put in my heart ...." During the three days that he stayed in the presence of the Lord in silence, the Lord was working creatively in Nehemiah's heart. Its purpose was for Jerusalem. Dr. Yoon-sun Park said: 'The time people work is precious, but the time they spend quietly is also important. In this way, when a believer is quiet, he prays to God and receives inspiration. When we work, we mainly deal with humans, and when we rest quietly, we deal with God' (Park).

What did Nehemiah do after praying for 3 days? At night he secretly inspected the city of Jerusalem. In other words, he toured the site in advance before rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. A long time ago, a letter came from the city when we inspected the fence of our house. It was about removing all the fences in front of the house. After receiving the letter, I asked a brother in our church for help. At that time, the brother came and tore it all off, but he told me to remove even the pillars. So, I went and bought a saw and cut it off with the other brothers. At the urban environment level, perhaps the fence in front of the house is removed to decorate the city beautifully. In today's text, Nehemiah 2:13, we can see that Nehemiah also inspected the ruined city of Jerusalem: "By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire." In Nehemiah 1:2-3, when Hanani, a couple of brothers from Judah, was asked about the condition of Jerusalem, they had already told Nehemiah, "The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire." However, in 2:13, we see Nehemiah personally inspecting and confirming the words of his brothers. Rather than doubting the reports of the brothers, this is what he wanted to see myself and make a final plan. Pastor John White said: 'Hope in God doesn't mean you don't need detailed information and research. Nehemiah will need to find out for himself, and this is another principle to follow when trying to be efficient. ... Of course, the Holy Spirit can, and often does, foresee problems we have no way of knowing about, but it would be irresponsible for us not to look into it ourselves' (White).

Here we have to think a little about what Nehemiah began to do because what God had put in his heart (v. 12). Here, we Christians need to think about what "work" means. When it comes to "work," many people will think of "workaholic." This is because this era in which we live is at risk of workaholic. If we look at the Internet article titled 'Self-diagnosis and treatment of workaholism,' written by

Professor Lee Hong-sik (Psychiatry) of Yonsei University College of Medicine, there are 10 lists of self-diagnosis methods for workaholism: (1) No matter how late I go to bed, I wake up early in the morning, (2) I make a list of my daily to-dos, (3) I can't bear to take a break, (4) I spread a stack of papers next to me at mealtime, (5) I am said to be energetic and competitive at work, (6) I work on weekends and holidays, (7) I am ready to work whenever and wherever I need to, (8) I have a lot of work, so it is difficult to take a vacation, (9) Even after work, I worry about tomorrow's work. (10) I really enjoy my work (Internet). What is "work" really? We must look for the answer to this question in the Bible. Pastor James Packer says 3 things:

(1) When the Bible says "work", it is not talking about the work or job.

The Bible doesn't say "work" just to make money and benefit ourselves. Work in the Bible is always goal oriented. It means putting the end in perspective and moving it into action.

(2) The Bible views life as a rhythm of work and rest and does not separate spiritual and temporal work as if they were two separate functions.

Rather, the Bible teaches us to plan and live our lives in unity. In other words, since we do everything for the glory of God, we must not separate the worldly from the holy.

(3) What the Bible makes clear is the fact that God made us to do work.

That is why Paul exhorts us to strive to work with your hands (1 Thess.4:11) and says, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10).

Nehemiah's responsible actions reflect his sense of duty. A leader who burns with a sense of mission, he never lives in a dream world. He confronts the facts honestly and also accepts good or bad news. Nehemiah saw more at night than the residents saw during the day. Nehemiah saw potential as well as problems while inspecting the city of Jerusalem at night. This is what made Nehemiah a leader.

Pastor John Johnston, under the heading 'David in the World of Goliath,' said: 'The pastor of a small church can easily develop a defeatist and delusional strategy. The result is a defensive aggression that maximizes stress and a serious sensitivity that creates an unrealistic sense of guilt. Despite the voices echoing the theme of 'bigger is better', leaders and members of small churches should not be discouraged. The temptation to despair must yield to a renewed spirit, a rekindled sense of purpose and mission' (Johnston). Let us all surrender to a burning sense of purpose and mission like Nehemiah, a man of prayer and a man who wants to make the king prosper. Let's ignite our sense of duty to expand the kingdom of God by raising and sending out workers like the 300 soldiers of Gideon who have a sense of purpose and a Christ-centered dream to rebuild the church, which is the body of the Lord!

# “Let us start rebuilding.” (2)

## [Nehemiah 2:17-18]

Pastor Rick Warren, in Chapter 3 of his book “Purpose Driven Life,” “The Driving Force of Life,” says that hundreds of situations, values, and emotions can guide our lives, and he identifies five of the most common. said: (1) Many people are driven by a sense of guilt, (2) Many live by chewing on the bitter root of resentment and anger, (3) Many live by fear, (4) Many people are driven by material things, (5) Many people live for the approval of others (Warren). If we add one thing besides these five wrong motives of life, we can say that Pastor Aiden Tozer said, 'Live led by wrong habits'. In other words, the above five wrong driving forces of life have become a habit and are so accustomed to us that we are living in ignorance, not even knowing what we are being led to. For example, even though we have been in the church life for a long time, are we living with a sense of guilt, chewing on the bitter root of resentment and anger, living with fear, living with material things, or living in church to be recognized by others. It means that we have lost the ability to discriminate. What is it that makes you and me come here today to worship God? Guilt? Are we worshipping with the bitter root of resentment and anger? Is it because we are afraid that something will happen if we miss the Sunday service? Do we want to receive material blessings? Or are we here to worship God in order to gain the approval of others? Or do we habitually come and worship?

Focusing on the words of Nehemiah 2:17-18, I would like to think about motivation under the title “Let us start rebuilding (2)”.

### **Second, we must be motivated.**

Look at Nehemiah 2:17 – “Then I said to them, ‘You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.’” What is motivation? Department of Psychiatry, College of Medicine, Chonnam National University, Department of Psychiatry, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Clinic, Chonnam National University Hospital, Young Choi says: ‘Motivation is something that causes a person to act. It refers to an internal psychological state that initiates an action and continues the action once it has started. All human behavior begins and continues because of this motive. To put it simply, the spark of desire, ‘I

want to do it', is the motivation. A motivating principle is to keep in mind that children hate pain and seek pleasure. You need to give them a chance to solve the problem on their own. If there is a problem in studying, rather than instructing students how to study, they should ask, 'What would you like to do?' and encourage them to find the answer themselves and put it into practice. Encouraging independence builds motivation (Internet). How did Nehemiah motivate the inhabitants of Jerusalem? We can think of it in 4 ways (white):

(1) Nehemiah made his fellow feeling known to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah's succinct and direct speech reveals that he considers himself to be one of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. This is his use of the word "we" when addressing the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as seen in his intercession, identifying himself with his own people, "I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you" (1:6). Look at 2:17 – "... "You see the trouble we are in: ...." Nehemiah did not pretend to be an official dispatched from the palace of Susa and said, 'I am here to help you, since you look so pitiful.'

(2) Nehemiah made the inhabitants of Jerusalem face their trouble.

For example, as a pastor, I first look at the bad situation in our church in advance, and then challenge my church members to face this difficulty we are silently praying about. But the scary thing is that if I live a religious life mechanically or habitually, I get used to bad situations in the church and don't feel the seriousness of them. Pastor John White said: 'The failure to act is not because we see difficulties, but because we do not see the resources to overcome them. And the closest resource is the leader himself, who advances despite difficulties' (White).

(3) Nehemiah challenged the residents of Jerusalem to rebuild the city of Jerusalem together.

Look at Nehemiah 2:17 – "... Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace." This is my personal concern: How can I get the saints to take action? Pastor White's words come to my mind: 'They (people) act only when a vision sparks in their hearts an irresistible desire for something greater than themselves, or a desire to realize what they have never dared to do' (White). What is your irrepressible desire? What is the desire welling up in your heart to realize what you have never even thought of?

(4) Nehemiah shared his personal testimony with the residents of Jerusalem.

Look at Nehemiah 2:18 – "I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, 'Let us start rebuilding.' So, they began this good work." Nehemiah shared with the residents of Jerusalem how he had been helped by God's gracious hand

through his encounter with King Artaxerxes before coming to Jerusalem. Nehemiah shared with them that King Artaxerxes, who did not want to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, was not only happy to send Nehemiah to Jerusalem because of the gracious hand of God, but also enjoyed giving letters that Nehemiah demanded, so he is now in front of the residents of Jerusalem. Nehemiah's personal burden for Jerusalem and his experience of God's gracious hand persuaded the residents of Jerusalem that the time had come to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

How did the residents of Jerusalem react when Nehemiah motivated them in this way? Look at Nehemiah 2:18b – "... Let us start rebuilding." So, they began this good work." This is it! When the vision (rebuilding of Jerusalem) and motivation presented in the leader's sense of mission were given, those who followed the leader shouted, "Let us start rebuilding." Then Jerusalem could be rebuilt. The same is true of the church, which is the body of the Lord. The Lord builds the church, which is the body of the Lord, because the Lord inspires the leader with a sense of mission, and the leader gives vision and motivation to those who follow. The Lord's word of promise to our church is Matthew 16:18: "... I ... will build my church ...." Our church is the Lord's church. And the Lord's church is being built by the Lord. Aren't you experiencing that the Lord is building His church? Aren't you seeing church leaders who are being helped by God's gracious hand like Nehemiah? When I look at myself, I cannot deny the faithful and gracious hand of the Lord who is strengthening a weak person like me. So, while talking to my wife this week, I confessed this: 'Your husband is not strong. I am quite weak, but the power of Christ is showing.'

Pastor James Packer said, 'All true leaders are master motivators'. An example is Winston Churchill of England during World War II. Here is an example of his speech to the nation when France was falling and Britain's strength was at its lowest: 'I have nothing to support. Only blood, toil, tears and sweat. ... What are our goals? I can answer in only one word: Victory – Victory at all costs, Victory in spite of all horrors, victory, no matter how long or difficult the road may be.' And later, when the invasion was almost certain, he gave this speech: 'We must defend our island at all costs. We must fight on the shore, we must fight on land. We must fight in the fields and we must fight by the roadside. We also have to fight in the hills. We must never surrender' (Packer).

# “Let us start rebuilding.” (3)

## [Nehemiah 2:19-20]

A complaining young man came to the king and begged him to teach him how to live a successful life. The king poured wine into a goblet and gave it to the young man, saying: ‘Go around town with a glass of wine and I will teach you the secret of success. However, if you spill the wine, your head will be cut off.’ The young man walked around the city sweating profusely. Then the king asked: ‘What did you see while walking around the city? Have you seen beggars and merchants in the streets? Have you ever heard the singing leaking from the bar?’ The young man replied: ‘I didn’t see or hear anything because I was paying attention to my wine glass.’ Then the king said: ‘That is the secret of success. If you set a firm goal in life and focus on your work, you will not hear the temptations and criticisms around you.’ People who don’t work complain a lot. A person who has a clear view of life and is immersed in work has no time to complain (Internet).

What is your view of life? What is the firm goal that you have set? Are you focusing on that goal and running without looking back to achieve that goal? When we think of Nehemiah, he had a firm goal in life. It was to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. He risked his life to achieve this goal. In other words, he had a sense of duty. We have already meditated that this, a sense of duty, is the first necessary element in rebuilding the Lord’s house. Second, we have already meditated on the fact that motivation is a necessary factor in rebuilding the Lord’s house. For the third time today, I want to meditate on Nehemiah 2:19-20, under the title “Let us start rebuilding (3)”. I hope and pray that God will give us the assurance of success while thinking about “Assurance of success,” which is an essential element in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem.

### **Third, we must have assurance of success.**

Look at Nehemiah 2:20 – “I answered them by saying, ‘The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.’” What does “success” mean? It usually means everything is going well. More specifically, it means that everything we do goes well, everything works out as we want, and we become prosperous

materially (Internet). However, "success" in the Bible means 'the blessing of living by putting God's Word into practice and working together for good in God's will.' When only God's good will is fulfilled through our lives of obedience to the Word, we call it prosperity or success. Then, what was the good that Nehemiah had experienced by working together in the will of God? It was to receive grace in front of King Artaxerxes. Look at Nehemiah 1:11 – "O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.' ...." The grace received in front of King Artaxerxes is nothing other than that God allowed King Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the city, which Nehemiah wanted (2:8). King Artaxerxes not only allowed Nehemiah to return to the city of Jerusalem and rebuild it, but also fulfilled Nehemiah's demands by giving two letters, one for safe passage to Judah (v. 7) and the other to Asaph, the king's forest manager, to give Nehemiah timber for beams (v. 8). This Nehemiah gave a short speech of his personal testimony before the people of Judah upon arrival in Jerusalem: "I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. ..." (2:18a). At that time, the stumbling block to success for Nehemiah and the people of Judah appeared (again). They were the Gentiles, Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, who were the leaders of the neighborhood around Jerusalem. Look at Nehemiah 2:19 – "But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. 'What is this you are doing?' they asked. 'Are you rebelling against the king?'" First, they despised Nehemiah and the people of Judah. They committed the sin of mocking Nehemiah, the servant of God, and they also committed the sin of mocking God's people. And they laughed at what Nehemiah and the people of Judah were trying to do: "What is this you are doing?" They ridiculed the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. Then they said, "Are you rebelling against the king?" This is a question that reminds Nehemiah and the people of Judah to go back to the time of Ezra and to remind them of the incident in which King Artaxerxes prevented the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Ezra 4). However, Nehemiah came with permission from King Artaxerxes. The enemies must have known this. Even so, what they said was intended to discourage Nehemiah and the people of Judah.

From the world's point of view, Nehemiah and the people of Judah did not prosper. How can we know that? It was because prosperity was generally when everything was going well for them, but then the enemies reappeared. However, success from God's point of view does not say that there will be no enemies when we live by practicing God's Word. The Bible says that success is when God's good will is fulfilled amidst the persecution of enemies. An example is Joseph in Genesis 39:2-3: "The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did." The Bible refers to Joseph as 'a prosperous (successful) man,' and says that Potiphar also saw that God made Joseph prosper (successful) in all he did. However, from the world's point of view, did Joseph really prosper in all things? Did everything go well? If Joseph is a successful person from the world's point of view, how does he go to prison with a false accusation? How can such a person be called a prosperous or successful person? However, the Bible says that Joseph was a prosperous (successful) man. There is also persecution and suffering in the life of a prosperous (successful) person. So why do we wonder about this biblical prosperity? The reason is because we envy the prosperity of sinners. Look at Proverbs 23:17 – "Do not let your heart



envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the LORD.” Keep Sunday diligently, worship well, read the Bible, give tithes... Even though we try to live a life that is in accordance with God's heart, things do not go well, the person next to us does not lead a righteous life and seems to earn money and live a good life despite bullying others. Seeing that, I think in my heart, "Did I live the wrong way? Shall I live like that too?" But we should envy the prosperity of such people. The prosperity of sinners refers to worldly prosperity. The Bible tells us not to envy the prosperity of the wicked. Look at Psalms 37:7 – “Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.”

What did Nehemiah do when obstacles to success reappeared? Look at Nehemiah 2:20 – “I answered them by saying, ‘The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.’” Here Nehemiah is saying two things:

- (1) Nehemiah firmly states that he will continue to promote the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem with the conviction that “the God of heaven” will make it successful.

The basis of Nehemiah's assurance of success was the "God of heaven." He had already experienced prosperity as the heavenly God answered his prayer when he wept bitterly and fasted and prayed before the “God of heaven” after hearing about the situation in Jerusalem (1:4-5). We also learned from Nehemiah 2:4 that when King Artaxerxes asked, “What is it you want?” Nehemiah prayed silently to the God of heaven. Nehemiah was certain that the God of heaven who made prosperity was with him, so he was certain that God would also accomplish the work of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. With that confidence, Nehemiah told his enemies that he would rise up with the people of Judah and build the city of Jerusalem. If the certainty of success is not God, but something else like ourselves, other people, or material or circumstances, even if we try to rise up and build, when the enemy comes, we may waver, doubt, and give up in fear. An example of this is found in the book of Haggai. Because of the enemy, the people of Israel built the temple in Jerusalem, but only laid the foundation. They were afraid of the enemy's threat and gave up rebuilding the temple (Hag. 1:9).

- (2) Nehemiah boldly tells the people of Judah that his enemies are not servants of God.

What does this mean? We can think of it in three ways: (a) Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem mean that there is no legal division in arranging the Jewish nation. (b) They are saying that there is no statutory right in Jerusalem. (c) They say that they have no right to celebrate Jewish religious ceremonies (Fensham).

There is a report that investigated the secret of success by tracking successful people among graduates of the Carnegie Institute of Technology in the United States. Experience or skill only contributed

15 percent to success. The remaining 85 percent had good interpersonal relationships.’ Especially, they were good at three visits for interpersonal relationships, which were ‘mouth visitation’, ‘hand visitation’, and ‘foot visitation’. The visit of the mouth is to soften and give courage to a person's heart by complimenting, and the visit of the hand is to write a letter and deliver the heart of true love. Foot visitation is when someone is sick or in trouble. The more compliments you give, the more letters you write, the more impressed you are, and the more you find someone in need, the more friendly you become. Take a good look at the successful people around you. They will have good relationships with the people around them by not neglecting the little things that others consider insignificant and taking good care of them (Internet). What is the secret to success taught in the Bible? We can think of it in 3 ways:

(1) God's presence is the secret to success.

Look at Genesis 39:23 – “... because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.” The God who was with Nehemiah, the God whose good hand helped Nehemiah (Neh 2:8, 18) and moved his heart to work (2:12). And the “God of heaven” was with Nehemiah’s success (2:8, 18). This is the secret to success.

(2) Keeping God's commandments is the secret to success.

Look at Joshua 1:7-8: “Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.” Nehemiah did not pursue his own will, but God's will, that is, to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

(3) Seeking God, that is, praying, is the secret to success.

Look at 2 Chronicles 26:5 – “He sought God during the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the LORD, God gave him success.” As a man of prayer, Nehemiah prayed to God.

# How to build?

## [Nehemiah 3:1-3]

A phrase often used during President Bush's speeches at the Republican Convention was 'Building a safer world and a more hopeful America.' During his speech, President Bush mentioned several names: '... I am lucky to have the best Vice President ... I am honored to have him by my side ....' He said that he was grateful to be walking through life with Laura Bush, saying that the American people were seeing the goodness, the kindness and the virtues of Laura Bush that she had seen 26 years ago. He then mentioned his two daughters and close friends and parents. During his speeches, especially at the end, as he spoke to the soldiers and their families who died fighting for freedom, I was moved and the TV showed people who shed tears. As I listened to President Bush's speech, I compared President Bush and Nehemiah. President Bush who wants to make America a safer and more hopeful America after the collapsed Twin Towers in New York and Nehemiah rebuilt the fallen Jerusalem. President Bush with a concrete plan with strong and consistent leadership and Nehemiah, who prays with a clear goal and sense of duty, made plans and put them into action. In particular, compared to today's text, Nehemiah 3, I see more similarities in the part where Nehemiah mentions the people who work with him.

In today's text, Nehemiah 3:1-3, Nehemiah mentions the names and groups of many people. I'm writing what these many people did to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. How did Nehemiah and the people of Judah build the city of Jerusalem? Focusing on today's text, I hope and pray that, while receiving lessons while thinking about two ways under the heading "How to build?", we will also be used to build the church, the body of the Lord we serve.

### **First, we must teamwork.**

Look at the teamwork (collaborative work) in today's text, Nehemiah 3. In Nehemiah 3, there are 38 individual names as well as 42 other group names written on the person who appeared to

say, “they began this good work” (2:18) to build the city of Jerusalem [At least 75 people (Lee)]. What does this fact teach us? It is true that the city of Jerusalem was not built by Nehemiah or anyone else alone. In other words, many people who had a sense of duty and were motivated by the leaders worked together to build the city of Jerusalem. Here we must learn the principle of cooperation. A good Bible verse that explains that principle is Ecclesiastes 4:9-12: “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.” If team members who have a three-fold cord that is not easily broken are used to cooperate to rebuild the church, which is the body of the Lord, the power will be amazing. One interesting fact here is that although Nehemiah wrote down the names of over 75 people and their deeds, he did not write down his own names and deeds (“Nehemiah” in verse 16 is a different person). What does this teach us? This teaches us Nehemiah's great leadership. What are the characteristics of his good leadership?

(1) Nehemiah knew the importance of manpower.

He knew that he would not have been able to build the city of Jerusalem alone without these 75+ men. He needed these people. Not long after Matsushita Electric was founded, Konosuke Matsushita told his employees: People will ask, ‘What is your company making?’ Then, they said, ‘Our company makes people’ (Internet).

(2) Nehemiah delegated the work to them.

Here's what one brother wrote on their website: ‘The greatest leaders in history are not those who do better than their subordinates. They were the ones who recognized, attracted, and effectively deployed talented people under a unified vision. Third-class leaders use their own abilities, second-class leaders use the strength of others, and first-class leaders use the wisdom of others.’ Nehemiah, who had excellent leadership, entrusted more than 75 Jewish people with the work to show their talents to their heart's content.

(3) Nehemiah was a leader who knew how to encourage.

Why is he writing down the names of over 75 people and their deeds (achievements) in Nehemiah 3? In particular, he writes in verse 20 that Baruch the son of Zabbai “zealously repaired another section.” This expression has never been used by anyone else. Commonly there is only the expression ‘... people ... worked.’ Then, Baruch emphasized that he worked especially hard. Why does Nehemiah place special emphasis on Baruch? Everyone worked hard, but Nehemiah wanted to remember one person who made a lot of sacrifices. So, he recorded it without forgetting it. Another thing to note in today's text is the word “Next to

him”. In Nehemiah 3:1-32, the word “Next to him” is emphasized 29 times across 22 verses. Start with verse 2 (“Next to him ...”). And in verses 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, etc., it appears 29 times. This is not just a sequence of things. This means that the people of Judah stood where they should stand and did the work. And another person stood next to them and did the work, standing where they should stand, and so the great Jerusalem was built. What this arrangement of words emphasizes is that they made this grand work by cooperating in orderly harmony (Lee).

In building the city of Jerusalem, the most important thing is to become “unity” in order to achieve a great work by cooperating and harmonizing everything. In other words, the important thing here is that people from all different backgrounds came together to build the city of Jerusalem: “the high priest” and “his fellow priests” (v. 1), “The men of Jericho” (v. 2), the “son” of so-so (vv. 2, 3, 4, 6, etc.), etc. Looking at the list of people in Nehemiah 3, we can see that people from various backgrounds built the city of Jerusalem together (v. 1). Interestingly, in verse 9 (vv. 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18), the word “ruler” appears. Usually, when we think about it, we can think that if we were in different provinces or cities, we would have servants do the work. But at that time, everyone worked in cooperation regardless of their position in the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. How beautiful is this scene? I am reminded of the word of Psalms 133:1 – “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!”

### **Second and last, we must work as we have been gifted.**

Regarding those who do not work in the church, Pastor D. L. Moody said: ‘Too many people have wrong ideas (thoughts) about the church. They think that the church wants to be a place where they can come and rest, where they can sit in soft pews, listen to the pastor's sermon, give alms offerings, and do their part to ensure that the church does not go bankrupt. For them, work (practical work in the church) has no place in their minds’ (Wiersbe). In the work of building the city of Jerusalem, there were people who did not work as Pastor Moody said. Look at Nehemiah 3:5 – “The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.” In rebuilding the city of Jerusalem, there were nobles who did not participate while everyone was doing this good work (2:18). They did not help Nehemiah and the leaders who were with him. Here I have 2 questions. (1) The first question is ‘Why didn't the Tekoa nobles participate in the rebuilding of Jerusalem?’, and (2) the second question is ‘Why did Nehemiah point out that this noble did not work?’. What do you think? A possible answer to the first question is that Tekoa, as an open country, geographically west-east of Jerusalem, was vulnerable to attack from Geshem the Arab (v. 19), one of the groups opposing the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Because of this, the nobles of Tekoa may have been afraid of Geshem and did not participate in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem (Fensham). Another possible answer is that as aristocrats, we might think that they did not serve with others because they were not humble enough (Park). The second question, “Why did Nehemiah point out in verse 5 why the nobles of Tekoa did not join in the work of the Lord?” gives us a valuable lesson. That precious lesson is that there should not be any bystanders in the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, where everyone puts their

strength into this good work, regardless of whether the reason is fear or not being humble. In other words, everyone must rise up and join in rebuilding temple of the Lord. Another lesson is that despite these bystanders, Nehemiah and everyone else worked hard and rebuilt the city of Jerusalem with one heart and one mind. In other words, even though there were Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem, and the nobles of Tekoa who were bystanders internally, God made it prosperous in the work of building the city of Jerusalem (2:2: 20) to prove it. Here we see that God made Nehemiah and the people of Judah prosper, but the important fact is that he used the gifts of many people in Nehemiah 3. In other words, our responsibility is to use the gifts God has given to each of us. In the parable of the talents we are familiar with, it says, “But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money” (Mt. 25:18). In other words, rather than being praised as “Well done, good and faithful servant” (vv. 21, 23) on the day of the Lord’s return after not working diligently (hard) using the gifts the Lord has given, he will be rebuked “You wicked, lazy servant!” (v. 26) or “worthless servant” (v. 30).

There are 38 individuals and 42 groups who appear in Nehemiah 3 (Weirsbe). And if the 42 groups are divided into 4 professional occupations, “the goldsmiths” (v. 8) and “the perfumers” (v. 8), “the politicians” (v. 12), and “the merchants or businessmen” (v. 31) (Fensham). Why does the Bible list a motley number of people with various occupations in the work of building the city of Jerusalem? The reason is to teach them that they worked together using their talents according to the gifts God gave each one. In other words, it is to teach us the principle of gifts. What is the principle of the gift? In 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4, we are talking about the principle of gifts. In particular, in 1 Corinthians 12, it says that the church is the body of Christ and that the church is made up of many people to whom God has given various gifts. In other words, it is a gathering of various people who have given our bodies various talents and gifts, such as arms, legs, and hair. Then, how did Nehemiah and the Israelites work according to the gifts they received?

(1) Leaders set an example.

Look at Nehemiah 3:1 – “Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel.” “Eliashib” is the grandson of Yeshua (who worked with Zerubbabel). He, who was in a priestly position, took the initiative and cooperated in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem, which is an example in construction (Park). What he did with his fellow priests was to build the Sheep Gate. The Sheep Gate was the door that the priests had to pass through when going toward the altar to offer sacrifices. Since this is related to the sacrifice, it was appropriate for the priest to do it (Lee).

(2) Some did more work than others (vv. 11, 19,21, 24, 27, 30).

I'm not sure if I read the Korean Bible, but if I look at these verses in the English Bible, it says

"repaired another section". Many would have been happy to put down their tools when the job was done. But the people in this verse are faced with something else. The lesson we learn here is that we should not serve the church comparing ourselves to others, but only serve faithfully until the Lord grants us strength.

(3) Some worked from home (vv. 10,23,28-30).

In these verses, it is written "Adjoining this, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house" (v. 10a), "Beyond them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their house" (v. 23a), "... made repairs, each in front of his own house" (v.28), "... made repairs opposite his house" (v. 29), "... made repairs opposite his living quarters" (v. 30). At least six workers and an unknown number of priests repaired the part close to their house. The spiritual lesson we can learn here is that Christian service must begin at home.

There is a book called "Through Gates of Splendor" by Elizabeth Eliot. This book is the story of the martyrdom of five young people who are the eternal hearts of North American missionaries. This book is about Jim Eliot, the husband of Elizabeth Eliot, and his mission team members, who are the other four co-workers, and how they met in the providence of God. This is a book that tells about their death. At the end of the book, in the 'Memorial Edition Epilogue' written in 1996, author Elizabeth Elliot describes the five martyrs: The five men look back at themselves. Pete's worry about whether he should join the other missionaries' adventures, Ed's enthusiasm to be sure that everything will work out even though Marilu is 8 months pregnant, Roger's depression and deep sense of defeat as a missionary, and Nate's extreme prudence. It reminds me of Jim's enthusiasm, his determination, and his reckless excitement.' In the meantime, from the death of these five young missionaries to the long years when he later lived with the Wao Lani Indians (Auka Indians) and then recorded them and meditated on his own later experiences, confessed that their story pointed to one point. It is the fact that God is God. 'If He be God, He is worthy of my worship and service' (Elliot).

The God of heaven lifted up Nehemiah and used him to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. In addition, God accomplished great things by lifting up the people of Judah in Jerusalem. That God wants to use me and you in this day and age not only to build the Lord's church, but also to expand the kingdom of God. We must cooperate with each other to faithfully serve according to the gifts we have received, and fully reveal God's being as God.

# Work with all their heart!

## [Nehemiah 4:1-6]

I saw Michael Moore's movie "Fahrenheit 9/11" and saw an article written by a moviegoer on the Korean Internet JoongAng Ilbo. Here is a partial introduction to the content of the article: 'First of all, the main plot of the movie is, as we all know, to mock Bush and his cabinet. The film begins with Bush's stupid expression, his words, the comical expressions of Bush and his aides preparing for a press conference, and the embarrassed expression of Bush upon hearing the news of the shooting while visiting an elementary school. Even the fact that he slept with a French blanket on the eve of the 9/11 incident, putting aside the essence of the problem, he only tried to make Bush a laughingstock, but it was enough to laugh at that level of comedy. I felt sorry for the director, who was not free of emotions and was talking about cheap jokes about a gruesome incident that took thousands of lives' (Internet). The conclusion is, in one word, is that the movie was 'a third-rate comedy meant to ridicule Bush ....'

In the first week of July 2004, a website called 'Media Today' surveyed netizens on the internet about the targets of ridicule, and as a result, the ranking of the targets of ridicule was as follows: 'First priority: Seoul Mayor Myung-bak Lee. Under the pretext of ambitiously changing the transportation system in Seoul, the complete bus route reorganization that took effect on July 1 met with strong opposition from citizens, and Mayor Lee suddenly became the focus of anger. Second place: CEO Cheonho Kim of Gana Trading Co., Ltd., who put the truth behind Mr. Kim's murder into a maze through suspicion of changing his words and his incoherent behavior, rose to second place in the weekly rankings. Third place: Britney Spears, who is engaged to a dancer, said 'I really want to get married this time' and 'I want to be a good mother' (Internet).

What about ridicule in the church? Who are people mocking? They mock those who believe well and are loyal. So, to a person who believes well and is loyal. That is why they ridicule those who believe well and are loyal, saying, 'Should you believe in Jesus and believe that way? Do you have to go out like that on Sunday? Who are you trying to impress by being so loyal?' Therefore, in



the last days, church members are hurt by church members (Internet). What should we do when we are ridiculed like this? If we look at Nehemiah 4:6, the Bible says that Nehemiah and the people of Judah worked with all their heart even in the midst of ridicule. So, I would like to think about two things centering on today's text under the heading "Work with all their heart!". I hope and pray that God's grace be upon you and me so that we may be able to work with all our heart.

### **First, under what circumstances did Nehemiah and the people of Judah work with all their hearts?**

Despite ridicule, they heartily rebuilt the city of Jerusalem. In today's text, Nehemiah 4:1-3, when Sanballat, one of the three opponents of Nehemiah and the people of Judah, heard that Nehemiah and the people of Judah had built the city of Jerusalem, he was very angry and laughed at the Jews (v. 1). Sanballat, along with other enemies, Tobiah the Ammonite and Geshem the Arabian, had already despised and ridiculed Nehemiah and the people of Judah (2:19). This hints to us that Sanballat was waging despicable psychological warfare as an attempt to sabotage the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. What was its purpose? It was to instill disappointment and fear into Nehemiah and the people of Judah (White). That is, it was intended to destroy the morale of the builders so that the city of Jerusalem could not be rebuilt (Packer). These adversaries took advantage of the "psychological weakness" of the rebuilders of Jerusalem to stop the work.

There is an interesting article about psychological warfare in Iraq. During the Gulf War in 1990-1991, psychological warfare units flew a small plane under the name "Voice of the Gulf" and distributed leaflets to the people of Iraq, eventually leading to the surrender of 87,000 Iraqi soldiers. In this war in Iraq, a huge number of leaflets were aired to the people of Iraq under the name "Information Radio", saying that the Allies wanted to help the people of Iraq and to eliminate Saddam and his regime who are killing innocent Iraqis and didn't want to hurt them (Internet). In Nehemiah 4:1-6, we can see Sanballat's psychological warfare. We can think of his psychological warfare in five questions:

(1) The first question is "... What are those feeble Jews doing?" (v. 2)

The key point of Sanballat's ridicule here was the people of Judah, the workers. He called them "feeble Jews." In psychological warfare, you can either poke the other person's weakness or tell them one fact that the other person is sensitive to. For example, a sister who belonged to a Christian group I was volunteering with when I was in college, my roommate, and the adviser in charge were sitting in a restaurant and were drinking water as we were waiting for food. And I said to the sister sitting across from me, 'You're very healthy' (I meant that she was little bit fat). And she picked up her cup and threw water at me (The sister seems to have been mostly concerned with her figure). Now Sanballat was doing just that. In front of his brothers Samaritans and his army, he called the people of Judah 'feeble

(weak) people of Judah' because they knew how to react sensitively to the disgraceful and humiliating situation they were in. The term "feeble Jews" here means miserable or unhappy Jews. The word has two roots in the Old Testament: (a) Used to refer to a dying or withering tree (Isa. 16:8; 24:7; etc.). (b) Also used for those without hope (Isa. 19:8; Hos. 4:3). In today's main text, what we call "feeble Jews" is to ridicule the people of Judah as withering people who are worthless or what to do with great things. However, what we need to keep in mind is that if we look at 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, the Bible says that God is pleased to use us, weak beings, as instruments, and He also uses us to accomplish His work. People of the world may take wealth and power as their glory, but we, the people of God, can be proud of our poverty and weakness because we believe in the Word that when we are weak, we are strong (2 Corinthians 12:1-10). People of the world may take wealth and power as their glory. But we, the people of God, can be proud of our poverty and weakness because we believe in the Word that when we are weak, we are strong (2 Cor. 12:1-10).

(2) The second question is "Will they restore their wall?" (Neh. 4:2).

Here in the second question, the point of Sanballat's ridicule was the work itself, the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. In other words, this ridicule is, 'Do they really know what they started doing?' (White) or 'The rebuilding of Jerusalem is clearly beyond their power' (Packer). For example, people who mock our church point at us and say, 'How can a weak church like you rebuild the Victory Presbyterian Church again?', 'How are you going to handle the Hispanic ministry?' and so on and continue to criticize our weakness and inability to handle it with ridiculing questions. When we are tired and weak in ministry, this kind of ridicule can't be fatal. Pastor White said, 'When doubts are about to arise about something you have started, it is most undesirable for someone to tell you what fears you already feel.' And he said Nehemiah 4:10 points out the weak condition and words of the people of Judah: The men of Judah said, "Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall." Sanballat's second mockery must have been fatal when the people of Judah were already questioning whether they would be able to rebuild the city of Jerusalem.

(3) The third question is "Will they offer sacrifices?" (v. 2)

This third mockery may not come across clearly. Sanballat is mocking their (the people of Judah) faith in God (White). It's like saying, 'Are they really mistaken that prayer can raise their wall?' What a terrible mockery of Sanballat! After mocking the people of Judah and mocking their work, the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, now they are mocking their faith, prayer. Simply put, 'What's the use of praying? Will prayer and worship work to rebuild the city of Jerusalem?' is a mockery. This tells us that Sanballat is denying that God helps his people. This is an insult to Jehovah God. For example, what is the use of interceding for

evangelism meetings and for new believers? How would you react if you heard ridicule? Will God really answer my prayers? Will my newborn believer accept the gospel? The point of this third mockery is to make us abandon our faith and walk the path of doubt.

(4) The fourth question is “Will they finish in a day?” (v. 2)

The crux of this fourth mockery is the ability to get the job done—to rebuild the city of Jerusalem in a short amount of time. Sanballat ridiculed the people of Judah, who were already exhausted from weakness (v. 10) and were saying, ‘We will not be able to build the city,’ with the intention of making them even more discouraged by how long it would take to complete such a great and difficult task. This is Satan's mockery and temptation. In fulfilling the Lord's will, the work that we, the Victory Presbyterian Church, have to do seems too big, and it makes us look small to handle the big task, so we can't persevere.

(5) The fifth and last question is “Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble--burned as they are?” (v. 2)

The key to Sanballat's mockery here was the building material. He is saying that the stones necessary for rebuilding the city of Jerusalem are already burned and are useless. However, the burned stones around the city of Jerusalem at that time were still good for building materials (white). At that time, it was the gates that were extinguished, and since the walls were demolished, almost all the stones were usable again (Packer). However, Sanballat secretly spit out the wrong words (burned stones) along with the right words to discourage the people of Judah.

After these five mockeries of Sanballat, comes the mockery of Tobiah the Ammonite: “Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, ‘What they are building--if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!’” (v. 3). The focal point of Tobiah's mockery here was the finished product, the city of Jerusalem. He is mocking that even if the city of Jerusalem, which Nehemiah and the people of Judah are building, is completed, it will soon collapse even if a fox climbs on the wall because it is too weak. Here, the meaning of the Hebrew word ‘to break down’ is ‘a crack in (the wall)’. In other words, even if the fox climbs up, there will be a crack in the walls of Jerusalem.

In building the church, we hold on to the word of Matthew 16:18, which is the Lord's word of promise, ‘I will build my own church’, and do not be shaken by the ridicule of any enemies and work to rebuild the church, which is the body of the Lord. We must serve faithfully. Even if our adversaries ridicule us as incompetent and weak, mock our work, ridicule our capabilities and resources, and even mock our faith and perseverance and challenge us, we must be faithful in fulfilling the will of the Lord in building His church.

## **Second, how did Nehemiah and the people of Judah work with their hearts?**

They prayed and built the city of Jerusalem with their hearts. Look at Nehemiah 4:4-5: “Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.” Here we see Nehemiah's third prayer (1:4-11 & 2:4). We can substantiate (clarify) his prayer as a double plea (Packer):

### (1) It is a plea for God to support his servants.

Look at Nehemiah 4:4-5: “Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. ... for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders.” Here, Nehemiah is asking God to weaken Sanballat's ridicule by giving new strength and confidence to the people of Judah who are building the city of Jerusalem.

### (2) It is a plea for God to judge his enemies.

Look at Nehemiah 4:4-5: “... Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight ...” This prayer is a prayer asking for a curse to be placed on Sanballat and his followers who were against Nehemiah and the people of Judah. On the surface, it seems that Nehemiah was ridiculed and prayed a curse out of vengeance, but it was not so. Sanballat and Tobiah ultimately resisted God and mocked God, so it is a prayer asking God to judge them righteously. This prayer can also be seen in the Psalms (Ps. 69, 79, 139:19-22). These psalms are called “Imprecatory Psalms.” One example is Psalms 79:4, 6: “We are objects of reproach to our neighbors, of scorn and derision to those around us. ... Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name.” Nehemiah praying like this, the amazing fact is in Nehemiah 4:6 – “So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.” The amazing fact is that Nehemiah resisted the ridicule of his enemies through prayer and heartfelt work. In other words, he prayed to God while hearing mockery. And while he was praying, he did not stop building the city of Jerusalem. Instead, he continued to build the city of Jerusalem with all his heart, together with all the people of Judah, without being shaken by the ridicule of his enemies who were trying to discourage him. Half of it was rebuilt within the period. What does this fact teach us? It is true that we can win through prayer. By praying to God, we can keep our hearts. In rebuilding the church, which is the body of the Lord, we must be faithful to rebuilding the church in prayer in the midst of any mockery.

Even our Jesus was mocked. Look at Mark 14:65 and 15:16-20: “Then some began to spit at him; they blindfolded him, struck him with their fists, and said, “Prophecy!” And the guards took him

and beat him. ... The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, 'Hail, king of the Jews!' Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him." Despite being ridiculed, Jesus suffered on the cross and then was nailed to death. He was crucified and died. He 'destroyed this man-made temple and in three days He built another, not made by man' (Mk. 14:58). How contrasting is this? Nehemiah and the people of Judah put their hearts into rebuilding the city of Jerusalem even in the midst of ridicule, but Jesus destroyed himself, the city of New Jerusalem, on the cross.

# Satan's strategy

## [Nehemiah 4:1-3]

In the church, who do people ridicule? They usually ridicule a person who believes in the Lord well and is faithful to Him. So, to a person who is well-believing and faithful, they ridicule by saying, 'Should you believe in Jesus like that? Do you have to go to church on a Sunday like that? To whom are you trying to impress with being so faithful?' Therefore, in the last days, the members of the church will be hurt by other members of the church (Internet).

In Nehemiah 4:1-3, we see Nehemiah and the people of Judah being ridiculed. Who ridiculed them? These were Sanballat (vv. 1-2) and Tobiah the Ammonite (v. 3). When Sanballat heard that Nehemiah and the people of Judah were building the city of Jerusalem, Sanballat became furious and very angry and mocked the Jews (v. 1). Tobiah the Ammonite, along with Sanballat, mocked and despised Nehemiah and the people of Judah (2:19). This suggests that Sanballat and Tobiah are engaged in a vile psychological warfare as operatives to thwart the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. What was the purpose? It was to instill disappointment and fear in Nehemiah and the people of Judah (White). In other words, the purpose was to destroy the morale of the builders to prevent the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem (Packer). These adversaries tried to stop Nehemiah and the people of Judah by taking advantage of the psychological weaknesses of those rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. Today, as I meditate on Sanballat's ridicule (v. 2) and Tobiah's ridicule (v. 3), I would like to think of Satan's strategies in six ways. Therefore, we can all know Satan's strategies, realize how deceived we are by Satan's temptations, turn to God, look and rely on Him, so that we can rededicate ourselves and be faithful in building the church, the body of the Lord, with the power that the Lord gives us.

### **The first thing I would like to meditate on is the ridicule of Sanballat.**

Look at Nehemiah 4:2 – "He spoke in the presence of his brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, 'What are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it for themselves? Can they offer sacrifices? Can they finish in a day? Can they revive the stones from the dusty rubble even the burned

ones?” We find five satanic strategies in his five ridicule questions.

(1) Sanballat's first ridiculed question was, “What are these feeble Jews doing?” (v. 2a).

At the heart of Sanballat's ridicule here were the workers of Judah. He called them “these feeble Jews.” In psychological warfare, you can either point at the opponent's weakness or tell them one fact that the opponent reacts sensitively. Sanballat called the people of Judah “feeble Jews” because he knew how sensitive the Jews would be to their poor and humiliating situation in front of his brothers, the Samaritans and the army. By “feeble Jews” here we mean “Miserable Jews”, that is the wretched or unhappy Jews. The root of the word ‘mll’ is used in two ways in the Old Testament: (a) It is used to refer to a tree that is disappearing or withers, (b) also to those who have no hope (Isa. 19:8; Hos. 4:3). Calling “feeble Jews” in the text is a mockery of how the Jews can do anything worthwhile or good because they are useless people like a withering tree.

I have fallen for this Satan's strategy countless times, and I still fall for it often. Just as Sanballat called the people of Judah “feeble Jews,” Satan keeps making me to say to myself, ‘James, you lack, you are weak, you do not deserve to be a pastor, you are useless’ and so on. I often mistook Satan's voice for the voice of God. In other words, I was mistaken for humility to say that to myself. Satan's clever strategy is to make me look at myself more than looking at God. To be more precise, Satan makes me to look only at myself. In particular, Satan makes me to look only at my weaknesses, my shortcomings, and my sins. And then Satan makes me unable to look to God, so I am disappointed with myself and even despair. True self-examination is to get to know God by getting to know ourselves. But Satan prevents us from knowing God and allows us to only get to know ourselves. Therefore, in the end, Satan prevents us from holding onto 1 Corinthians 1:27-28: “but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are.” Satan keeps us from looking at this God and only makes us focus on our foolishness and weakness, our lowliness, our despised points and our nothingness. So Satan is trying to discourage us from doing the Lord's work by disappointing and frustrating us.

(2) Sanballat's second ridiculed question was, “Are they going to restore it for themselves?” (Neh. 5:2b).

At the heart of Sanballat's ridicule in the second question here was the work itself, the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem. To paraphrase this ridicule, ‘Do they really know what they started with?’ says John White, while J. I. Packer says, ‘Rebuilding the city of Jerusalem is clearly beyond their capabilities.’ For example, people who ridicule our Victory Presbyterian Church are pointing at us and asking, ‘How can a church with such small numbers and weakness as you do to rebuild Victory Presbyterian Church?’ It is the same ridicule as continuing to criticize our

weakness and insufficiency with taunting questions. Such mockery can be fatal when we are weary and weak in our ministry. The fragility of the Jews in Nehemiah 4:10, “Thus in Judah it was said, ‘The strength of the burden bearers is failing, Yet there is much rubbish; And we ourselves are unable To rebuild the wall,’” as John White says, ‘It is the most disgusting thing to hear someone else tell you of the fear you already feel when you are about to have doubts about something you have started’ (White). Already the people of Judah were exhausted. There was still a lot of work left, but they were exhausted. And they wondered if they could rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Then this second mockery of Sanballat, “Are they going to restore it for themselves?” (v. 2) was fatal.

I think this satanic strategy is truly terrifying. The reason is because Satan first magnifies how weak we are and then shows us how great our work is. In other words, Satan's strategy is to magnify the greatness of our work and our smallness in order to make us think, 'How can a weak and insufficient person like me do such a great work for the Lord?' By doing so, Satan makes us to be discouraged and be frustrated. The reason why we are so discouraged and frustrated is that Satan, through all these delusions, prevents us from looking to God with faith. No matter how weak and lacking we are, if God is with us and He gives us strength and allows us to bear it, no matter what great things we do. Thus, we will try with faith for the Lord, but Satan tries to stop us from even starting at all. And by magnifying the great thing, Satan makes us see ourselves smaller and smaller. Also, he makes us unable to see God with faith, who is greater than the great thing, so that we become discouraged, frustrated, and even despair.

(3) Sanballat's third ridiculed question was, “Can they offer sacrifices?” (v. 2c)

This third ridicule may not make sense clearly. As John White says, Sanballat is ridiculing their [the people of Judah] faith in God (White). It's like saying, ‘Do they really think that prayer can elevate walls?’” What a terrifying ridicule of Sanballat? He ridiculed the people of Judah, ridiculed their work, ridiculed the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, and now ridiculed their faith. Not only was Sanballat denying that God was helping His people, but also he was blaspheming God.

Now Satan attacks our faith. He first attacks our weakness, then what we want to do. Thus, Satan attacks even our faith and puts us into doubt. Satan ridicules us by making us to think, 'What good is prayer? Would prayer and worship come makes us to build the Lord's church?' For example, how would you react if you were ridiculed about the use of intercessory prayer for evangelism meetings and for non-believers whom you try to reach out? Maybe you fall into Satan's strategy and ask yourself, ‘Will God really answer my prayers?’ Will you not doubt that your non-believers will accept the gospel? Satan makes us abandon our faith and walk the path of doubt. Satan creates disbelief in us. And in the end he leads us to unfaithfulness in unbelief.



(4) Sanballat's fourth ridiculed question was, "Can they finish in a day?" (v. 2d)

At the heart of this fourth ridicule is the ability to complete the task, namely, 'Can you rebuild the city of Jerusalem in a short time?' To the people of Judah who were still weary of strength (v. 10) and were saying, 'We cannot rebuild the wall,' Sanballat intends to further discourage them by ridiculing them, how long it will take to finish such a great and difficult task. In the end, Sanballat attacked the incapacity of the people of Judah and tried to force them to give up on rebuilding the city of Jerusalem while they were exhausted. To the tired and weary people of Judah, they could not endure any longer, but they acknowledged the limits of their patience and wanted to stop this great work of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem.

This is Satan's ridicule and temptation. Satan tries to make us impatient and give up in doing the Lord's will by making the things we have to do seem so great and at the same time too small for us to handle the great thing. In particular, Satan magnifies how short our time is, which causes us to stop serving the Lord when we are tired and exhausted. While Satan emphasizes our inability and the size of the work we have to do, he makes us think that we don't have enough time. So in the end, he makes us to say, 'Lord, I can't do it,' and makes us give up on the work of the Lord.

(5) Sanballat's fifth and last ridiculed question was, "Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble – burned as they are?" (v.2e)

The key to Sanballat's ridicule here was the building materials. He said that the stones necessary for rebuilding the city of Jerusalem have already been burned and are of no use. But the burned stones around Jerusalem at that time were still good building materials (White). Packer also says that the gates were extinguished at the time and that the walls had been demolished. As a result, almost all the stones were reusable. But in order to disappoint the people of Judah, Sanballat spit out the wrong words (burned stones were useful) as well as the right words (burned gate materials were not useful) (Packer).

This ridiculed question of Sanballat made me realize more clearly that Satan indeed tempts us with a mixture of truth and lies. Just as Satan quoted the Old Testament with a twist when tempting Jesus, Satan does not tempt us with unconditional lies, but with lies plus truth (truth + lies). Consider the church as an example, and Satan often causes us to say: 'There are no workers in our church.' Even though we are serving the body of the Lord according to the gifts we have been given, Satan makes us think and say things like, 'There is no one who serves outside of me' like Elijah. God has prepared 7,000 people other than Elijah who did not bow down to Baal. But When Elijah was exhausted from fear and discouragement, he did not know that fact. By making us focus on things like lack of resources with the church since the church is small in order to discourage us and stop us from serving the church. Indeed, Satan's strategy is clever.

After these five ridicules of Sanballat, Nehemiah 4:3 shows the ridicule of Tobiah the Ammonite. This is the second and last thing we want to meditate on.

**Tobiah's ridicule was this: "What they are building--if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!" (v. 3)**

The key to Tobiah's ridicule here was the finished product, the city of Jerusalem. He is ridiculing that even if the wall of Jerusalem, which Nehemiah and the people of Judah are building, is completed, it is too weak and will soon collapse even if a fox climbs on it. The Hebrew word for 'to break down' here means 'a breach in (wall)'. In other words, even if the fox climbed up, there would be cracks in the walls of Jerusalem.

I will never forget this Tobiah's ridicule. The reason is because about 5 years ago, the Lord led me back to Victory Presbyterian Church and led me to meditate and preach on the Book of Nehemiah, and showed me many breaches in my life through this Tobiah's ridicule. As I received that grace, I was convinced in my heart that the Lord wanted to build me as the senior pastor of the church first in fulfilling the promise of Matthew 16:18 that He will build His own church, Victory Presbyterian Church. With the thought that 'I, as a pastor, must be properly build first,' and I couldn't understand why the Lord is trying to build Victory Presbyterian Church by raising such man like me who had many breaches. So I could not but praised the hymn "I know not why God's wondrous grace To me He hath made Known, Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love Redeemed me for His own" (v. 1 of the hymn "I Know not Why God's Wondrous Grace"). Then, about five years later, as I meditate on this text again, God is showing me my breaches and how much I am exposed to Satan through these five ridicule questions of Sanballat.

But I am not discouraged. The reason is because God is giving me strength again with the word of His promise. God is giving me strength by making me see His strength and power in the midst of my own weakness. Also, God is making us bold by making me to look to God, who is bigger than the size of the work of building Victory Presbyterian Church, which is the body of the Lord. God has given me the wisdom to distinguish between Satan's voice and God's voice, so that I can listen to His voice and move forward in faith. Also, He is allowing me to persevere and participate in the Lord's work of building the body of the Lord even in the midst of against all hope. And God is giving me strength by letting me see the faithful workers the Lord is building for me, who complains about the lack of workers.

In building the Lord's church, we must hold on to the word of the Lord's promise, 'I will build my church' (Mt. 16:18), and do not be shaken by the ridicule of any adversary. Let's serve the Lord and His church faithfully together. Although our adversaries ridicule us for our shortcomings and weakness, our work and our abilities and resources, let us all participate in building the body of the Lord. Even if they further ridicule and challenge our faith and patience, let us all participate in building the Lord's church. I hope and pray that we will all be able to glorify God by doing the Lord's will completely.

# When it is being rebuilt

## [Nehemiah 4:7-14]

If we look at the Internet cyber reading class, there is an article called 'There is no fear' written by a person named Mun-ju Kang. Part of the text reads: 'The thing we have to fear most is fear itself,' said President Franklin D. Roosevelt at his inauguration on March 4, 1933, to the anxious and frustrated people of the Great Depression. At that time, an unprecedented economic crisis in the United States left 15 million people unemployed, and as financial institutions such as banks went bankrupt, extreme fear swept over the people. ... What is the most important thing at this time? Roosevelt perceived that the recovery of confidence was more urgent than any other economic policy in overcoming the recession. Endless anxiety and defeatism brought about by fear are seen as the essence of crisis. Roosevelt wanted to cut off the process in which a sense of crisis causes a sense of crisis and the crisis in turn amplifies the sense of crisis' (Internet). How about you? What kind of crisis do you have? Are you afraid? Are you worried and anxious? Are you discouraged? Do you have any doubts? When you look at our church, what kind of crisis do you think will come? Personally, I think a "Crisis of Conviction" could come. In other words, the statement that President Roosevelt thought that the important thing in the economic crisis of the 1930s was the recovery of confidence speaks of a crisis of confidence. In other words, I think the United States tried to instill a mindset of confidence that economic recovery would come out of the economic crisis. This means that the economic crisis at that time was a crisis of confidence in economic recovery. In this way, it means that our church may also face a crisis of confidence. In other words, when we do not believe in the words of Matthew 16:18, 'the Lord builds the church, which is the body of the Lord,' and dwells in uncertainty, that is the crisis of the church. When could this crisis of confidence come? It can come when the church, the body of the Lord, is being rebuilt.

In today's text, Nehemiah 4:7-14, when the city of Jerusalem was being rebuilt, Nehemiah and the people of Judah faced a great crisis. So, I would like to meditate on two things under the title of "When it is being rebuilt" centering on the text today: What is the Coming Crisis when you are going to be rebuilt? (2) Crisis Management. While meditating on these two, I hope that we can all

manage the coming crisis well.

### **First, what is the Coming Crisis?**

Look at Nehemiah 4:7-8: “But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it.” When the walls of Jerusalem were repaired and the ruins were being repaired (v. 7), and half of Jerusalem's walls were repaired (v. 6), a crisis came to Nehemiah and the people of Judah. There is one thing we need to point out here. It is how Tobiah, the enemy of the people of Judah, mocked the people of Judah, saying, “What they are building--if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!” (v. 3). How did the people of Judah accept this mockery? In this mockery of Tobiah, the Hebrew meaning of the word “break down” is that there would ‘be cracks in (walls)’. It was mocking that this would happen. However, if we look at Nehemiah 4:7, the Bible says that “the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed.” In other words, the people of Judah were not shaken by Tobiah's ridicule, but rather, as if they had learned a lesson through Tobiah's mockery, they were closing all the cracks in the wall of Jerusalem. So, they were rebuilding the city of Jerusalem even stronger. This attitude is a wise person who knows how to turn a crisis into an opportunity. Then what kind of crisis came to the people of Judah? We can think of it in 4 ways:

#### (1) The first crisis is the number of enemies.

Look at Nehemiah 4:7 – “But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem's walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry.” As the rebuilding of Jerusalem progressed, the number of enemies increased. At first, in Nehemiah 2:10, the opponents were specified as only two leaders, Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite. Then, in 2:19, Geshem, an Arabian, appeared, and three opponents arose. Then, looking at today's text 4:7, “the men of Ashdod”, not just one person, is uniting with other enemies to oppose Nehemiah and the people of Judah rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. Why are they united? They allied themselves in trying to prevent the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, which was the same wrong purpose. God's people are sometimes not easy to work with. However, the people of this world seem to have no problem in resisting the Lord's work together.

#### (2) The second crisis was a combined armed attack by adversaries.

In Nehemiah 4:7-8, when the opponents heard that the city of Jerusalem had been rebuilt and the ruins were being repaired, they were very indignant and plotted together. What was their intention? Look at verse 8: “They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem

and stir up trouble against it.” In other words, the enemies were united and attacked Jerusalem. Therefore, they wanted to stir up trouble against Jerusalem. And the city of Jerusalem was besieged by the enemies. Sanballat and the Samaritans to the north, Tobiah and the Ammonites to the east, Geshem and the Arabs to the south, and the Ashdodites to the west were besieging Nehemiah and the people of Judah who were rebuilding Jerusalem. Ashdod was said to have been the most important city in Palestine at the time. And the Palestinians would not have wanted another important and strong community in Jerusalem to spring up. This union of adversaries reminds us of Luke 23:12 – “That day Herod and Pilate became friends--before this they had been enemies.” In persecuting Jesus, we see the adversaries who avoid a united front. This phenomenon was already prophesied by the psalmist in Psalms 2:2 – “The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.”

### (3) The third crisis was discouragement.

Look at Nehemiah 4:10 – “Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, ‘The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.’” The people of Judah were discouraged because of the multitude of work. They were discouraged because there were still many mounds of dirt left, but now they heard the news of the adversaries' united front and military reverence. So, they felt even more discouraged. The city of Jerusalem had been destroyed before, and the heaps of earth and stones scattered here and there had to be removed and the walls had to be rebuilt. So, the work had to be doubled. That was why the people of Judah were discouraged because they had too much to do. Also, how discouraged was it when they felt that the number of enemies was increasing, and the attacks were getting worse in this yard where the walls of Jerusalem were half rebuilt?

Here is an instructive parable created by a Christian teacher. One day, the devil brought demons and attended a “weapons exhibition” where the weapons that used to destroy and corrupt God’s people were displayed. There were many different types of weapons on display, and one of them had the highest price. Curious about this, the evil spirits asked the devil: ‘Boss, why is this weapon so expensive?’ Then the boss gave the following answer: ‘People don’t know I use this weapon. So, I can easily captivate people with this crowd. How many of God’s people have been corrupted by this weapon.’ The name of that weapon was “discouragement” (Lee). Our souls may become discouraged because there is so much to do in rebuilding the church. Discouragement can quickly contaminate the entire rebuilding atmosphere, as it leads to a reluctance to try any further, apathy, and hopeless inertia (Packer).

### (4) The fourth crisis is fear.

News of a conspiracy was brought to Nehemiah and the people of Judah by Jewish informants that the adversaries would unite and launch an armed attack. What was particularly frightening was the report that there would be a surprise attack from different directions simultaneously entering Jerusalem (White). Look at Nehemiah 4:11-12: “Also our enemies said, ‘Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work.’ Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, ‘Wherever you turn, they will attack us.’” Henry Thoreau, an American thinker and naturalist, is said to have written in his reading on September 7, 1851: “Nothing is so much to be feared as fear”. Why? The reason is because fear paralyzes us. Fear is contagious. It can also paralyze others. Fear and faith can never revolve in our hearts. Fearful people discourage and defeat others. Look at Deuteronomy 20:8 – “Then the officers shall add, ‘Is any man afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too.’”

A crisis will come when the church, which is the body of the Lord, is being rebuilt. In the midst of this, what we must keep in mind is ‘Increased opposition is increased opportunity!’ The Lord will turn the crisis that discourages and frightens our souls, strengthen our hearts, and give us hope. We must obey the will of the Lord who wants to build His church. The Lord will build our church through those who obey.

## **Second and last, how should Crisis Management be done?**

If we look at ‘Crisis Management of Successful People,’ written by Yeon-joong Kim, who holds the record for car sales in the Guinness Book of Records for 10 consecutive years, one of the things successful people have in common is their risk management. They are exceptionally strong in critical situations. In a word, it has an excellent ability to turn a crisis into a moment of opportunity. As an example, there is a person named Hoon-hyeon Jo, who is 9th in Go. When Hemp is put in a crisis due to an enemy attack or when he judges that it is impossible to win, his head often comes up with tricks that others cannot imitate. Not only that, but befitting the nickname ‘Swallow’, he does not dwell on the practicalities of small battles. But he has the determination to bite down on the enemy’s weaknesses with quick tactics and to overthrow them at once (Internet). What did Nehemiah do when he faced with a crisis? Let us learn his crisis management.

### **(1) Nehemiah prayed to God with the people of Judah.**

Look at Nehemiah 4:9a – “But we prayed to our God ...” When did Nehemiah pray? He prayed to God in a situation where his enemies were surrounded on all sides because they were in the east, west, south, and north. At the time of the Exodus, the Bible says that the Israelites were “hemmed in by the desert” (Exod. 14:3) in front of the Red Sea. At that time, when the Israelites were discouraged by their surroundings and complained to Moses, Moses looked up

and prayed to God (v. 15). From the beginning of the crisis, Nehemiah clearly prayed for God's protection. He also asked God to move the hearts of the people of Judah to pray to God with him (Packer). I am reminded of the words of Pastor George Muller: 'He who has not learned to fight life on his knees still does not know the ABCs of the Christian faith' (Muller).

(2) Nehemiah posted a guard.

Look at Nehemiah 4:9 – "... and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat." Nehemiah did not forget his responsibility while praying to God. In other words, he diligently did what he had to do as a man of prayer. Nehemiah then posted the guard to ward off the invaders. Where and how did he post the guard? Look at verse 13: "Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows." Nehemiah placed guards in prominent and vulnerable places on the wall. Then the invaders would be able to see that the Jews were ready to fight. The reason Nehemiah posted the guard together for all the tribes was because they knew how to stand firm together as a family and comfort each other. The people of Judah not only repaired the wall near their house (3:28-30), but they stood guard with their families to protect their home and city.

(3) Nehemiah constantly challenged the people of Judah to fully trust and have confidence in God.

Look at Nehemiah 4:14 – "After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, 'Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.'" What is important here is the leader Nehemiah's faith, confidence, and confidence. What would happen if the leader showed weak faith, uncertainty, and lack of confidence in front of the people of Judah who were discouraged and trembling in fear because of their enemies? Nehemiah's heart was occupied by the "great and awesome" God (1:5; 4:14). And he believed that God was strong enough to save the people of Judah in the midst of crisis.

There is a saying: 'Unbelief maximizes the problem, but faith makes the Lord look bigger' (Lee). When difficulties come to us, if the problem seems bigger than our Lord, this is unbelief. Nehemiah was able to challenge the Jewish people with confidence and confidence even in the midst of a great crisis because he looked at the great and awesome God. He didn't fear his adversaries because he feared his God. Fear of man is proof that we do not fear God. Those who fear God are not afraid of people. Hear what Moses praying said to the Israelites: "... Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still" (Exod. 14:13-14).

When the church, which is the body of the Lord, is being rebuilt, enough crises can come. At that time, we may be afraid and be gripped by caresses. However, Christians who live by looking to the Lord, who is the head of the church, have the wisdom to turn crisis into an opportunity given by the Lord. They wait in silence before the Lord with patience, praying and expecting how the Lord will build them and the church through the crisis. At the same time, they engage in spiritual warfare with faith while preparing more thoroughly even in the midst of a crisis. We go into battle relying only on the victorious Lord of salvation. Therefore, we witness and experience the works of salvation and victory by the Lord. May God bless you with this blessing.



# Coming crisis

## [Nehemiah 4:7-14]

‘The thing we have to fear most is fear itself.’ At his inauguration on March 4, 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appealed to a people in the midst of the anxiety and frustration of the Great Depression. At the time, an unprecedented economic crisis in the United States left 15 million people unemployed and a series of financial institutions such as banks went bankrupt, and extreme fear swept over the people. What was the most important thing at this time? Roosevelt perceived that restoring confidence was more urgent than any other economic policy in overcoming a recession. He saw the endless anxiety and defeatism brought about by fear as the essence of crisis. Roosevelt wanted to cut off the process in which a sense of crisis causes a sense of crisis and a crisis in turn amplifies the sense of crisis (Internet).

How about you? What kind of crisis do you have? Are you afraid? Are you worrying? Are you discouraged? Are you doubting? When you look at our church, what kind of crisis do you think will come? Personally, I think a “Crisis of Confidence” could come. What kind of crisis of confidence? Of course, we can talk about the assurance of salvation, the assurance of forgiveness of sins, the assurance of prayer answers, the assurance of guidance, and the assurance of victory. Rather, I think that a crisis of confidence can come when we do not believe in Matthew 16:18, the word of promise that the Lord will build His church, which is the body of the Lord. When we dwell in this uncertainty, it will soon become a crisis for our church. So when can this crisis of confidence come? It can come when the church is being rebuilt.

Looking at today's text, Nehemiah 4:7-14, we see that Nehemiah and the people of Judah faced a great crisis when the city of Jerusalem was being rebuilt. So, centering on Nehemiah 4:7-14, I want to think about the four crises under the title of “Coming crisis” and learn about the crises that will come to each of us in our individual lives, families, and churches. I hope and pray that we will be able to cope with the upcoming crisis wisely and faithfully by preparing well.

### **The first crisis is the growing number of adversaries.**

Look at Nehemiah 4:7-8: “But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod ... all plotted together ....” As the rebuilding of Jerusalem progressed, the number of enemies increased. At first, the opponents opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem by Sanballat, the Samaritans, and Tobiah and the Ammonites (2:10). Then, in 2:19, Geshem and the Arabs joined together to oppose Nehemiah and the Jewish people's rebuilding of Jerusalem. And in Nehemiah 4:7, we see that even a group of people called “the men of Ashdod” are uniting to oppose Nehemiah and the people of Judah rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. Why did they unite? Their purpose was to prevent the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

Likewise, Satan is still screaming like hell to prevent the church from being rebuilt. One way is not only to increase the number of external church enemies, but also to create internal church enemies. The adversaries of these increasing enemies are especially severe when the church is being built more and more firmly. In other words, the more the church is built, the more Satan strives to destroy the church by continuously raising enemies externally and internally to prevent the church from being rebuilt. This increasing enemy is an increasing opportunity for us. What kind of opportunity? It is an opportunity to realize our weakness and inability more deeply. At the same time, it is a wonderful opportunity to go further and experience God's power more deeply. It is also a good opportunity to pray more earnestly to God, and also a good opportunity to understand the heart of Heavenly Father by receiving answers to those prayers. It is a rare opportunity to see the glory of God.

### **The second crisis is a combined armed attack by adversaries.**

Looking at Nehemiah 4:7-8, many opponents heard that the city of Jerusalem was being repaired and the ruined place was being repaired. So, they were angry and all plotted together. What was their intention? It was to go to Jerusalem and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it (v. 8). In other words, the opponents would unite and attack Jerusalem. Therefore, they wanted to stir up trouble against the people of Judah. Now the city of Jerusalem is besieged by the enemies. Sanballat and the Samaritans to the north, Tobiah and the Ammonites to the east, Geshem and the Arabs to the south, and the Ashdodites to the west were besieging Nehemiah and the people of Judah who were rebuilding Jerusalem. They all united against Nehemiah and the people of Judah to stop them from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

This union of adversaries reminds us of Luke 23:12 – “That day Herod and Pilate became friends--before this they had been enemies.” In persecuting Jesus, we see the adversaries who avoid a united front. This phenomenon was already prophesied by the psalmist in Psalms 2:2 – “The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.” Even now, the adversaries who oppose Jesus and His church are united in this way and are trying to attack the church together and create a stir in the church. And it seems that they are successful.

The church is disrupting order in the church because it makes people unable to enjoy peace in their hearts due to noisy and complicated matters and confuses even the purpose of the church. Our Holy Spirit is the God who leads clearly, but Satan continues to confuse us. The combined attack of these adversaries is a good opportunity for our church to become more and more united in the Lord. It is an opportunity for us to gather together, hold on to God's word of promise with one heart and one mind (Ex. Acts 1:8) and devote ourselves to prayer (v. 14). Then, the whole church can be filled with the Holy Spirit (Ch. 2) and declare the gospel of Christ more boldly.

### **The third crisis is discouragement.**

Look at Nehemiah 4:10 – “Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, ‘The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall.’” The people of Judah were discouraged because of the multitude of work. They were discouraged because there were still many mounds of dirt left, but now they heard the news of the adversaries' united front and military reverence. The city of Jerusalem had been destroyed before, and the piles of earth and stones scattered here and there had to be removed and the walls rebuilt, so the work had to be doubled. As a result, the people of Judah were discouraged because they had too much to do. Also, how discouraged must they have been when they felt that the number of opponents was increasing and the attacks were getting worse in this yard where half of the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt? This discouragement was truly dangerous in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. The reason is because discouragement can quickly pollute the entire rebuilding atmosphere, as it leads to an attitude of not trying any more, apathy, and hopeless inertia (Packer).

Our souls may become discouraged because there is a lot of work in rebuilding the church, which is the body of the Lord. At first, there are times when we do church work with a joyful heart, but gradually the work comes as a burden. There are many volunteers who eventually burn out. Why is this happening in the church? It is because of discouragement. The discouraged soul eventually feels that church work is a heavy burden. I think it is tolerable that our hearts are discouraged by external factors. However, if the cause of the discouragement is ourselves, it is not easy to endure. If we look at ourselves and see our weaknesses, inadequacies, and foolishness, and become discouraged, it will only lead us to fall deeper and deeper into the swamp of discouragement. However, there is a more terrifying cause of discouragement than this. That is God. In other words, the discouragement that comes when, like the psalmist, it seems like God is covering His face and when we cry out in pain and feel like there are no answers to my prayers, the discouragement is truly fatal. It can almost make us feel hopeless. In doing so, we should rather long for God in despair. The reason is because God will give hope to those who long for God in despair (Jer. 29:11). He is the Lord of hope who restores and revives our souls. Therefore, we should rather look to God in despair (Ps. 43:5).

### **The fourth crisis is fear.**

News of a conspiracy was brought to Nehemiah and the people of Judah by Jewish informants that the adversaries would unite and launch an armed attack. What was particularly frightening was the report that there would be a surprise attack from different directions simultaneously entering Jerusalem (White). Look at Nehemiah 4:11-12: “Also our enemies said, ‘Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work.’ Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, ‘Wherever you turn, they will attack us.’” The news of this conspiracy to stop the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem by ambush and slaughter when Nehemiah and the people of Judah did not know or see was enough to frighten the hearts of the discouraged people of Judah.

Henry Thoreau, an American thinker and naturalist, is said to have written in his reading on September 7, 1851: “Nothing is so much to be feared as fear”. Why? The reason is because fear paralyzes us. Fear is contagious. It can also paralyze others. Fear and faith can never revolve in our hearts. Fearful people discourage and defeat others. Look at Deuteronomy 20:8 – “Then the officers shall add, ‘Is any man afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too.’” In recruiting soldiers to go to war, if there is a person who is afraid and trembles in his heart, the hearts of the other recruited brothers must not fall away like his heart. So, the Bible says that the brother who is afraid should go home. The Lord's church is a victorious church, but it is also a militant church. However, in the church's spiritual warfare, if there is one among its spiritual soldiers who is afraid of Satan's attack, if the fear gradually infects all the members of the despot church because of that one person, that spiritual warfare cannot be won. The spread and controlled by fear, the soldiers will have no choice but to watch the work of Satan destroying the church in a daze. Let us all hold on to Isaiah 41:10 – “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Fear and faith can never revolve in our hearts. We must not be afraid, but only have victory through faith in God.

A crisis will come when the church, which is the body of the Lord, is being rebuilt. Adversaries who try to stop the establishment of the Lord's Church will gradually increase. And the adversaries will unite and conspire against the church. As a result, the church may become discouraged and fearful. But we must keep in mind. ‘Increase opposition is increase opportunity!’ We should rather use it as an opportunity to long for God in the midst of discouragement and despair. When we do, God will give us hope. Also, when we are afraid, we must look (rely on) the great and fearful God. Therefore, we must experience the power of God who strengthens our hearts and makes us bold. In the midst of this, we must all join in the work of building the Lord, who promises to build the body of the Lord (Mt. 16:18) and continues to fulfill that promise. Victory!

# Crisis management

## [Nehemiah 4:7-14]

I remember reading a column by Mr. Cheol Lee for the Korea Daily in America about the US economy. He saw these cases of investment banks collapsing due to poor investments. It is said that the cause of the problem is that the lump of investment banks has grown, fearlessly raised funds directly and even touched real estate investments, and then the subprime mortgage (non-prime mortgage loan) crisis occurred. High returns always come with high risks, and even though executives knew this, they said they couldn't resist the temptation because the incoming profits were so great. Then, one of his words came to mind: 'Capitalism is driven by the pursuit of individual interests. However, if you try to maximize profits, the risk management system does not work because you are blinded by greed' (Lee). I think there is a point in saying that the risk management system will not work if we are blinded by greed. If a high return always comes with a high risk, the risk management system should be working well. But in the end, greed blinds the eyes, so the risk management system, which should work well at a high level, does not work. I agree with the statement that the US economy is struggling like this.

It seems that the US economy is really struggling. If we watched the CNN Internet news today, it says that 8 out of 10 Americans are stressed out because of the bad economy. Yesterday, on Monday, due to economic problems, a 45-year-old man, the head of a family, shot his mother-in-law, wife, and three sons through the barrel, and then committed suicide. It is truly shocking. As more and more people are under stress due to such a dark economy, there are also cases of suicide due to making extreme choices in the middle of life. In such a dark economy, how should we navigate this economic crisis? We need to learn how we got through economic crises in the past. As an example, we can consider the economic crisis in the United States during President Franklin D. Roosevelt's inauguration on March 4, 1933. At that time, an unprecedented economic crisis in the United States left 15 million people unemployed, and as financial institutions such as banks went bankrupt, extreme fear swept over the people. At this time, President Roosevelt saw that the endless anxiety and defeatism brought on by fear were the very essence of the crisis, and saw that the recovery of 'confidence' was more urgent than any economic policy in overcoming the recession. Therefore, President Roosevelt wanted to cut off the process in which a sense of crisis causes a crisis, and a crisis in turn amplifies the sense of crisis (Internet).

Even in our lives, there are times when life becomes dark due to crises. And there are times when we experience another crisis due to a sense of crisis. What could be the cause? One of the reasons is because we are not good at crisis management. All of us must have faced a crisis at least once in our past life. And if we have not properly learned how to manage a crisis through that crisis, we cannot help but face extreme pain and difficulties because we do not know how to manage the upcoming crisis as well. Therefore, we must learn crisis management through unexpected crises in our lives. In particular, in Nehemiah 4:7-14, how did Nehemiah and the people of Judah overcome the four crises that came to Nehemiah and the people of Judah (the increasing number of enemies, their combined armed attacks, discouragement, and fear)? I want to receive a lesson on crisis management that is given while thinking of three things. In the meantime, I hope and pray that we can apply the lesson to our lives and overcome the current crisis as well as the upcoming crisis.

### **The first lesson in crisis management is to pray together.**

Nehemiah prayed to God and dealt with the four crises that he could feel, the increasing number of enemies, the combined armed attack of these enemies, and the discouragement and fear of the people of Judah. Look at Nehemiah 4:9 – “But we prayed to our God ....” Nehemiah prayed to God in a situation where his enemies were surrounded on all sides, from the east, west, south, and north. If we look at Exodus 14:3, the Bible says that the Israelites were “hemmed in by the desert.” At that time, the Israelites saw their surroundings and became discouraged and complained to Moses. However, Moses looked up and prayed to God (v. 15). This is the first risk management lesson I and you should learn.

Pastor George Muller, who claims to have received 5,000 answered prayers, said this about prayer: ‘He who has not learned to fight life on his knees is still the one who does not know the ABCs of the Christian faith (Muller). Do you and I really know the ABCs of Christian faith? When faced with unexpected adversity and difficulties in life, are we fighting our sense of crisis, fear, anxiety, worry with our knees? Are we coping with crises in our lives by crying out to God? Like the Israelites, we must not be discouraged and complain about the land because we are trapped in the east, west, north, and south in front of the Red Sea. Rather, like Moses, we must look upward even in such a crisis. That is, we must look to God. And we must ask the God of our salvation in faith. Then we will experience God's salvation. In particular, it is important for the church to pray together when the community encounters a crisis. Of course, individual prayer is necessary. But when the whole church gathers together with one heart and one mind and prays earnestly to God, we will experience God's saving grace through that crisis. Even in the state of siege in the east, west, north, south, and north, we must experience God's work of salvation in our lives as well, who turned the Red Sea into dry land and allowed the Israelites to cross the Red Sea on foot. Our God will open the way of salvation for us. Like Paul and Silas who prayed and sang hymns (Acts 16), God will hear our prayers and give us the grace of salvation. I hope and pray that we will be able to experience God's work of salvation by praying together to God no matter what crisis we face.

### **The second lesson in crisis management is to post a guard.**

Nehemiah posted a guard when a crisis came for him and the people of Judah. Look at Nehemiah 4:9 – “But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.” Nehemiah then posted the guard to ward off the invaders. Where did he post the guard and how? Nehemiah posted the guard in prominent and vulnerable places on the wall. Look at verse 13: “Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords, spears and bows.” Because then the invaders would be able to see that the Jews were ready to fight. The reason Nehemiah posted the guard along with all the tribes was because they knew how to stand firm together as a family and comfort each other. The people of Judah not only repaired the wall near their house (3:28-30), but they stood guard with their families to protect their home and city.

Nehemiah prayed to God and did not forget his responsibility. In other words, he diligently did what he had to do as a man of prayer. In the midst of a crisis, Nehemiah not only prayed to God with the people of Judah, but also posted the guard on the walls of Jerusalem to block many enemies who were actually trying to invade. Nehemiah posted the guard in prominent and vulnerable places along every tribe. Likewise, we must set up the guard when facing a crisis. In particular, we personally must set watch over our eyes, ears, and hearts. Why should we post the guard in our eyes and ears? It is because if we do not post the guard in our eyes when we are looking at a crisis situation, we will see the crisis situation with our physical eyes and tremble in fear. Also, we must post the guard on our ears. That way, we can block out all the news from a crisis situation. As we block the news that discourages and despairs our hearts, we must hear God's still voice louder in the midst of the crisis. In particular, we must post the guard on our heart, the source of life. We must guard our heart well. In particular, we must be wary of distrust that may arise in our hearts due to a crisis. Also, we must guard against the crisis of confidence in our hearts. Rather, in a crisis situation, we must fill our hearts with the assurance of salvation. The word of God must be a guard in our hearts. Therefore, we must not be guided by a crisis situation or our thoughts and emotions that react to that situation, but only be guided by God's word of promise. Therefore, I hope and pray that we will experience the work of salvation of God who rescues us from the midst of crisis while enduring with faith.

### **The third lesson in crisis management is to trust God completely.**

Nehemiah constantly challenged the people of Judah to fully trust in God and have confidence when he encountered a crisis due to the enemies while rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Look at Nehemiah 4:14 – “After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, ‘Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.’” The important thing here is Nehemiah's faith, conviction, and confidence as a leader. What would happen if the leader showed weak faith, uncertainty, and lack of confidence in front of the people of Judah who were discouraged and trembling in fear because of their enemies? Nehemiah's heart was occupied by the great and awesome God (1:15; 4:14). And he believed that God was strong enough to save the people of Judah in the midst of a crisis. With this faith and confidence, Nehemiah constantly challenged the discouraged and fearful people of Judah to trust God

completely.

I remember reading a book that said, ‘Unbelief magnifies problems, but faith makes the Lord appear bigger.’ I agree. If we face a crisis and the crisis seems bigger than our Lord, we must keep in mind that this is unbelief. With such unbelief, we can never overcome a crisis situation. Like Nehemiah, we must have true faith. Because of the faith that makes us look at the extremely great God, we must overcome the crises that come into our lives. Even if a great crisis comes at home and at the church level, we must rather overcome it with faith in God. While longing for, praying for, expecting, and waiting for God's saving grace with conviction and confidence, we must overcome the fear that arises within us, and the fear of the adversaries who push us into a crisis situation. Hear what Moses praying said to the Israelites: “... Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. ... The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still” (Exod. 14:13-14). Our God fights for us. And the victory of war belongs to God. We should not be afraid because that God is with us and is fighting our enemies. Only by trusting God completely, we should not only overcome the crisis in our lives, but also use it as an opportunity to glorify God. Victory!



# The attitude of the builders

## [Nehemiah 4:15-23]

Here is the story of a Sufi teaching: A man wanted to get married. He wandered all over the world to meet the most perfect woman, but he could not find the perfect woman. In the end, her friend asked him who just came back after wasting her life. ‘Yes, isn’t there a single woman in the world who is so perfect?’ The 70-year-old bachelor replies. ‘No, there was one. She miraculously found the perfect woman.’ asked the startled friend again. ‘So how did it go?’ the bachelor replied with a gloomy face. ‘Whatever she is, she is looking for the perfect man. So, in the end, she was blown away’ (Jeong-ho Kim). Maybe that's why there are old bachelor and old virgins, we don't know. What is the essence of Sufi teachings here? There is no perfect church in this world. But what's the problem? Like a 70-year-old bachelor, we are looking for the perfect church. If we say that the community of imperfect beings is the church, isn't it a contradiction if we want to find the perfect church? The question I want to throw out here is what kind of attitude of mind am I serving the church with? What kind of attitude are you and I taking part in rebuilding the church?

I would like to receive a valuable lesson from the attitude of Nehemiah, the builder, and the people of Judah, with the title “The attitude of the builders” centered on the words of Nehemiah 4:15-23.

### **First, we must be driven by our goals.**

Look at Nehemiah 4:15 – “When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work.” Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, the enemies who opposed the building of Jerusalem, gathered in anger and decided, “They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it” (v. 8), but the plan failed. There are 2 reasons for this:

(1) The surprise attack failed because the people of Judah learned the will of the

enemies first and prepared a defensive posture.

The will of the enemies was to stop the work of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem by attacking and slaughtering the people of Judah “before they knew it or see us” (v. 11). But the people of Judah who lived near the enemies came to Nehemiah and the people of Judah and told them several times in advance that the enemies who were besieging Jerusalem would attack (v. 14).

(2) Because God destroyed the counsels of the adversaries, their plans failed.

A good example is when Absalom heard the advice of Ahithophel and David's friend Hushai the Archite (2 Sam. 16:16) in killing David, God frustrated the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom (2 Sam. 17:14). If we look at Nehemiah 4:15, the Bible says that God had frustrated the plot of the Judah's enemies. At that time, Nehemiah and the people of Judah returned to the city and worked individually. In other words, Nehemiah and the people of Judah prepared for the attack of their enemies “behind the lowest points of the wall at the exposed places” (v. 13) and then returned to the wall and continued their goal of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem.

The principle we learn about the attitude of a builder here is work by being guided by the goal. It is said that General Mahon, a U.S. Navy admiral during the Revolutionary War, emphasized the following spirits when teaching his subordinate officers: ‘Gentlemen, whenever you set out to accomplish something, start by deciding on the final goal first. Once you have decided, never forget it’ (White). Nehemiah had a goal. It was none other than the construction of the walls of Jerusalem. If Nehemiah had chosen to strike first, he would have needed all the troops. And all work would have been stagnant. If he had decided to suspend construction of the walls until the hostility of his enemies had subsided, the inevitable redeployment of the workforce would have made resumption of construction difficult. However, as we have already seen, the labor force remained active and work resumed at the earliest possible time. Nehemiah's ultimate goal was to build the wall, and his policy was determined by his goal. That's why the plan to keep working with a defensive posture in place came out. His stance on offense was defensive and his stance on work was aggressive (White).

Eighteenth-century evangelist George Whitefield, more than any other leader of the eighteenth century, was at the center of the great spiritual awakening in England and North America, and few Christians faced such fierce and relentless opposition. It is said that it met with early opposition from clergy who did not live a God-centered life, and most Anglican churches ultimately turned their backs on it. At that time, Whitefield adhered to three principles: (1) To never retaliate against one's accuser, (2) Not to get involved in a controversial controversy as far as possible, and (3) To never stop proclaiming the whole truth of the gospel. He had the ultimate goal, the full and fearless proclamation of the gospel. He never lost sight of his goal despite all the slander and accusations that were directed at him (White). What is our church's goal? Isn't it to build (rebuild) the church, which

is the body of the Lord? Driven by this goal, we must not stop this great work of rebuilding the church. We must go forward!

### **Second, we must work with a combative attitude.**

Look at Nehemiah 4:16 – “From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah.” “From that day on”, that is, after receiving the information that the enemies were united to attack Jerusalem by force, Nehemiah and the people of Judah did not just rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, but prepared themselves for their attack. In other words, while building the walls of Israel, they worked with a war readiness (Park). Half of his own men continued to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, while the other half took up arms and stood guard. And the builders and those who were undertaking repairs to the walls of Jerusalem (i.e., those who removed the stones and cut the materials needed to build the walls) each worked with one hand and held a weapon in the other (v. 17). Because builders need both hands when working, they built the walls of Jerusalem with swords at their sides (v. 18). And the trumpeter stood by Nehemiah. The reason was because the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem was great, and because the walls were wide, they wanted to fight in unity by blowing the trumpet when enemies attacked from either side, helping the dangerous side.

I remember what I learned when I was at Westminster Theological Seminary. I am reminded of what the theologian Herman Bavinck said, ‘The church on earth is a militant church, and the church in heaven is a victorious church.’ I agree. The church must be militant. The reason is that the church is fighting a spiritual war. We must rebuild the church, the body of the Lord, holding the Bible, the sword of the Holy Spirit, in one hand and prayer in the other. What is important at this time? It is the assurance of victory. Look at Nehemiah 4:20 – “Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!” For Nehemiah, this had no choice but to be a very certain truth. The reason is because he has already experienced God's gracious hand many times. The hand of God destroyed the counsel of their adversaries (v. 15). Nehemiah had assurance of the victory of the war, and we can think of four grounds for that assurance: (1) The first ground for assurance is that God will always help the side of justice’, (2) The second ground for assurance is that the Jerusalem restoration movement was God's own work, (3) The third ground assurance is that all wars for the glory of God (wars to fulfill God's Word) in Israel's history were all victorious. thing, (4) The fourth and last ground for assurance is that the fact that God is always with us (Park).

Do you remember what David said as he went to fight Goliath? “... for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands” (1 Sam. 17:47). Since the battle belongs to the Lord (2 Chron. 20:15), we must be faithful in rebuilding the church, the body of the Lord, with a combative attitude with the assurance of victory.

### **Third and last, we must work with tension.**

In the book 'Ingenious Ideas Awakening the World' (co-authored by Sira P. White and G. Patton Wright), the subjects who create ideas and create innovation are called 'H3 leaders'. In other words, it means a person who is Hot, Hip, and Happening. In the book, the authors say that an H3 leader is the "someone" who creates ideas for innovation, and that creative talent is the most necessary and important resource when pursuing innovation. However, H3 leaders are not only creative, but also have idea techniques, which are new ideas for materializing ideas. What is the idea technique specifically? There are five things the authors have arranged, of which the third seems to apply to Nehemiah and the people of Judah: 'The third is the creation of a state of creative tension. Creative people know that to achieve something new, friction and tension are necessary, and confrontation is inevitable. In other words, you need to use tension where there is tension, and create tension where there is no tension. ... In other words, H3 leaders attract creative sparks by securing diverse people. Greater ideas emerge from the dissonance created by confrontation and contradiction. This is because the more diverse the viewpoints and experiences, the better the results. Innovation requires the convergence of at least two knowledge systems. When different ideas come together in a unique way, a new idea emerges' (Internet).

Now Nehemiah and the people of Judah are in a state of tension. They were nervous because of the enemy's armed attack plan, a crisis that came while rebuilding the city of Jerusalem. How do we know? We can tell they were tense in three ways:

- (1) Half of the Jewish people held their spears from the first light of dawn until the stars came out.

Look at Nehemiah 4:21 – "So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out." In other words, they worked while holding a spear or wearing it around their waists from the time the sun rose in the morning until the stars were visible at night.

- (2) Nehemiah asked the people not to return to their homes even after they finished rebuilding the city during the day, but to stay inside the city to continue defending (Park).

Look at Nehemiah 4:22 – "At that time I also said to the people, 'Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day.'" They didn't even go back home in tension. Venturing out of Jerusalem at night would have been dangerous. Every night some workers had to stand watch. The reason for this is because they knew that it was easy to be attacked at night.

- (3) Nehemiah and the people of Judah did not take off their clothes except for washing, and they carried weapons even when they went to draw water.

This tells us how tense they were even in their daily lives. Look at Nehemiah 4:23 – “Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water.” Even though they had to wash dirty clothes after work, if they worked without time to wash their clothes, they would stand guard. And even when they went to fetch water, they always took their weapons with them. We can see Nehemiah's influential leadership here. In the midst of a crisis, he also set an example with a sense of urgency (v. 23). He joined in the trouble without undressing with his own brothers and servants and the watchmen who followed him. This example encouraged the Jews who followed him to be more faithful and to endure the work of rebuilding the city of Jerusalem even in the midst of a crisis. In a word, Nehemiah formed a consensus with the people of Judah who followed him. In other words, he was loyal to rebuilding the city of Jerusalem with tension like the people of Judah. In the words of James Packer: 'When people admit that their leader is the closest person to them, they also admit that they are the same person' (Packer).

The poet of faith, Orfellow, in his ‘Hymn to Life,’ exhorts us not to lose our dreams and courage: “... In life’s vast battlefield/ In life’s campground/ Let us not be a herd of silent driven cattle/ Let's be the leading heroes of this struggle/ Let's not be fooled by the fact that the future will be sweet/ Let's turn the past into the past/ Let's act, let's act for the living present/ Have the courage in our hearts/ Know that God is above the sky. Have faith ....” Look at the Puritans who traveled to the New World on the Mayflower with dreams and pioneering spirit. The pilgrims who arrived in the New World on the Mayflower faced hard labor, exhaustion, and malnutrition that year. Many people died because of the pain, and the funeral was also held at night, fearing that the pilgrims might be attacked by the natives by exposing the situation that the number of pilgrims was decreasing. After the winter, their numbers were cut in half. Surrounded by an unexplored primeval forest in front and an open sea behind them, the sadness and unpredictable anxiety of losing loved ones often come to them. And the intimidation of pioneering a new continent was enough to make them despair. The painful winter of that year has passed and spring has come. As the Mayflower returned to her homeland, the captain kindly invited: ‘Those who want to go back to their home country should not hesitate to go back.’ But the ship had to leave empty. It was because not one of the pilgrims went back in the boat. They had nothing, but only one thing. It was because they only had dreams and hopes. Although the wings of reality are heavy, a life like a pilgrim who used those wings to move toward the world of hope was a truly beautiful life (Dae-seong Jung).

# Do as you had promised!

## [Nehemiah 5:1-13]

One Sunday, my husband went to evening worship alone. And that day he passionately loved his wife until late at night. Satisfied with her mood for the first time in a while, his wife looked at her husband with her proud eyes and said: ‘What are you doing today?’ The next morning, assuming that what happened last night must have been influenced by the pastor's sermon, the wife bought an expensive fruit basket and went to see the pastor. ‘Thank you, Pastor. And the sermon last night was really good. Was it a sermon about ‘Love your wife as yourself’? Then the pastor shook his head excitedly and replied: “It wasn’t. It was a sermon on ‘Love your enemies’” (Internet). What's the point of this humor? Of course, the key to this humor is the wife's delusion, that is, she thought her husband loved her as himself. But she found out that her husband considered her as his enemy and loved her. However, looking at it from another angle, we can pay attention to the fact that the deacon's husband listened to the sermon and put into action the words of "yourself" and "enemies."

If we look at Nehemiah 5:13, “... At this the whole assembly said, "Amen," and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.” I would like to listen to and meditate on the words of the three types of people in today's text under the heading “Do as you has promised!” I hope and pray that there will be God’s work in which the community becomes more and more becoming one through the practice of God's word.

### **Listen to the first group of people, the men.**

Look at Nehemiah 5:1 – “Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers.” Here, the word “a great outcry” means ‘to cry out loudly’, and it refers to ‘cry out loud’ in the midst of grief/pain. A great cry (5:1) was heard among the Jews in the midst of doing great work (4:19) for the great God (1:5). This cry was not from the external enemies, the Samaritans of Sanballat, or Tobiah and the Ammonites, Geshem and the Arabs and the Ashdodites. This cry is not from other internal enemies,

but from fellow Jews. They were none other than nobles and rulers (v. 7). Until then, the people of Judah, who had united and devoted themselves to rebuilding Jerusalem, now grumbled against each other. How difficult it must have been for even the wives, who were usually silent in their cries, to come forward and cry together. Because at that time, women did not come forward and mostly stayed behind. What difficult things were the people of Judah facing? Food shortages due to population concentration, excessive taxation, and selling children as slaves were the hardships the people of Judah were facing. Understandably, many Israelis flocked to Jerusalem for the construction of the city of Jerusalem, which caused the problem of population concentration. Since a large population was concentrated in one place, food was naturally scarce (Fensham). In addition, as all hands were concentrated on the construction of the wall, the number of people doing farming decreased, and food production was greatly reduced. Also, it is now in a state of war. Outside, they were looking for an opportunity for invasion by tribes from neighboring regions who were displeased with the building of Jerusalem's walls, or by people from other countries. In this situation, it was almost impossible to open the gates of Jerusalem and go out to farm. And to make matters worse, a famine came. 'Also, the Medes and Persians, the most powerful nation in the world at that time, were taxing excessively on all their subjects. The people of Israel, unable to withstand such pressure, had to pawn their fields, vineyards, and animals' (Lee). The brutality of these circumstances was that many Jews survived only by selling their children into slavery to wealthy Jews (who opposed the rebuilding of the walls) in order to buy food (White). This indicates that the rich at that time disobeyed God's word (Exod. 22:25-27; Deut. 15:7-15). According to the law, they were to lend money without interest to their poor brother, and they were not to mortgage the poor man's goods for a long time. However, the rich in Nehemiah's time did not obey this law, so the poor got into trouble and complained (Park). The complaints of these people of Judah were essentially four: (1) 'We must eat to live!' (v. 2), (2) 'We are all mortgaged!' (v. 3), (3) 'The tax is to the point of death!' (v. 4), (4) 'Their children have everything they want, but why should our children be servants? Aren't we all one nation? But we also don't know what to do' (v. 5) (White). In a word, the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls would bring ruin to the poor people of Judah and should therefore be abandoned. This was Satan's work. In the end, it was the work of Satan who wanted to prevent the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, which was the final goal. What we need to pay attention to here is the second half of Nehemiah 5:5 – "... but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others." In other words, even if the poor Jewish people wanted to redeem their enslaved children with fields or vineyards, they did not have the ability to do so because their fields and vineyards were pawned by rich Jews (v. 3). The poor people of Judah who had no power, who did not have the ability to redeem their children sold as slaves, were seriously crying out.

How should we respond to the words and cries of powerless brothers? We must hear their cries and look after them. The reason is because the Lord hears their cry and looks upon them. Look at 1 Samuel 9:16 – "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me."

### **Listen to the second man, Nehemiah.**

Look at Nehemiah 5:6 – “When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry.” If Nehemiah had been a politician, he would have handled matters in the direction of gaining popularity by asking the question, “What is popular?” Or, if he were a diplomat, he would have chosen the safe road between rich and poor Jewish people, asking the question, ‘What is safe?’ However, a true leader chooses the right path by asking the question, ‘What is right?’ That’s why Nehemiah saw the sins of the people of Judah and harbored holy anger. Nehemiah was angry because he knew that these problems had arisen because the rich people of Judah disobeyed God’s word. Also, while the country was now in such a difficult situation, he was enraged when he learned that a terrible tragedy had occurred in which people were exploited and enslaved. In other words, the same people made each other slaves and servants, taking advantage of this time of hardship (Lee). How did leader Nehemiah solve this problem?

(1) Nehemiah planned in his mind.

Look at Nehemiah 5:7a – “I pondered them in my mind ....” When Nehemiah was angry, he planned it in his mind rather than venting it. In other words, he pondered in front of God and planned ‘What shall I do?’ This is truly constructive leadership. Nehemiah tried to get God’s consent and act in God’s way to right the wrong that had offended God even more than it had offended himself (White). Nehemiah’s actions remind us of Proverbs 16:32 – “Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.” A leader who cannot govern himself will never succeed in governing others.

(2) Nehemiah accused nobles and officials.

Look at Nehemiah 5:7b – “... and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, ‘You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!’ ....” What we can see here is that Nehemiah first went to the nobles and officials who were responsible for the wrongdoing. Obviously, he should address the matter publicly. But first in private he made clear his attitude to the wrongdoers. I don’t think this is an easy move. Hearing the poor Jews and now hearing the rich Jews and their leaders, Nehemiah could have tried to see both sides. If Nehemiah had been like that, he wouldn’t have been able to rebuke the nobles and the officials. Even if he tried to rebuke, his heart must have weakened. But Nehemiah didn’t. He did not know how the relationship between the nobles and the officials would develop in the future. But he clearly and implicitly expressed his clear and implicit opinion, “You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!” (v. 7). Here we see Nehemiah rebuking the nobles and officials, appealing them on two facts:

(a) **First is brotherly love.**

Nehemiah referred to the poor people of Judah whom they were exacting as “your own countrymen” (v. 7).



**(b) Second, based on the word of God, he appealed to the nobles and officials.**

That is, the Mosaic Law forbade Jews from charging interest on each other. Look at Exodus 22:25 – “If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest.” Nehemiah first held “a large meeting” to deal with the issue in a public setting, since it was a public issue after exonerating nobles and officials who had done wrong in private. Now, instead of personally rebuking the nobles, he tried to rebuke them in public. Look at Nehemiah 5:8-9: “and said: ‘As far as possible, we have bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your brothers, only for them to be sold back to us!’ They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say. So I continued, ‘What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies?’” Nehemiah pointed out that this trial was made worse because the leaders of the day were unjustly exploiting the people. Not only that, but he pointed out the lack of 'brotherly spirit', taking advantage of this difficult time to lend money and enslaving the children of those who could not repay. Also, he pointed out that the Gentiles were looking at them, and 'if we live this way, don't we cover the glory of God?' In other words, all problems arose because they did not have a fear of God and did not fear God (Lee).

**(3) Nehemiah solved the cause of the problem.**

How did he solve the problem? He appealed to rich Jews to stop charging interest. Look at Nehemiah 5:10 – “I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop!” Whether Nehemiah here is presenting himself as a good example, or whether he too is confessing that he once erred, his words alone are not clear. If he and his men were lending money for interest, he now exposes his fault by confessing it and proposing to stop doing it from now on (White). Leaders make mistakes. The distinguishing characteristic of a leader according to the will of God is his willingness to openly deal with all his mistakes, applying the same standards to himself as he applies to others. Never shrink from doing so. It may feel embarrassing. But it is the most honest path that leads to freedom (White). Also, Nehemiah appealed to return the things he had taken from his poor brothers, the people of Judah. Look at verse 11: “Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the usury you are charging them--the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil.” This is true repentance. To realize that I am wrong, to immediately stop doing that wrong, and to make amends if I can. When should I do it? ‘Even today,’ we must forsake our sins and repent. This is what Pastor Dong-won Lee heard when he attended a revival meeting: ‘What kind of place is hell? It is a place where people say, ‘Oops’, because they procrastinate while trying to fix it, but eventually fail to realize it’ (Lee).

**Listen to the third group of people, the nobles and officials.**

The first reaction of the nobles and officials who had heard Nehemiah's rebuke was silence (v. 8). In other words, the nobles and officials could not find words to exonerate Nehemiah. This implies that they were admitting their wrongdoing. It makes no sense to redeem the poor people of Judah, brothers who had no power to redeem them, from the hands of the Gentiles with all their might, and then make them their slaves again. The purpose of redemption is nothing but the sin of binding the people of Judah, their poor brothers, to their power. Nehemiah knew this, pointed it out, and excused himself, so the nobles and officials had nothing to say. They knew they were committing a sin. The second reaction of the nobles and officials is given in the first half of verse 12: "We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. ...." They told Nehemiah that they would do as he advised. In other words, they promised Nehemiah that they would give back to the poor Jewish people (fields, vineyards, olive groves, houses, one hundredth of money, grain, new wine, or oil) without asking for anything. At this time, Nehemiah summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials to take an oath to do what they had promised (v. 12). And then Nehemiah gave a solemn warning to the nobles and officials: "I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, 'In this way may God shake out of his house and possessions every man who does not keep this promise. ...' (v. 13). This was a symbolic action. Shaking off the folds of the robe means that if the oath was not kept, a curse would come and all possessions of those who did not keep the oath would be destroyed. Then all the congregation said "Amen" and praised the Lord, and the people did as they had promised (v. 13).

If we look at Nehemiah 5:4, we see the word, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax ...." This word refers to the fact that around 2500, in the time of Nehemiah, the Jewish people had to pay taxes to the Medo-Persian government, the most powerful nation in the world at that time. This word also applies to our church now. We have to pay taxes on church buildings that our church owns. But now, our church finances do not have the ability to pay taxes. Personally, I believe this is a great opportunity for our church. In other words, I believe it is an opportunity to build a stronger church by filling the "gap" that appears in rebuilding the church, which is the body of the Lord. I remembered the words of 1 Chronicles 29. David, who so desperately wanted to build the temple of Jerusalem, knew through his son Solomon that God was accomplishing that work, and prepared with all his might (v. 2) for that great work (v. 3). When he set an example, "Then the leaders of families, the officers of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of the king's work gave willingly" (v. 6). At that time, "The people rejoiced at the willing response of their leaders, for they had given freely and wholeheartedly to the LORD. David the king also rejoiced greatly" (v. 9). As the senior pastor of Victory Presbyterian Church, I will have to set an example like David. I would like to pay the taxes that our church must pay by providing financial resources first. As I told you today, I will put it into action. At that time, I hope that our church leaders will be able to support the material happily. Also, I hope that the whole church will have one mind and one will and give it to the Lord with a joyful heart in filling the "gap" shown in the work of rebuilding the church, which is the body of the Lord. Look at 1 Chronicles 29:14 – "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand." Look at verse 17: "I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things have I given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you."

# An exemplary leader

## [Nehemiah 5:14-19]

Steven Berglas, a psychologist at Harvard Medical School, had this to say about ‘Success syndrome’. Even if you get a great sense of accomplishment, if you don't have the basic character to sustain it, you're headed for ruin. He believes that such people fall for one or more of the following four A's: (1) Arrogance, (2) Painful feeling of Aloneness, (3) Destructive Adventure-Seeking, (4) Adultery. These 4 things are that people with weak character always ask for too high a price to pay. One thing to keep in mind here is that no amount of time, money, or even prestige will ever get you past the valley you're in, where you've fallen into one or more of the four A's. The reason is because the cracks in character grow deeper and more destructive over time. Whether we lead people at home, at work, or at gatherings, we must not forget that character is our most important asset (Maxwell). Alan Bernard, president of Mid Park, Inc., said this about character: ‘The respect that leadership must have, it requires the ethical life of the individual. A leader must not only stand on the line between right and wrong, but also live a transparent life without a ‘grey zone’ (Maxwell). I think the most important list in leadership is character. Therefore, we must devote ourselves in building character in order to find potential leaders, build them up as mature lay ministers, and send them out. And the important thing in the process of creating character is crisis or adversity. The reason is because crises do not necessarily shape character, but they do reveal character. Adversity is a crossroads where character and compromise meet, and life always has to choose one of them (Maxwell).

If we look at Nehemiah 5:14-19, we can see the exemplary leader Nehemiah. He was an uncompromising leader in the midst of crisis and adversity. I would like to meditate on his exemplary leadership in four ways. I hope and pray that we can all become leaders with Christ-centered visions by receiving the grace given in the midst of this.

**First, exemplary leaders do not abuse their privileges.**

Look at Nehemiah 5:14 – “Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year--twelve years--neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor.” While Nehemiah was governor of Judah for 12 years, he and his brothers did not do so even though he and his brothers had the authority to collect taxes from the people as governors of Judah. In other words, they were able to collect taxes not only for the Judean land-centered fund of the people, but also for their own personal treasury. However, Nehemiah himself and his brothers, those who had a high position in the governor's service, served the people of Judah with their own money without gathering taxes from them.

Nehemiah's exemplary behavior brings to mind the New Testament apostle Paul. Apostle Paul did not use his authority as an apostle even though he had it (1 Cor. 9). Even though he was entitled to receive support from the Corinthian church, he did not use that authority. Rather he did not use the authority he had as he preached the gospel “free of charge” (9:18). Of course, Paul is not saying that all Christian workers should do as he does. The reason is because those who preach the gospel are commanded to live through the gospel (v. 14). However, all of us Christians must follow Paul's example and have a spiritual attitude regarding wealth and ministry. We must be prepared to sacrifice our own personal interests for the good of the souls entrusted to our care. But what about reality? What about Korean politics in particular? When a person rise to a high position, isn't the first thing s/he think about, 'How can I use my power to make money?' If the people elect people to do well in the country, aren't they busy filling their stomachs by abusing their power, privileges, and high status, leading to economic collapse? When a problem arises, they give and receive hundreds of millions of dollars in an apple box.

Leaders must be governed more by a sense of servanthood than by a sense of privilege (Lee). Leaders are those who are much criticized and trusted.’ Leaders are to be of benefit to others, even at the expense of themselves.

## **Second, exemplary leaders break away from traditional mistakes.**

Look at Nehemiah 5:15 – “But the earlier governors--those preceding me--placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that.” Before Nehemiah became governor of the land of Judah, the governors, together with their servants, extorted from the people. In other words, they stole from the people of Judah an allowance of meal and wine and forty shekels of silver for their personal luxurious life. Therefore, the former governors and their retinue became a heavy burden to the people of Judah. Because they were busy filling their stomachs without considering the people's situation at all, the people's burdens were bound to become even heavier. But Nehemiah, the new governor, did not do the same. The reason is because he was a leader who feared God. In other words, Nehemiah took proper action as a worshiper of God.

We often forget God when we go up in rank or when our status improves. Also, when we use a high command, there are times when we look away from God because it seems bigger than God (Lee). One example is King Saul. Look at 1 Samuel 15:17 – “Samuel said, ‘Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel.’” Saul, who considered himself small, became proud and became a king who cared for himself rather than for God (v. 12). In the end, rather than fearing God, he was afraid of those who thought he was great (v. 24). In the words of Pastor John White: ‘From the very beginning, when Christian public affairs are in full swing, few Christians are interested in making money from that ministry. But as we grow older and our responsibilities grow and our careers grow, we begin to feel that we deserve not only to be paid for the work we do, but to be paid as much as a king. The snake of greed slowly strangles our charity and love. In wealthy countries, Christian leaders can, and sometimes do, use Christian ministries for personal gain. In doing so, they reveal themselves to be wolves, not shepherds’ (White). It is a scary word to say that in the early days of ministry, the serpent of greed cannot be seen, but it can slowly begin to lift its tail. Therefore, like Nehemiah, we must be people who fear God. We must hate evil because we fear God (Prov. 8:13).

### **Third, exemplary leaders do what they have to do with all their might.**

Fearing God, Nehemiah did what he had to do with all his might, but what did he do? We can think of it in 2 ways:

#### (1) Nehemiah continued to build the walls of Jerusalem.

Look at Nehemiah 5:16 – “Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.” Instead of extorting the people of Judah like the previous governors or their servants, Nehemiah, with his servants, instead continued to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, his goal, in the fear of God. How contrasting is this? Seeing the difference between the leaders who did not fear God and the leader who feared God, the former governors and their servants who did not fear God were busy building their own “wall”. An example is Haggai 1:9b – “... ‘Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house.’” What was the result? “You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little ...” (v. 9b). The God-fearing leader, Nehemiah, and his servants worked hard to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem with all their might, but did not buy the land of Judah. In other words, he did not speculate on land.

#### (2) Nehemiah tried to be kind.

Look at Nehemiah 5:17-18a: “Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply

of wine of all kinds. ....” There are two views on leaders. One is the view that leaders should show that he is the boss. Another is the view that leaders should be servants. The governors and their men before Nehemiah reigned over the people (v. 15). In contrast, Nehemiah was a servant leader. True leaders serve. It is to serve people. It is to serve for their best interest. And in doing so it is not always famous, and it is not always impressive. However, true leaders are willing to pay the price because they are driven by love and concern, not by a desire for personal glory (White). As governor, Nehemiah had more than 150 guests to serve at his table every day (guests from the surrounding countries, in addition to the people of Judah and the officials). How much money would it take to treat them? Nevertheless, Nehemiah did not ask for the people's food, but prepared and served all the food with his own money. They also served the best food (“choice sheep”) abundantly (v. 18). Why? The answer can be found in the second half of verse 18: “... I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.” In other words, Nehemiah was a leader who had mercy on the people.

#### **Fourth, exemplary leaders long for God's grace.**

Look at Nehemiah 5:19 – “Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done for these people.” When we do something sacrificially, we may feel like we are losing money: ‘Why am I giving this a hard time? What is that price?’ However, Nehemiah did not expect anything in return from the people of Judah. Instead, he prayed to God to be gracious. He expected a reward from God. Nehemiah served only to please the Lord and only asked Him to reward his sacrificial service.

This is what Colossians 3:23-24 says to slaves who work hard and do not receive any reward or reward and suffer hardships: “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. ....” We must serve hard while looking forward to the reward we will receive from the Lord.

# “Now strengthen my hands”

## [Nehemiah 6:1-9]

If we look at the book “Burnout in Church Leaders” (by Peter Kaldor & Rod Bullpit), we will find survey data of 20 denominations, 7,200 church pastors, and 430,000 believers. Pastors who are more at risk of burnout say six things, two of which have gotten some attention:

(1) It is said that the degree of stress and exhaustion was higher in younger group.

The fact that the younger you are, the greater your risk of burnout reflects several facts: The fact that youth ministry is not easy, that leaders have too high expectations of themselves or others have too high of them, that they are inexperienced in dealing with tensions.

(2) It is said that the level of burnout was higher in leaders who are raising young children.

The reason that burnout levels are higher among people under 40 is because they are taking on the responsibility of raising children. The dual responsibilities of parenthood and ministry can place a heavy burden on leaders as they go back and forth, pouring scarce time and energy to either side (Kaldor & Bullpit).

What does “burnout” mean here? ‘Burnout can be caused by fatigue and despair resulting from being cut off from the energy supply necessary to attain something strongly attached or to sustain a particular way of life’ (Freudenberger). ‘Burnout is usually manifested as a low self-esteem and negative attitude toward work, life, and others, accompanied by feelings of helplessness and hopelessness’ (Maslach). Satan’s schemes exhaust us and leave us feeling helpless and hopeless, preventing us from achieving the God-given goal we had a strong attachment to. If applied to our church, it is Satan’s strategy to exhaust us from achieving

this great goal of building the church, which is the body of the Lord.

Look at Nehemiah 6:9 – “They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, ‘Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.’ But I prayed, ‘Now strengthen my hands.’” If we look at this word, we can see the strategy of the enemies who want to exhaust the leader Nehemiah. Focusing on today’s text, Nehemiah 6:1-9, under the heading “Now strengthen my hands” I would like to meditate on the three elements that make us weak and prevent us from rebuilding the church, the body of the Lord. In the midst of this, I hope and pray that we can receive and enjoy the grace God gives to us.

**First, the element we want to prevent from rebuilding the church is encounter.**

Look at Nehemiah 6:2 – “Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: “Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.” But they were scheming to harm me.” As we walk the journey of life, we meet many different people. We might be able to classify the encounters into two types: one beneficial and the other damaging. In today’s text, when Nehemiah and the enemies of the people of Judah heard that they had built the walls of Jerusalem and “not a gap was left in it” (v. 1), Sanballat and Geshem sent messengers to Nehemiah and suggested that they meet each other. One thing we can apply to our lives and the church here is that another crisis may come to us when the work reaches its completion stage. Even in the Bible, we often see that the greatest crisis that comes to God’s people comes after victory, after blessing, after revival, or while things are going well. For example, in the dramatic battle of 850 to 1 on Mount Carmel, Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal by winning the victory by the work of God. What happened after that? Elijah sought death under a broom tree (1 Kgs. 19:4). Elijah’s frustration came right after success. That’s why the Bible says, “Let him who thinks he is standing beware lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Now, when Nehemiah and the people of Judah had almost finished building the walls of Jerusalem and only needed to mount a door on the gate, Sanballat and Geshem, their enemies, sent messengers and suggested, “Come let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono” (Neh. 6:2). The plain of Ono was in the land of the tribe of Benjamin and was said to be 20 miles north of Jerusalem (Park). But we may wonder why Sanballat and Geshem wanted to meet Nehemiah in this place. The reason was a plan to weaken Israel’s hand by luring Nehemiah to the village and harming Nehemiah, the leader. In other words, it was an assassination plan to kill Nehemiah. This is Satan’s strategy. By making the leader of the church separate from the holy group and preventing them from receiving the fellowship and help of the saints, in the end, they want to destroy the entire church community by harming one leader (Park).

When the person at the top is removed, the entire organization collapses (White). In a war context, it means “shoot the commander.” So, it is an attempt to assassinate the president, and now in the United States, the leader of al Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, has been captured alive or ordered to assassinate. Opposition to the reconstruction of the city wall reached its climax at this yard when the reconstruction of the city wall was being completed. If we say that the previous opposition was against the Jews, today’s chapter 6 focuses on their leader, Nehemiah. The reason is because now the opponents tried to stop the



whole work because they harmed the leader at the completion stage. Here Pastor John White said: ‘The role of a leader entails severe mental stress and tension even in normal times’ (White). In other words, when a leader becomes the target of personal attacks, the psychological pressure is indescribable. But what we need to keep in mind here is that the call to follow the Lord is a call to life from pressure to pressure. Fortunately, that call is also a call to a life that goes from ability to ability (White).

Then, what ability did Nehemiah show in these circumstances? It was discernment. Nehemiah knew that what Sanballat and Geshem were asking to meet was actually trying to harm him (v. 2). Sometimes I said something like this: ‘We Christians need to live like fools in this world.’ But the more I live in this world, the more I think that I shouldn’t be as gentle as a dove. As the Bible says, we need to be as wise as snakes. There was no balance for me. Nehemiah discerns the plot of the enemy. The Bible also encourages this discernment: “... so that you may be able to discern what is best ...” (Phil. 1:10), “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, ...” (1 Jn. 4:1). With such discernment, how did Nehemiah reject the offer of a meeting with his enemies? Look at Nehemiah 6:3 – “so I sent messengers to them with this reply: ‘I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?’” Nehemiah said that the enemies could not be met because the great project, the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem for the glory of the great God, could not be stopped. If Nehemiah took a detour and was distracted from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, which was what God wanted, what should the people of Judah who followed him do? A large-scale project without a leader is a project without a goal and will eventually fail. Leaders must set a good example and be loyal to their work. What did Sanballat and Geshem do at that time? Look at verse 4: “Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.” Not once or twice, but four times in a row, he sent messengers to Nehemiah and begged him to meet him. But Nehemiah gave the same answer. That is, he gave the answer that this great work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem cannot be stopped. How beautiful is this of a leader who lives a goal-driven life? While rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem confidently with the confidence he received from God, Nehemiah proceeded with consistency despite any temptations, persecutions, or warnings. Looking at one commentary, it says: “Decisions based only on opinions might be reconsidered, but decisions based on convictions must stand unless those convictions are changed.” Rather than listen to people’s thoughts and be loyal to this great task of rebuilding the church, which is the body of the Lord, we must all participate in rebuilding this church, which is our goal, with the confidence that comes from meeting God.

**Second, the element that tries to prevent the rebuilding of the church is rumor.**

Look at Nehemiah 6:6 – “in which was written: ‘It is reported among the nations--and Geshem says it is true--that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king.’” Although Sanballat and Geshem suggested ‘Let’s meet each other’ four times through messengers, Nehemiah was not swayed by the goal and continued to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. When he did so, Sanballat began plotting another fifth plot: “Then, the

fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter” (v. 5). When Sanballat's plot to assassinate Nehemiah failed, Sanballat started making malicious rumor as a second plot. The malicious rumor was this: ‘Nehemiah is trying to incite the people to make himself king. Nehemiah is not interested in building the city, but through this he intends to secure his own power and eventually become king himself’ (vv. 6-7). Sanballat's slander could be fatal. If rumors reached Susa that the wrath of King Artaxerxes might come upon Jerusalem, this could be a great political crisis. Of course, Nehemiah would have to go to the citadel in Susa and reveal the truth of the rumor to King Artaxerxes. But that would put his and the people of Judah's goal of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem on hold for many months. So how devastating is this rumor of Sanballat? Thus, he began to circulate the great rumor. As for how we can know this fact, in verse 5, we can find out through the word “unsealed letter” in his hand. This is because the letter was not intentionally sealed in the process of being delivered to Jerusalem, so it could be read multiple times (White). As a result, this letter could become a source of more and more rumor and gossip. So, it says that there was rumor even among the Gentiles (v. 6).

Hogyu Kim, a Ph.D. student in Advertising at Texas State University, wrote a study on the consumption propensity of young people in their teens, a consumer group that spends more than \$200 billion a year under the title ‘Teenage Marketing, Reap What You Sow’ wrote. According to this article, a study by Blue Fusion found that 27% of young people said advertising had no influence on their purchasing decisions. And then he says: ‘Experts are advising that the time has come for advertisers to realize the power of the word of mouth. The survey above shows that 90% of young people hear about new products from their friends. The power of rumor is astonishing.’ Isn’t there a Korean proverb that goes, ‘A word without feet goes a thousand miles’? Rumor spreads surprisingly far and quickly (meaning be careful with our words). And another proverb, ‘Words make words,’ means that while words are being moved, their content is exaggerated and changed without realizing it (Internet). It's crazy how quickly malicious rumors spread all over the Internet these days. So, there is a tendency to post on the church's free bulletin board to slander pastors and spread malicious rumors. How should we react? Pastor John White said: ‘In situations like these, most of us quickly get into self-defense. We are sensitive about our own honor, and we are sensitive about how others see us. We are also afraid of what will happen if people readily believe the slander against us. The closed doors, the faces turned away, the mean letters, the cold attitudes, they are afraid of it all. And there is an even greater danger: loss of work, that is loss of the work of God’ (White). But for Nehemiah, there can be no ‘loss of the work of God,’ so he sent a message to Sanballat like this: “... Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head” (v. 8). Nehemiah pointed out that Sanballat's slander was not true and revealed that Sanballat had invented it. However, his excessive self-defense did not. In other words, Nehemiah did not make long excuses. The reason was that he was well aware that excuses and clarifications could not solve the problem (Lee). A Puritan is said to have set three principles for his conduct as to what attitude he should take when he hears rumors about a person, so that he may not commit the crime of slander: (1) ‘Is this a rumor based on fact?’ (2) ‘Have I confirmed this to myself?’ (3) ‘Even if it’s true, is it an honor to God and beneficial to my brothers if I tell others what I have heard?’ (Lee)

**Third and last, the factor that wants to prevent us from rebuilding the church is fear.**

Look at Nehemiah 6:9 – “They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, ‘Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed.’ But I prayed, ‘Now strengthen my hands.’” Nehemiah knew that the adversaries wanted to meet him to harm him (v. 2), and also spread malicious rumors (v. 8), which eventually frightened and discouraged Nehemiah and the people of Judah so that they would stop the great work that God wanted to accomplish through them, namely the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. This was Satan's strategy. His final goal was to prevent the will of the Lord from being fulfilled on earth. If it was God's will to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, Satan's servants, the enemies of Nehemiah, tried to stop the rebuilding of the wall by any means. Here we see Nehemiah's prayer: “Now strengthen my hands” (v. 9). In other words, Nehemiah prayed that God would enable him to ignore all malicious rumors and continue to work as an inspiration, organizer, and supervisor of the people of Judah until the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls was completed (Packer). Nehemiah knew. If malicious rumors that get out of hand reach the ears of King Artaxerxes, he has no idea what will happen to him, the people of Judah, and the city of Jerusalem. Also, even if it wasn't a malicious rumor, when the walls of Jerusalem were completed, King Artaxerxes' heart changed and no one knew what to do with them and the wall. It would have been something to worry about in fear. However, Nehemiah knew that all of this was not in his own hands but in God's hands, so he prayed to God (Packer). ‘God, make my hands strong. So let me do all I have to do. Let us do all the work you have entrusted to give praise and glory to the Lord’ (Lee).

Pastor John White said this: ‘Success usually creates opposition. The greater the success, the worse it is. If that success is of the kingdom of God, opposition to it (whether it manifests as human hostility or inexplicable feelings of disappointment and fear) belongs to Satan. And half a degree of ferocity indicates the importance and imminence of realization of a specific goal’ (White). What should a leader do in this case? Two things must not be forgotten. That is, the source of opposition (Satan) and the intent of opposition (stopping things). Therefore, we must never take our eyes off the work of rebuilding the church, which is the goal given to us by God. In order to prevent this great work from being accomplished, misguided encounters, false rumors, and enemies who want to frighten us to lose our strength, rather believe that the goal given to us is proof that the goal is being fulfilled, and do not be shaken by the goal. It will not be possible to stop this great work of rebuilding.

# Power leadership

## [Nehemiah 6:10-14]

If we look at the book “Power Leadership” by John Maxwell, there is a section called ‘Creating Focus’. It tells us three things about how we can achieve the focus required of effective leaders (Maxwell):

(1) 70% of your focus should be on your strengths.

Effective leaders who have reached their potential need to focus more time on what they are good at than what they are bad at. If you want to be a successful person, you need to focus on your strengths and develop them.

(2) 25% of your focus should be on new things.

A competent leader is one who always tries to improve and strive for change. He's not afraid to step into new territory. He needs to invest time in new things related to merit. In leadership, if you stop growing, you stop everything.

(3) 5% of your focus should be on your weak points.

No one can work completely avoiding weaknesses. The key is to make it as minimal as possible, and a leader can do it through others. An effective leader is one who knows how to delegate what he or she is not good at.

However, our human instinct is to keep focusing on our weaknesses so that we cannot even save our strengths. That's why we tend not to make changes in order to develop ourselves. We are also reluctant to delegate our weaknesses to others.

You could say that Nehemiah was a very focused leader. What was his focus? It was to rebuild the

walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah was a leader who was loyal with an unstoppable passion, not turning to the right or the left in order to accomplish this task. Today, I would like to think about the three elements of “Power leadership” centered on Nehemiah 6:10-14. I hope and pray that leaders who demonstrate strong leadership like Nehemiah will continue to be raised in our church.

### **The first component of power leadership is ‘Great Courage’.**

Look at Nehemiah 6:11 – “But I said, ‘Should a man like me run away? Or should one like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!’” If we look at the chapter “Courage” in John Maxwell’s “Power Leadership” book, there is a story about a person named “Eddie Rickenbacker,” America’s “best fighter pilot.” He logged 300 combat hours (the most of any American pilot) by the end of World War I, encountering enemy aircraft 134 times and shooting down 26 of them. For this reason, he is said to have been awarded the Medal of Honor, eight Orders of the Cross for Special Merit, and the French Legion of Honor. It is said that the courage he showed led the press to attach the title of ‘American Ace of Aces’. When he was asked about his bravery in battle one day, he is said to have said: ‘Courage is doing what you fear. If there is no fear, there is no need for courage’ (Maxwell).

In today's text, Nehemiah 6:10-14, we see Nehemiah, the leader of the people of Judah, who showed great courage in the midst of fear. If we look at Nehemiah 6, which we have already meditated on, we will see three trials approaching Nehemiah. The tests were enough to frighten Nehemiah: (1) The first was when Sanballat and Geshem sent messengers to meet Nehemiah in the plains of Ono (v. 2) and attempt to assassinate him (vv. 1-4); (2) The second test was to stop the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem by making Nehemiah and the people of Judah afraid and discouraged through malicious rumors in 6:5-9; (3) The third test comes from today's text 6:10-14. The test was the threatening prophecy of the false prophet Shemaiah. Look at verse 10: “One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, ‘Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you--by night they are coming to kill you.’” The threatening prophecy of this false prophet Shemaiah was to hide in the house of God because Nehemiah's enemies would come at night to kill him. In other words, Shemaiah proposed to Nehemiah that they flee to the temple together because an assassination attempt was imminent. This reminds me Proverbs 27:12 – “The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it.” Nehemiah knew that his enemies wanted to harm him when he asked to meet him in a village in the plain of Ono (Neh. 6:2). Nevertheless, in today's text, even when the prophet Shemaiah heard that the enemies were coming to kill Nehemiah, he refused to hide and to preserve his life. We think we can compromise and hide for a while to get past this threat, and then we can do more to preserve our lives while continuing to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. At that time, we can rationalize that we must live and extend our lives so that we can do more of the Lord's work for a longer period of time. But how did Nehemiah react?

- (1) He said he would not run away.

Look at Nehemiah 6:11 – “But I said, ‘Should a man like me run away? Or should one like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!’” Nehemiah knew that the morale of the Jews would suffer greatly if he showed cowardice (White). This reminds me Proverbs 24:10 – “If you falter in times of trouble, how small is your strength!”

(2) Nehemiah said that he would not go into the temple and hide.

The reason is because Nehemiah was neither a priest nor a Levite. In other words, Nehemiah told the prophet Shemaiah that he would not hide in the temple because hiding in the temple, even if it meant preserving his life, was an act of blasphemy (White). Another reason is because Nehemiah did not even preserve his own life to fulfill the mission given to him, so he said he would not go into the temple and hide (v. 11). This shows Nehemiah's strong sense of duty. He valued the mission given by God more than his own life (Park).

Here we see courage, an element of power leadership. Here Nehemiah showed great courage. Great courage is not the absence of fear, but a firm attitude to do the right thing whether we are afraid, anxious, or hurt (Packer). Pastor White said of the “School of Courage”: Long before the work in Jerusalem began, when confronted with the question of making his first request to King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah confessed, “I was very much afraid” (2:2). ... But he pressed forward in spite of his fears, which he said later did him great good. It was at this moment that he enrolled in God's School of Courage. A few months later, he was graduating from this school with honors when he shouted, ‘How can someone like me escape?’ (White). Leadership is showing the courage to get people to do the right thing (Maxwell). Nehemiah showed courage in telling the people of Judah to do what was right.

**The second component of “Power leadership” is ‘Great Discernment’.**

Look at Nehemiah 6:12 – “I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him.” We Christians live in an age of spiritual confusion, not spiritual discernment. In his book, “That Incredible Christian”, Rev. A. W. Tozer has this to say about “spiritual illusions”: ‘There are times in life when it is not easy to completely escape from errors because it is so difficult to distinguish between true and false, good and evil. ... The lie is so good at imitating the truth that we keep confusing the two. Today, we must have a very sharp eye to distinguish who is Cain and who is Abel. ... There are people who are very comfortable and fun to hang out with. He is likable because he speaks softly too. However, such a person can sometimes be a messenger of Satan. On the other hand, there are people who keep avoiding him because he is harsh and outspoken. But such a person could be a prophet sent by God to warn us of spiritual dangers and eternal destruction’ (Tozer). This third test that came upon Nehemiah was 'spiritual seduction' (Packer). That is, it was an attempt to tempt Nehemiah out of fear into committing the sin of blasphemy. What is surprising is that Satan's strategy took a more savage form of attack at each stage of the construction of the walls of Jerusalem (White). At first, in Nehemiah 4:1-3, it was openly ridiculed. Then came the news of an armed attack by building a formidable united front (4:7-12),

followed by an assassination plot disguised as an offer to settle it through dialogue (6:1-3). Then came an open letter containing slanderous accusations in 6:5-6. And when the walls of Jerusalem were almost completed, they tried to make Nehemiah sin against God through the false prophet Shemaiah and make the people of Judah lose trust (6:10-13). This last stage, 'spiritual temptation', which came just before the completion of Jerusalem's walls, requires considerable discernment.

We already learned from Nehemiah 6:2 that Nehemiah discerned that Sanballat and Geshem were sending messengers to meet him and to harm him. At that time, it must have been difficult for him to discern the plan to assassinate himself compared to today's text 6:10-14. The reason is that, at that time, the enemies sent messengers, but in today's passage, the enemies bought the prophet Shemaiah, a religious leader, as a bribe and sent him to Nehemiah. If we apply this to our church, we can say that in order to stop the reconstruction of our church, our enemies bought a false pastor as a bribe and sent him to me, the senior pastor, to commit a crime before God, so that they can destroy the trust of the members. The first thing Nehemiah discerned here was to discern whether Shemaiah was a prophet sent by God or not. But do you think this would have been easy? If we look at verse 10, it is not that the prophet Shemaiah went to Nehemiah, but that Nehemiah went to the prophet. It seems that the reason was because Shemaiah was "shut in at his home", that is, locked inside the house for an unknown reason, but in the end, it was nothing more than an excuse to bring Nehemiah into his house. And the prophet Shemaiah said to hide in the house of God together with him as the assassination attempt was imminent, just like he did for Nehemiah. How can we discern whether this prophet Shemaiah is a true prophet or a false prophet? This reminds me John 10:12-13: "The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep." The Bible says that "The hired hand" abandons the sheep and runs away when the wolf comes. The false prophet Shemaiah proved himself to be a hireling prophet when he suggested that Sanballat and Geshem, who were like wolves, were coming to kill Nehemiah and proposes to Nehemiah that they ran away together to the house of God. If the religious leader, the prophet, and Nehemiah, the leader of the people of Judah, ran away and hid in the house of God, then what would happen to the flock and the people of Judah? The false prophet Shemaiah was not interested in it, but Nehemiah was. Therefore, Nehemiah answered how he would preserve (only) his life (v. 11). Another word that comes to mind is Deuteronomy 18:20 – "But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death." Nehemiah knew that the prophet Shemaiah was speaking a word that God had not commanded. In other words, in Numbers 18:7 and below, God entrusted the priests, the descendants of Levi, with "... Anyone else who comes near the sanctuary must be put to death." The prophet Shemaiah himself and Nehemiah were not even priests, but the words of going into the temple of God and hiding were against the word of God. This is what Nehemiah was discerning. Also, if you look at Jeremiah 23:32, it says that false prophets not sent by God are of no benefit to these people. In other words, Nehemiah saw that Shemaiah had no interest in the safety of the people of Judah and discerned that Shemaiah was a false prophet. Why did Shemaiah, the false prophet, tempt Nehemiah? Look at Nehemiah 6:13 – "He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me." In the end, Tobiah and Sanballat bribed

Shemaiah to make a false prophecy (v. 12) in order to make Nehemiah sin against God and slander him in front of the people of Judah. The bribe blinded the prophet's eyes and made him prophesy falsely (Exod. 23:8).

One lesson we need to learn from Nehemiah's discernment here is that we must have a Biblical mind. In other words, we must cultivate the ability to judge based on the standard of God's word, and it must become our habit. What is "discernment"? It is 'the ability to evaluate what you are seeing on a reasonable basis' (Packer). Nehemiah's proper standard was the word of God. Because Nehemiah had the habit of thinking in terms of the standards of His word, he was able to distinguish between true and false prophets.

### **The third and last component of 'power leadership' is 'Great Prayer'.**

Look at Nehemiah 6:14 – "Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been trying to intimidate me." What we can learn from this is that not only Shemaiah was the false prophet who opposed Nehemiah, but there were the rest of the prophets besides the prophetess Noadiah. In other words, there was a conspiracy of false prophets against Nehemiah. This was a great pressure for Nehemiah. The reason is because the Jews at that time had great respect for their prophets. It was as if a conspiracy group of many false pastors were opposing the work of God that one layperson wanted to pursue. At that time, Nehemiah did not surrender to the false prophets and prayed to God in that situation. Nehemiah prayed and entrusted the false prophets to God who were trying to make him fearful and stop God's great work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Interestingly, his prayer was not a long one. One commentator has called these Nehemiah's prayers "telegraph prayers." This short prayer occurs several times in Nehemiah. An example of this is Nehemiah 6:9 – "... 'Now strengthen my hands.'" This shows Nehemiah's life of prayer. His life of prayer became a part of his daily life, and he prayed to God and relied on God for help amid various adversities and difficulties that approached him moment by moment. And he went on to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

If we look at "The Only Necessary Thing: Living a Prayerful Life" by Henry Nouwen, there is a chapter called 'Constant Prayer'. There are these words about unceasing prayer: 'To pray unceasingly is to transfer all your thoughts from fearful isolation to fearless conversation with God. ... The prayer of the heart is like a stream whispering endlessly under the many waves of daily life. There opens the possibility of living in the world without belonging to it, of reaching out to our God in the midst of solitude' (Nouwen).



# What God has done

## [Nehemiah 6:15-19]

Do you know what the word “anointed” means? In a religious sense, anointing has two uses, one of which is to consecrate something by anointing it with oil (Exod.30:23, Lev. 8:10-12). And the other is to anoint people to be priests (Exod. 29:7), prophets (1Kgs. 19:16), and kings (1:39). This indicates that whoever is anointed has the source of his authority from God. From here, the concept of the Messiah as a holy savior from Jehovah arose, and “Messiah” and “Christ” both mean “Anointed One” (Internet). Pastor Eugene Peterson said this about “anointing” in his book “Leap over a Wall: Earthy Spirituality for Everyday Christians”: ‘To be anointed in the Bible means to receive a work to do from God. It means that they are hired. That's what it actually means: ‘I have work to do. I will leave it to you. And you can do it’ (Peterson). My personal opinion is that seeking an anointing is a great responsibility. The reason is because seeking the anointing means seeking work from God to do, but the question is whether we can do God's work ourselves or not. In other words, we must admit that God's work is not something we can do, but that the Holy Spirit who dwells in us does it through us. Because "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me", it must be God's work done by faith (Gal. 2:20). That is the anointing spoken of in the New Testament. In other words, the anointing was used as a symbol of the presence or indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Jn. 2:20, 27). However, the greater temptation (danger) lies in the illusion that we have become like God while experiencing God the Holy Spirit working through us in doing God's work. If we really become godlike when we do good or good things (Peterson), doing God's work by being anointed with oil is a great blessing and grace, but also a great danger and temptation. We fall into this temptation especially when work takes precedence over worship. In other words, when worship gets to the point of being instrumentalized for work (eg, like Saul), then we are not doing God's work, but ours. And when we do our work under the guise of being anointed, Christ is not honored through our service, but we ourselves are honored. Such deification work is nothing but denying the existence of God under the name of doing God's work.

Looking at today's text, Nehemiah 6:16, the Bible says that the walls of Jerusalem was completed “with the help of our God.” God anointed Nehemiah to complete the work that God had entrusted to him,

the walls of Jerusalem. Then how did God work through Nehemiah? I would like to meditate on God's work in three ways: (1) Conspiracy, (2) Completion, and (3) Confidence.

### **First, “Conspiracy”.**

If we look at Nehemiah 6:17-19, we can see the unceasing works of Satan. Look at verse 17: “Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them.” The word “in those days” here refers to the period during which the Jews were rebuilding the city of Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah (Park). In other words, it refers to before the completion of the walls of Jerusalem (vv. 15-16). So, logically, verses 17-19 should have been written before verses 15-16 because it happened before verses 15-16. Nevertheless, the Bible writes after verses 15-16. Not sure why. One guess is that even after the completion of the walls of Jerusalem, it may be at the level of always being wary of not being proud and always be on the lookout for Satan's temptations. In the meantime, high-ranking people in Judah also had an affair with Sanballat and Tobiah, and continued to exchange letters to discourage Nehemiah. Sanballat and Tobiah must have been well acquainted with the affairs of Jerusalem because they kept exchanging letters. Based on Nehemiah 2:10, looking at this personal relationship, we might think that Tobiah may have lived in Jerusalem as an official under Sanballat in Samaria. At this time, it seems that Tobiah, his son, and the daughters of high-ranking officials in Judah were married. Look at Nehemiah 6:18 – “For many in Judah were under oath to him, since he was son-in-law to Shecaniah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah.” Here, the person “Meshullam son of Berekiah” must have been an important official in Judah (WBC). In Nehemiah 3:4 and 30, “Meshullam” appears twice, and he is regarded as a strong supporter of Nehemiah in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. In the end, what this means is that when Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, not only externally, but also internally, there were people who conspired with his enemies among the people of Judah who were rebuilding the walls together. Also, they spoke well to Nehemiah about Israel's enemies, and they also spoke badly about Nehemiah to their enemies. Look at verse 19a: “Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said ....” Also, the enemy Tobiah threatened Nehemiah with a letter (v. 19b).

Here we can see Satan's constant work. What is surprising is that Satan's ploy takes a more savage form of attack with each step in the construction of Jerusalem's walls (White). First it was open ridicule (4:1-3), then news came of an armed attack by building a formidable united front (4:7-12), and then a proposal to settle it through dialogue. Then an assassination plot disguised as an offer to resolve it through dialogue followed (6:1-3). Then came an open letter containing slanderous accusations (6:5-6). And when the walls of Jerusalem were almost completed, they tried to make Nehemiah sin against God through the false prophet Shemaiah and make the people of Judah lose trust (6:10-13). In the midst of this, Tobiah, who appears from chapter 2:10, constantly exchanges letters with high-ranking figures in Judah and eventually uses a strategy to get their children married to each other (intermarriage), trying to frighten Nehemiah and prevent him from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. What should we do if we find ourselves in a similar situation? Hymn “Simply Trusting Every day” answers this question: “Simply trusting ev-ry

day, Trusting through a stormy way; Even when my faith is small, Trusting Jesus, that is all. Trusting as the moments fly, Trusting as the days go by; Trusting Him whate'er befall, Trusting Jesus, that is all" (v. 1 and chorus).

## **Second, "Completion".**

Look at Nehemiah 6:15 – "So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days." The work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was completed in 52 days. 'The twenty-fifth of Elu' is about September 20th in the current calendar. This work started around the end of July and was completed around September. As we have already meditated on, the time when Nehemiah first heard about the problem of Jerusalem was "Kislev," that is, around the 11th to 12th months of our calendar (1:1). And when he told King Artaxerxes of his plan, it was "Nisan," that is, around March-April, four months after our calendar (2:1). Then, after receiving permission from the king, it took Nehemiah two to three months to leave from Susa and come to Jerusalem, and he arrived in Jerusalem between April and May and between June and July. This period of time took longer than the 52 days during which the walls of Jerusalem were completed, indicating that Nehemiah came from the palace of Susa to Jerusalem. How was Nehemiah able to complete the walls of Jerusalem with the people of Judah in a short period of 52 days? We can think of several secrets for this:

### (1) The most important secret to completion is to prepare a lot through prayer.

The completion of Jerusalem's walls took only 52 days. But before that, the "month of Chislev," when Nehemiah first heard about Jerusalem's problems, that is, the "month of Nisan," when he informed King Artaxerxes of his plans to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem from November to December in our calendar. From March to April, he prayed to God for four months. Nehemiah, who had heard the bad news from his homeland, told his brother Hanani (1:2-3) that the city of Jerusalem had been destroyed, the gates had been burned, and the remaining people were suffering disgrace and suffering. So, Nehemiah, who mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven" (1:4). He pleaded with God for the matter until he revealed his plan to King Artaxerxes. The reason is because Nehemiah knew that it was more important to move God with his petition than to move the man, King Artaxerxes (Lee). In other words, Nehemiah, as a man of prayer, was more conscious of God than man, so he looked at Almighty God, the King of Kings, rather than King Artaxerxes, the King of Media and Persia, who boasted the greatest strength and power at the time.

We too must look to God. We too must pray to God. The reason why we fast one meal a day for 40 days and cry out to God while preparing for the evangelism meeting is because only God can open the heart of our new believers. Therefore, when we cry out to God in prayer, God hears our prayer and opens the hearts of our newly born believers to hear the gospel and receive Jesus as their Savior and Lord. What is the word of promise that we are holding on to and seeking? This is the

Acts 16:14: "... The Lord opened her (Lydia's) heart to respond to Paul's message."

(2) The secret to completion is to experience God's presence.

After praying to God, Nehemiah took action. In other words, he offered a living prayer, a prayer with action, to God. He continued to pray to God and moved into his action. At that time, "because the gracious hand of my God was upon Nehemiah (2:8, 18) King Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah's request.

(3) The secret to completion is a life led by a purpose.

Nehemiah was an unstoppable leader. Although he could have diverted his mind and attention from his enemies after he began rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, he did not divert his mind and attention from the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. He was able to do this because he had the 3 C's: (a) Conviction: the conviction that this is the mission given to me by the Lord, the certainty of victory, etc., (b) Confidence: Confidence based not on confidence, but on the faithfulness of the Lord. Confidence in his faithfulness that the word of the Lord will be fulfilled no matter what. (c) Consistency: A life of walking one way in fulfilling one's mission, not one way or another. For Nehemiah, the purpose was to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

(4) The secret to completion is excellent risk management.

As the walls of Jerusalem were completed, the enemy's attacks became more and more ferocious and stronger (mockery, news of an armed attack by building a united front, disguised assassination plot, slander, appearance of false prophets). Whenever he encountered these crises, Nehemiah showed his excellent crisis management. He overcame the crisis through prayer, and also set up a guard through the act of prayer to avoid the crisis. In addition, he constantly challenged the people of Judah to fully trust and have confidence in God, so that they looked to the great Lord rather than maximizing the crisis. He showed courage to the people of Judah and averted a crisis with God-given discernment. Nehemiah was an excellent crisis manager.

(5) The secret to completion is patience or endurance.

The period of 52 days would not have been a short period for Nehemiah and the people of Judah. The difficulties and crises they faced required a lot of patience and endurance from Nehemiah and the people of Judah. But why did they not give up rebuilding Jerusalem's walls? The reason is because they had hope. It was because they had a dream in their hearts of the completion of the walls of Jerusalem.

One day during a prayer meeting with church leaders, I challenged them. We challenged ourselves

to draw a picture in our hearts that our church raises and dispatches workers with a Christ-centered dream like the 300 soldiers of Gideon. Then we will be able to endure with patience no matter what difficulties and crises we encounter.

In a word, the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls, which was God's work, had been done "with the help of our God" (6:16).

### **Third and last is confidence.**

Look at Nehemiah 6:16 – "When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God." The work God has accomplished, that is, the completion of the walls of Jerusalem, has been seen and heard by all the enemies and the people of the Gentiles. When they did, they all became afraid and lost their self-confidence. The reason is because all the enemies and the Gentiles knew that the completion of the walls of Jerusalem was accomplished by the God of Israel. In other words, all the enemies and the Gentiles knew that it was impossible to complete only with the human strength of Nehemiah and the people of Judah. Because God was with Nehemiah and the people of Judah and helped rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, all the enemies and the people of the Gentiles around the world knew that the walls were completed. In the end, God caused all the enemies of Nehemiah and the people of Judah to lose confidence of the Gentiles.

What we realize here is that even through our enemies, God breaks down our self-confident attitude by cutting down all the branches we want to rely on. For example, if we rely on ourselves, God makes us unable to rely on ourselves even through the work of our adversaries making us afraid or discouraged. Therefore, in the end, God makes us depend only on Him. Another fact is that those who rely on God will not be discouraged by people and circumstances. Nehemiah led his enemies through various problems and difficulties. But it is not stated in the Book of Nehemiah that he was discouraged. In other words, Nehemiah, who completely depended on God, was not discouraged by his enemies. Even when the people of Judah were discouraged (4:10ff.), Nehemiah the leader was not discouraged.

Our God is the God who moves trust from self-confidence to God-confidence. Therefore, God makes those who trust in Him lose the confidence of those who oppose God's people. Listen to the confession of Rahab the prostitute in Joshua 2:9-11: "... "I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below."

The book "Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing God's Will" by Henry Blackgarvey and Claude V. King says: 'In the Bible, the tasks God gives to His people are always "God-sized"'. This encounter with God

brings a crisis to our confidence (Black Garvey & King). When we take on a “God-sized” task, we can test our beliefs: ‘Either I show faith through my obedience to God or discover my weak faith (disobedience). The reason people in the world are not drawn to Christ and His church is because God's people lack the faith to try things that only God can do’ (Black Garvey & King). The great God gave Nehemiah the task of God’s size. His anointed Nehemiah, in the midst of any adversary's threats and complicity, fulfilled the task by his faith. That's why the enemies and everyone everywhere were afraid and lost confidence. What is the ‘God-size’ mission that the Lord is giving us today? It is to build a church where the Lord is the body. The Lord will establish the church, which is the body of the Lord. I hope and pray that we will be able to participate in the work that the Lord is establishing by faith.

# Appoint the workers!

## [Nehemiah 7:1-3]

It is said that there are 18 types of service in the church (Internet): (1) Platoon leader type - Saints who always take care of themselves at the forefront, (2) Food type – A believer who skips cooking while working and show up quickly when eating, (3) Forward head posture type – A believer who is full of energy at home but shrink at church, (4) Mudfish type – A believer who makes excuses and escape easily, (5) Innocent type – A believer who is obedient and diligently looking for something to do, (6) Snout type – A believer who serves only with the mouth, (7) Lucky type – A believer who just grabs a broom and is praised by a pastor who has just arrived, (8) Destroying a family type - A believer who neglects his family under the excuse of volunteering, (9) A morale booster type - A believer who brings food for workers, (10) Leaving behind type – A believer who wants to stay behind, (11) Time oblivion type – A believer who needs guidance by a pillar of fire once they start, (12) Drop-off type – A believer who disappears silently in the middle, (13) Blind fish type – A believer who comes to the site without thinking and is always caught, (14) Martha type – A believer who prepares snacks and meals to entertain others, (15) Endorphin-supplying type - A believer who laughs happily next to you rather than work, (16) A hardware store type - A believer who takes care of necessary materials and tools, (17) Unlucky type to eat type – A believer who is always involuntarily fall in whenever he eats snacks, and (18) Loyalist type – A believer who serves quietly until the end.

What kind of workers do you think are needed in the community? Focusing on today's text, Nehemiah 7:1-3, I would like to think about three types of workers Nehemiah raised after completing the city of Jerusalem under the title “Appoint the workers!”

**The first workers to be appointed are the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites.**

Look at Nehemiah 7:1 – “After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the

gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites were appointed.” Nehemiah 6:1 says that although the walls of Jerusalem have been built, the gates of the city have not yet been installed. So, when the work of the city was completed in fifty-two days and the city was completed (6:15), in Nehemiah 7:1, Nehemiah installed the gates of the city. After the gates were installed, the first representatives of the people of Judah appointed the gatekeepers, the singers, and the Levites. These were all those who would engage in temple service. If we put this into our modern language, we can think of rebuilding the city and appointing a pastor, praise team, and guides to serve in the church. In a word, it means that the worshipers were appointed.

F. Charles Fensham, in his commentary, states that the Hebrew word for 'appoint', 'put in charge' or 'appoint' in verses 1, 2 and 3, has three different roots. The “appointed” in verse 1 is the root “pqd,” which means “probably made by representatives of the people.” In other words, the gatekeepers, singers, and Levites in verse 1 would have been appointed by the representatives of the people. The root of the word “put in charge” in verse 2 is “swh,” which was appointed by Nehemiah, governor of Judah. The root of the word “appoint” in the last verse 3 is “md”, which means the guards set by the two men appointed by the governor Nehemiah in verse 2 (Fehsham). ‘The gatekeeper’ comes first here (v. 1). How can this be applied to our church? I think we can apply the words of Mark 13:34 – “It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.” In other words, we must carry out our mission with faith as a gatekeeper (Internet). From Mark 13:33 to 37, the word “keep watch” appears four times. What does this teach us? It means that as gatekeepers, we must be keep on the alert. In other words, the closer the end approaches, the more Christians must carry out their mission well with the faith of a gatekeeper. What is the gatekeeper's mission? It is to guard and check entry and exit. It is the gatekeeper's mission to let in those who should be allowed in and to stop those who should be blocked. It is the same in our daily life as well as in our spiritual life. We must prevent the entry of anything that destroys our souls. And what beautifies our souls must be allowed in and out.

Apostle James says that one of the pure and undefiled religions before God the Father is to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (Jam. 1:27). If all evil, secular, unclean, dirty, and false things come into us, our life of faith becomes a mess. But when good thoughts and beautiful thoughts come into us, our life of faith becomes beautiful. That's why Satan struggles to let the evil spirit into us whenever he gets a chance. Therefore, in the last days, as worshipers, we must carry out our mission with faith as gatekeepers. When the Holy Spirit is seated in our hearts, evil things cannot enter. Otherwise, the devil puts evil thoughts into our hearts and makes us do what the devil does in our lives, even though we look like holy saints.

### **The second set of workers are the assistants.**

Look at Nehemiah 7:2 – “I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most men



do.” After the representatives of the people appointed gatekeepers and singers and Levites in verse 1, here in verse 2 we see Nehemiah, governor of Judah, appointing two assistants to rule Jerusalem together. Their names were “Hanani” and “Hananiah” (v. 2). The name “Hanani” is a name we have already heard. Here, Nehemiah referred to his younger brother (“my brother”), and this Hanani was the one who came from Judah to the Susa palace in Nehemiah 1:2 and informed Nehemiah of the people remaining in Judah and the conditions of Jerusalem (v. 3). This was a man with honesty and love for his country (Henry). The other was “Hananiah,” and he was “the commander of the fortress” (v. 2). ‘The fortress’ was a fort around the temple, guarding the northern wall, where it could be attacked most easily. Nehemiah writes about this man in two ways. Hananiah was a faithful man, and he feared God more than many.

The most important qualities of an assistant are loyalty (faithfulness) and fear of God. Look at 2 Timothy 2:2 – “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” Those who fear the Lord are faithful to fulfill the mission the Lord has given them. However, if the leaders fear people more than God, they will fall into a snare and fail. Look at Proverbs 29:25 – “The fear of man brings a snare, But he who trusts in the LORD will be exalted.”

### **The third and last set of workers are the guards.**

Look at Nehemiah 7:3 – “Then I said to them, ‘Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot, and while they are standing guard, let them shut and bolt the doors. Also appoint guards from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, each at his post, and each in front of his own house.’” After Nehemiah appoints two assistants, his younger brother Hanani and God-fearing faithful Hananiah, to rule Jerusalem together, we see these two assistants appointing guards (v. 3). What was the guards' role? They were the ones who opened and closed the gates: “Then I said to them, ‘Do not let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot, and while they are standing guard, let them shut and bolt the doors. ...’” (v. 3a). One of the roles of the guards was those who knew when to open the doors and when to close the doors and put them into practice. If the gatekeepers open the gates in the morning while everyone is asleep, the enemies will come in and they would be caught defenseless. Also, if they kept the gates closed at night without the guards, they could give their enemies an opportunity to sneak into their city. This should have been done for the safety of Jerusalem and the Jewish people. They appointed two kinds of guards: The first kind of guards patrolled from special locations on Jerusalem's walls, while the other set watch near their own house. In Nehemiah 3, many people of Judah worked on the wall near their houses, so Nehemiah challenged Hanani and the guards appointed by Hananiah to guard the area of the wall they had built. With gatekeepers at the gates and the guards on the walls, the city of Jerusalem was kept safe from enemies.

We must appoint spiritual watchmen. Look at Isaiah 62:6a – “I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. ....” As it is written here, the watchmen of

God set on the walls are the servants of the Lord and also the saints. The most important duty of a castle keeper is to stay awake. It's a big deal if the watchman is sleeping. In military terminology, there is a saying that those who fail in battle can be forgiven, but those who fail to guard are not forgiven. We must not stop praying and always be spiritually awake to keep our own faith well.

What kind of workers does the Lord want to appoint within or through our church? Those who worship God, those who praise God, pastors, and those who carry out missions with the faith of gatekeepers, God wants to appoint faithful workers who fear God. God wants to appoint spiritual watchmen who are being alert. I sincerely hope and pray that all of us will be raised as such workers.

# Revival of the Word (I)

## [Nehemiah 8:1-5]

Do you know the difference between bewilderment, sadness and shock? Bewilderment - when you go through the Old Testament, thinking that the sermon text the book of Hebrews is from the Old Testament, Sadness - when you can't find the text of the Bible and wander around, but the pastor told me to read it first, Shocking - when you open the Bible to read the text, but it's a Chinese Bible (Internet). In this age we live in, we are facing the phenomenon of a drought in which we do not listen to God's word. Look at Amos 8:11 – “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘when I will send a famine through the land-- not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the Words of the LORD.’” This era we live in is an era that denies the existence of absolute truth, an era in which emotional arousal through psychological manipulation draws more attention than the true Word of God, an era where people talk about the God’s word more than do the word, and an era which even if we have ears, we cannot hear the Word of God (God’s voice). Next year's church motto is ‘Running toward the Word of the Lord’ (Ps. 119:32). May the Lord bring about a revival of the Word in our church. I hope and pray that our church will be firmly established on the rock of the Word. Then our church will not be shaken. We will not be shaken no matter what temptations, adversities, and crises may come our way. So, I would like to think about one thing today under the title of “Revival of the Word (I)” centered on the text of Nehemiah 8:1-5.

### **First, we must long for the Word of God.**

How do we know that the Israelites longed for God's Word? We can tell in 3 ways:

#### (1) They asked to preach the word of God.

Look at Nehemiah 8:1 – “And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses

which the LORD had given to Israel.” After God rebuilt the city of Jerusalem through Nehemiah, we now see him rebuilding the hearts of the Israelites through the scholar Ezra. Who is Ezra? He was a scholar who had already been in Jerusalem thirteen years before Nehemiah went to Jerusalem, and Ezra 7:10 says about him: “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.” Ezra was a man with great ambitions. The purpose of his life was to study, practice, and teach the law of God. In other words, his aspirations included action. It was because of this that he was able to become an extraordinary person (White). God used this spiritual leader, Ezra, to bring about the revival of the Word in the square in front of the Water Gate for the rebuilding of the Israelites' hearts. An interesting fact is that all the Israelites voluntarily came to the Water Gate Square and asked Ezra to read the book of the law of Moses. It wasn't even advertised. Although the city of Jerusalem could have turned into a festive atmosphere, the Israelites wanted to gather in front of the Water Gate Square to hear the word of God. Why did the Israelites do that? ‘The Israelites knew an important truth. They knew they couldn't be happy with just the fact that the construction of the wall was complete. They knew they needed God's Word. They knew the truth that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’ (Lee). But the question is, how did the Israelites know such an important truth? That is what the Israelites would have learned through Nehemiah's exemplary life. The Israelites, who rebuilt the city of Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah for 52 days, saw and learned through their leader Nehemiah the life of faith in which they fear God and keep the word of God even in the face of the danger of assassination. They wanted to listen to the word of God without holding a feast afterwards. Another thing I think I learned from watching the life of obedience to the words of the scholar Ezra. With good reason, the Holy Spirit used the exemplary lives of Ezra and Nehemiah to arouse hunger and curiosity in the people (White).

What phenomenon do we see among us these days? What do we really feel and see in the church? The church, the preacher, hopes to amuse us, to rid us of our boredom or indolence (Packer). That's why the pastor's sermon is changing into 'very entertaining'. What should we be? Just like the Israelites in the text, we should ask our pastor, ‘Pastor, teach me the words of God. Please deliver God's true message' and become people who want to listen to the Word.

## (2) The Israelites listened to the Word from early morning until midday.

Look at Nehemiah 8:2-3: “Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women and all who could listen with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. He read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the people were attentive to the book of the law.” The Israelites who asked the scholar Ezra to

explain the book of the law of Moses heard Ezra read the book of the law at the Water Gate Square from early morning to midday [about six hours (Lee)]. This was very surprising. It is not easy to listen to a 40-minute sermon these days. But imagine if the pastor read the Bible for 6 hours. How many people do you think there will be in the congregation who will open their eyes and ears and listen to the Word to the end? The wife of Pastor In-joong Kim of Ansan Dongsan Church said: I think ministry is a battle between remembering names and keeping time. ... My husband impresses me by memorizing his name, but he loses points by being on time. It takes 23 years to burn the pain of preaching for more than 50 minutes even though the time for worship is tight. Why is the pastor's wife like that? I just want 5 more minutes. You don't know my husband, but everybody likes him. It would be nice to listen to the silent eyes of the public and the wife's mantra. ... Those who know the characteristics of long sermons, if they want to request a 30-minute sermon, 'Pastor, please shorten it to 15 to 20 minutes. Place a special order. So 30-40 minutes... I nag that good instructors are punctual. Then you try... (Internet). It's not once or twice when I think about shortening it a little while watching your faces when the sermon is getting longer. But isn't it surprising that the Israelites had been listening to the law of Moses through Ezra for about 6 hours? This is the revival of the Word. True spiritual revival arises from a thirst for the Word of God and a thirst for the truth (Lee).

### (3) The Israelites stood and listened to the Word.

Look at Nehemiah 8:5 – “Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.” Why did the Israelites stand and listen to God? The reason is because they thought they were listening to the Word of God, not just listening to people (1 Thess. 2:13). This was the behavior of the Israelites to show humility and reverence before God (Park). That's why our church stands up and receives the word of God when I read the Bible during worship. How long did the Israelites stand and listen to God? They continued to stand until the end of the explanation of the law of Moses to be read and understood (8:7). That is, they stood up from early morning until midday to hear the word of God (v. 3). In terms of time, they stood and listened to the Word for about 5 to 6 hours. This is very surprising. Imagine you stood up and listen to the sermon not 30-40 minutes, but about 6 hours. Imagine standing up and listening to the words of God. Can you imagine?

It is still an unforgettable experience. Before marriage, I asked to be a bridesmaid at my middle school friend's wedding. I remember that the wedding service lasted about an hour. And I stood upright with tension for an hour. But after the wedding service, my legs didn't feel like mine. But what I have nothing to say is that my wedding went on for over an hour, and I wonder if my friends who were bridesmaids were shocked. One friend told me that she would never stand up for a friend's wedding again because it was so hard to stand there wearing a suit for so long all her life. Lol. However, the

Israelites stood and listened to the word of God for about 6 hours, not 1 hour. I think this is impossible if we do not long for the word of God. But what is even more surprising is that the Israelites listened to the word of God not just for one day, but for a week (7 days), standing for about 6 hours every day (8:18). Of course, I think that Ezra probably gave the Israelites time to rest. Still, the fact that they wanted to stand and listen to the word of God for so long every day for a week shows how much the Israelites longed for the word of God.

A traveler traveling in England was passing by the coast and saw many seagulls lying dead on the sand. The sea was clean and it was a perfect environment for seagulls to live in. So he thought it would not be an ordinary death. So, the traveler asked the cause of death to a man who was clearing up dead seagulls. Then he answered: 'Many travelers come here. Travelers throw delicious food such as sweets and candies to the seagulls. That's harmful to seagulls. As the seagulls eat these delicious foods, they completely lose their appetite for natural food. When the season passes and tourists stop coming, the seagulls leave a lot of food in the sea that is good for them and wait for the food from the tourists and die of starvation.' Things that harm us are sometimes so sweet that we forget good food to satisfy our soul's hunger and thirst (Internet).

# Revival of the Word (II)

## [Nehemiah 8:6-9a]

It is a morally lax world. We hear a lot about moral hazard these days. Originally, this meant that people were not careful when they bought insurance. If we buy car insurance, we don't worry too much about traffic accidents. And if we buy life insurance, we don't pay much attention to our health. As if the sense function of the remote control has been exhausted, it means that the conscience has become dull. It refers to the loss of judgment about right and wrong. This kind of moral hazard phenomenon is not a thing yesterday or today, but you can see that there is no standard (Internet). What is our standard? It is the Bible. The Bible is called the canon. Its original meaning is sleep. Borrowing the words from Amos 7:7-8, it is "a plumb line". A plumb line is a tool used on construction sites. It serves to correct the verticality by hanging a weight on the thread. This is the function and role of the word of God. If we leave the word of God, you can only live your own way (Internet). So, if we look at Judges 21:25, there is this word: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit." I would like to think of three signs for the revival of the Word under the title "Revival of the Word (II)" centered on today's text Nehemiah 8:6-9a.

### **The first sign is praise and worship.**

Look at Nehemiah 8:6 – "Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen! Amen!' Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground." In Pastor Seong-geon Hong's book, 'The Man God is Looking for,' he says that there are two stages of worshipping God. The first step in worship is "praise". This stage is the stage of approaching God, relying on what God has done for us through Jesus Christ and what He has done. When we worship God, the starting point is to remember and give thanks for what God has already accomplished in Jesus Christ. And it is to sing it and to proclaim it and praise God. The second stage of worship is "worship." When we go before God, we sing and give thanks for what God has done in us, but when we come before God's throne, we see God's glory. At that time, we will exalt God Himself rather than what God has accomplished. Praise be to the majestic God of His grace, love, holiness, mercy and goodness. It is no longer praising God for what God has done, but

worshiping God for who He is (Hong). If we look at today's text, Nehemiah 8:6, we see Ezra praising and the Israelites worshipping: "Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; ...." Ezra knew (6:16) that the great God (1:5, 4:14) accomplished this great work (6:3, 4:19) by rebuilding the city of Jerusalem with His great power (1:10). So, Ezra praised the great God in front of all the people of Israel who had gathered in the Water Gate Square to hear the law of Moses. Look at Ezra 3:11 – "With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: 'He is good; his love to Israel endures forever.' And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid." At that time, the response of all the Israelites was to worship the Lord. Look at Nehemiah 8:6b - "... Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground." This can't be but a wonderful revival of the true Word. All the Israelites gathered in the Water Gate Square humbly worshipped God while responding with "Amen, Amen" to Ezra's praise of the great God. In other words, the Israelites said "Amen, Amen" because they acknowledged that the great God had rebuilt the city of Jerusalem, a great work. Then, going further, the Israelites did not end by joining Ezra's praises because of the works God had accomplished, but worshiped the greatness of God in humility and reverence.

Like Ezra, we see God's good hand in fulfilling the word of Matthew 16:18, the word of promise given by the Lord to our church, so we must praise God for what He had done. Also, like the Israelites, we humbly acknowledge God's faithfulness, graciousness, and goodness. In other words, we must acknowledge who our God is, who goes on to fulfill His promise. So, we must come before the throne of God's grace and worship Him.

### **The second sign is understanding.**

Look at Nehemiah 8:7-8: "The Levites--Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah--instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read." When the scholar Ezra praised God, the Israelites responded with "Amen, Amen" and worshiped God. Here we can find some principles about how to teach the Bible.

#### **(1) Reading the Bible.**

The Levites read from the Book of the Law of God."

#### **(2) We must clarify and interpret what we want to teach in the Bible.**

The Levites made the Book of Law of God clear to the Israelites and gave the meaning the meaning. More specifically, the Levites interpreted the Mosaic Law in a language the Israelites could understand. The reason is because the Hebrew language at the time when



Moses wrote the Pentateuch, from Genesis to Deuteronomy, changed over time during the times of Nehemiah and Ezra. So, the Levites interpreted the Law of Moses so that the Israelites could easily understand it. The Levites interpreted the meaning of the Book of the Law of God so that the Israelites could apply the law in their lives (Packer).

(3) The purpose of Bible study is to help learners understand the Word of God.

The Levites made the Israelites understand the law of God.

In John Milton Gregory's "The 7 Laws of Teaching," the first of which is "The Teacher's Law," he defines "teaching" as follows: 'Teaching, in its simplest terms, is the imparting of experience. ... It is painting a picture of myself in the other person's mind.' In other words, the truth obtained by the understanding that the teacher knows and wants to convey to the other person is shaped in the mind and understanding of the learner. Conveying here is not about imparting intellectual knowledge, but helping the learner to produce the experience of the teacher. In saying this, Gregory had this to say about "teacher": 'Teachers must be thoroughly familiar with the lessons they are trying to teach. It means teaching with a full heart and clear understanding. And he must use clear, crisp language that he and his students can understand' (Gregory).

### **The third sign is tears.**

Look at Nehemiah 8:9b – "... For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law." All the Israelites wept while listening to the Law of Moses. The reason is because they realized their sins through the Law. Look at Romans 3:20b – "... rather, through the law we become conscious of sin." Pastor Packer said the reason why the Israelites cried was because the understanding of God's Word shocked the hearts of the Israelites. People cry because they are overwhelmed with emotions. And the tears of that emotion are due to the clear awareness of a particular reality. The root of individual and community spiritual revival is always a clear awareness of God's holiness, goodness, and mercy and of His personal sins—wickedness, shame, insolence, and suicidal folly (Packer).

When have we heard the word of God and shed tears? When did we shed tears of repentance because the words pierced our hearts and exposed our sins? Why are our tears of repentance dry? I find the reason in the words of Amos 8:11 – "'The days are coming,' declares the Sovereign LORD, 'when I will send a famine through the land-- not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.'" The famine of hearing the words of the Lord prevents us from realizing our sin. "Repentance" by Thomas Watson: 'Repentance is necessary for hypocrites. Hypocrisy is the guise of holiness, and the hypocrite or stage actor goes above the moralist and adorns himself with the garb of religion. He professes the form of godliness, but denies its power (2 Tim. 3:5). The hypocrite is like a house with a beautiful exterior, but all the rooms are dark. He is a rotten pillar, beautifully gilded, and he hides his plague scars under a mask of confession. The hypocrite opposes makeup on the face, but

wears makeup that adorns holiness. Because he is outwardly good, he can be truly evil. The hypocrite seems to have his eyes nailed to heaven, but his heart is full of impure lust. He lives in secret sin against his conscience. He hears the word, but only his ears. He is zealous for his devotion to the church, for which others look upon him and praise him, but he neglects home and closet prayer. A hypocrite pretends to be humble, but this is to get ahead in the world. He claims to have faith, but he uses it as a mask rather than a shield. He carries a Bible under his armpit, but he does not carry it in his heart. Search your heart with the candlestick of the Word and see if you can find nothing to repent of there' (Internet).

We have entered an era of famine in which we have not heard the word of God (Amos 8:11). In this age, as in the days of the prophet Habakkuk, the righteous are surrounded by the wicked, so the law is loose and justice is perverted, so justice is not being enforced at all (Hab 1:4). When the law is loose like this, what should we believers do? We must pray to God. The prophet Habakkuk prayed to God: "LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy" (3:2). The Hebrew word for revival used here is "chayah," and it means to hope that God will pour out life. Revival from the point of view of the Hebrews is always to repent of sins and 'return to God'. Even in the New Testament, 'returning to God' is called revival. Rather than the glory of God, revival is to abandon what one pursues and return to the Lord. Revival is 'to become hot again' by setting fire to the weakened soul. It is a period in which the believers' faith grows and unbelievers return to God intensively. We must repent of our sins and turn quickly to a life of obedience to God.

# Our strength

## [Nehemiah 8:9-12]

It is said that there is no mysterious insect like an ant among insects with life. Have you ever seen an ant dragging prey many times larger than itself with its small body? An observer who was watching an ant dragging a dead locust weighed the ant and found that the ant was dragging 60 times more weight than itself. How can the ant do something like that? That ability is a wonderful gift that God gave to creation (Internet). Proverbs 6:6 tells us: “Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!” How do we compare ants to us? We humans are gifted with greater strength and abilities than ants. That is why Paul confessed, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). But too many of us, Christians, live a powerless life. ‘I can do all things in the Lord who gives me strength’ is a verse in the Bible, but in our lives we are denying that truth. That is why words such as “I can’t do it” and “I think it will be difficult” come out of our mouths more easily than “I can do it”. Or there is a lot of unbelief in denying the power of the Lord. It seems that we are living a very pessimistic life while denying the power of faith and godliness. We waste by failing to use the Lord's full supply of power. What should we do about this problem? How can we live a life of faith and strength? Today's text Nehemiah 8:10 gives the answer. It tells us the answer to how we can lead a powerful life of faith. It is none other than to rejoice in the Lord.

### **Our strength is to rejoice in the Lord.**

Look at Nehemiah 8:10b – “... This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” Then, how can we rejoice in the Lord? We can think of it in three ways.

#### **(1) In order to rejoice in the Lord, we must not be sad and not cry.**

Look at Nehemiah 8:9 – “Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, “This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep.” For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.” When the Israelites heard the law of Moses through the scholar Ezra and realized the law

through the Levites, their sins were revealed and they could not help but shed tears of repentance. In other words, they wept because there was a conviction of sins through the law. Ezra also shed these tears. Look at Ezra 10:1 – “While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites--men, women and children--gathered around him. They too wept bitterly.” In this way, while the Israelites were weeping because of the conviction of their sins, Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites who taught the people exhorted the Israelites not to mourn and weep because it was God's holy day. In modern terms, when the congregation heard the word of God through the pastor and Bible study teachers and realized their sins and shed tears of repentance, the pastor, elders, and teachers said, 'Today is the Lord's day. Do not weep in sorrow'.

Tears are drying up in the eyes of our Christians. The reason is because we are not aware of our sins through the Word. In other words, we do not realize our sins well because we do not diligently reflect ourselves in the spiritual mirror, the Word of God. Also, it seems that we mistakenly feel even the need for repentance because our spiritual eyes are so darkened that we cannot see our own ugliness even when we look in the spiritual mirror. If this is true, how are we to interpret the shedding of tears during sermons in the church? Unfortunately, we can make our meeting-goers weep with psychological techniques. Many preachers use the technique of psychological manipulation without any knowledge that they are doing so. It is true that there is a satisfying feeling when a powerful wave of emotion engulfs the entire congregation. We will feel successful when we make people cry. This is because we are more concerned with visible results than with inner awakenings (White). Many times we preachers are more concerned about the visible result of the tears than the inner awakening of the saints. In other words, there are plenty of times when the tears we shed are emotions caused by the psychological manipulation of the preachers rather than tears of repentance due to the awareness of sin as we listen to the Word. The shedding of tears does not mean that an inner awakening is taking place. Tears may have nothing to do with the inner awakening of a soul at all. So, the prophet Joel says in Joel 2:12-13a: “‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, ...” But are tears of repentance and sorrow for sin really our strength? The answer is “no”. The Bible does not say that tears of repentance are our strength. In other words, it is not our strength to come up to the Lord's house on Sunday, the Lord's day, to realize our sins and repent through the Word of God.

(2) In order to rejoice in the Lord, we must not be sorrowful.

Look at Nehemiah 8:10b, 11b: “... This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength. ... Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve.” Why were the Israelites gathered at the Water Gate Square worried? The reason the Israelites were grieved was because they had not properly served the Lord for a long time, not knowing what pleased and

displeased God (Packer). When we look back on our lives, we may think of our sins of not serving God rightly like the Israelites. 'If I had done that at that time, God would have been pleased...' etc. As we look back on our life, we may see many "gaps". We may think of things we have said or done unwisely. Lack of love can also feel a lot. When we are immersed in these thoughts, our heart cannot be happy. Or we may become discouraged with ourselves and lose our strength. How about you? As you look back on your life, do you have the same sorrow over your sins as the Israelites did? Among the writings written by a man named Man-je Jo, there is 'The wisdom to overcome worry' (Internet): 'As Shakespeare emphasized that sorrow is the enemy of life, a person cannot be happy and cannot have joy as long as worry persists. Worry hinders health, shortens life, and makes humans unable to concentrate on new creative work. ... Even the well-known Aesop said, 'A piece of bread eaten in peace is better than a feast eaten in sorrow.' I agree. Worry makes us more vulnerable than it gives us strength. So, Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites who taught the people told the weeping Israelites, "Do not mourn or weep" (v. 9) and "Do not grieve" (v. 10). The reason is, imagine how tired the Israelites would be when they imagined standing there crying and worrying for hours. And another reason is because the day they were weeping and grieved was the sacred day of the Lord (v. 10). Reminds me of the well-known gospel song "This is the day that the Lord has made": "This is the day, this is the day That the Lord has made, that the Lord has made. I will rejoice, I will rejoice And be glad in it, and be glad in it." As we come up to the Lord's house and worship on Sundays, we can and should be sorrowful because our sins are exposed before God's holy presence. But even this sorrowful cannot be our strength.

### (3) In order to rejoice in the Lord, we must understand the Word of God.

Look at Nehemiah 8:12 – "Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them." When the Israelites listened to the advice of Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites, who made them understand the Mosaic Law, their tears and sorrow ceased, and they rejoiced greatly. The reason is because the Israelites clearly understood the words they had heard (v. 12). In other words, it was the clear knowledge of the Law of Moses that made the Israelites' sorrow, tears, and anxiety disappear. The Mosaic Law makes us realize our sins, bringing us tears and sorrow of repentance (Rom. 3:20). They came to know clearly that they could not be saved by the Mosaic Law. Here we must listen to Galatians 3:24 – "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." The Mosaic law gives us a sense of sin, that is, realizes sin, but it cannot save us. However, the Law of Moses points to Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:24). In other words, through the Mosaic Law, you will realize your sins, and you will be justified through faith in Jesus Christ, whom the Mosaic Law points to. The Israelites, who clearly understood this truth, stopped their sorrow, tears, and sorrow and rejoiced greatly. The reality of many of us Christians is that there are not many people who are in tears and sorrow while repenting of their sins because their hearts are pricked by listening to the word of God. We need

to go one step further in this stage, but we are not able to do so. In other words, the stage of repentance of hearing the Word and realizing sin is the beginning stage, not the final stage. The final stage indicated by God's Word is Jesus Christ. In other words, the forgiveness of sins and salvation in Jesus Christ. Like the Israelites, believers who clearly know the Word of God look to Jesus Christ whom the Word of God points to with faith. Therefore, as they shed tears of repentance by believing in the power of the blood of the cross of Jesus Christ, they enjoy the blessing of peace in which the Lord removes all sorrow and worry from their hearts.

The Israelites celebrated the Day of Atonement every year and rejoiced because the Lord had dealt with their sins (Lev. 16) and that they were forgiven. According to the Jewish calendar, the Feast of Tabernacles comes after the Day of Atonement. The Feast of Tabernacles is a week-long festival held by God's people (23:26-44). The order of importance is this: conviction, cleansing, and celebration. The fact that the Israelites heard and understood the Law of Moses means that there was awareness of sin, cleansing, and festivals. That is why the Israelites rejoiced greatly (Neh. 8:12). So, what should we do?

(1) We must listen to the word of God with a longing heart.

This means that we must be still before God and listen to his words (v. 11).

(2) We must clearly understand that Word.

We must ask God the Holy Spirit to make us understand the Word of God. Therefore, we must meet Jesus Christ through the Word of God. Only Jesus can wipe away the tears of our repentance and remove the anxiety from our hearts. Only the Lord is our joy. And rejoicing in Him is the true strength of Christians.

If we look at the book 'You Must Be Careful When You Have Power' by Pastor Yeong-jo Ha, Pastor Ha says 4 things about "true power". About the fourth of them he said (Internet): 'Fourth, true strength comes from God. When we live for the glory of that God, we enjoy Him. And when we rejoice and be glad in God, we can truly confess what the psalmist said in Psalms 18:1 – "I love you, O LORD, my strength."

# Applying the Word Bible study

## [Nehemiah 8:13-18]

It is said that there are words that came about when unemployment among middle-aged and elderly people soared in Korea 2003 due to the economic recession (Internet): 'O-ryuk-do' (thieves who work until the age of 56) and 'Sa-o-jeong' (retirement age at 45) became popular, and as unemployment among young people became serious, 'Lee Tae-baek' (mostly in their 20s were unemployed) and 'Sam-pal-sun' (early retirement at the age of 38). Originally, 'Sa-o-jeong' was said to be one of the escort monsters (?) of the third Xuanzang in Journey to the West. However, the current Sa-o-jeong is used to refer to 'a person who misunderstands words' and 'a person with a different thought pattern'. It is used to mean that a person does not listen properly and says something else. There is a series of Sa-o-jeong that I found in the Bible: A woman was caught committing adultery. People seized her and brought her to Jesus. People were making a lot of noise to test Jesus. But Jesus sat quietly on the floor and wrote something. Then people just started to disperse. Someone in the middle said, 'Why are you going?' People... 'Um... he said that the man without a stone should hit her ...' Then another said: 'No, look at that writing! He used the names of the men who went to her house!' So, people were freaking out and were just leaving. But suddenly Sa-o-jeong was running towards them with a stone in his hand. People asked Sa-o-jeong: 'What are you doing?' Then Sa-o-jeong: "Isn't that Stephan over there? (Internet)

I don't know if the Sa-o-jeong series found in this Bible can make us laugh a little. But I think it's something that can never be laughed at. In particular, if we interpret the words of the Bible according to our own will and live our lives claiming that we have received grace according to our own will, how can we laugh at this? It's something to weep over. But now this is happening. It is common to live by interpreting the Word of God according to one's own will and furthermore, applying it according to one's own will. What should we do? We must study the Bible properly. We must study the Bible diligently. So, I would like to think about three principles for Bible study based on the words of Nehemiah 8:13-18.

**The first principle of the applying the Word Bible study is to gain insight into the words of God.**

Look at Nehemiah 8:13 – “Then on the second day the heads of fathers' households of all the people, the priests and the Levites were gathered to Ezra the scribe that they might gain insight into the words of the law.” ‘On the second day’ that is, the first day of the seventh month, which is the first day of Nehemiah 8:1-12, the Lord’s holy day, the second day after the Sabbath, we now see the Israelites gathering again to gain insight into the words of the Law of Moses. To put it in words now, the whole congregation gathered during the 11:00 worship service on a Sunday to listen to the word of God through the pastor and return home in an enlightenment. On the following Monday, we can think that the leaders of the church and the head of the family gathered to study the Bible in order to gain the insight into the Word of God. This is the result of true renewal. On the first day, the holy day of the Lord, the Israelites listened to the Law of Moses for about six hours. Through this renewal, true reformation took place for those who had fallen over and mourned and wept over their disobedience because they were convicted of their sins through the law. Spiritual awakening comes first, followed by reformation. In other words, when repentance and a new life begin, reformation will follow (White). This is exactly what happened to the Israelites in the days of Nehemiah. A spiritual awakening, tears of repentance, and the beginning of a new life created a longing for the Word of God. As they repented of their disobedience and cleared their lives, the true reformation in their hearts, the work of returning to the Word of God, began. Why did they regroup around Ezra the priest and the scribe? The reason is because they believed the words of Deuteronomy 8:3 – “... to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

Pastor Dong-won Lee said: ‘The procession of people staggering toward this word of truth, discovering that my soul can never be renewed through this word unless this word touches my soul deeply. This is revival’ (Lee). I dream of this procession of revival. A procession of people running toward the word of the Lord. To do so, first of all, pastors, church leaders, and teachers must have a keen interest in and understanding of the Word of God that they want to gain insight (White). We must experience the sweet taste of God’s Word.

**The second principle of the applying the Word Bible study is to obey the commands of God.**

Look at Nehemiah 8:14 – “They found written in the law how the LORD had commanded through Moses that the sons of Israel should live in booths during the feast of the seventh month.” The Israelites who gathered around Ezra the priest and the scribe in order to gain insight into the words of the law found God’s commands in the book of the law. That command was none other than the word, ‘On the Feast of Tabernacles, build and dwell in booths.’ So, the Israelites obeyed God’s command. Here we have to think about something called “the Feast of Tabernacles”. This holiday, called “Sukkot” in Hebrew, begins on the fifth day after the Day of Atonement and lasts for seven days. The Day of



Atonement has a solemn atmosphere as an awe-inspiring day, while the Feast of Tabernacles, a festival, creates a much more joyful atmosphere. The most noteworthy thing about the Feast of Tabernacles is the making of a hut or tent called 'Sukha' in Hebrew. The reason for making booths is to let people know that God made them dwell in booths when he brought them out of the land of Egypt (Lev. 23:43) (Internet). It was an event to commemorate the fact that the ancestors of the Israelites lived in tents in the wilderness after leaving Egypt (Park). That's why we see the Israelites obeying God's command to build booths to keep the Feast of Tabernacles: "So they proclaimed and circulated a proclamation in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, 'Go out to the hills, and bring olive branches and wild olive branches, myrtle branches, palm branches and branches of other leafy trees, to make booths, as it is written'" (v. 15, commandment) and "So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof, and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God, and in the square at the Water Gate and in the square at the Gate of Ephraim' (v. 16, obedience).

A famous theologian said this: 'When you hold on to the Bible, then you start studying the Bible. And that is how I started my life of faith. But when the Bible holds you back, you enter into a life of faith in earnest, and that is the completion of Bible study' (Lee). That makes sense. At first, I run to hold on to the Bible. But in the end, the Bible study is complete when the words hold onto me and cause me to run. It is no longer I who have lived, but the Word of God is living and working in me. A Christian who is led by the Word while experiencing the power and power of the Word is the fruit of true Bible study. I sincerely hope and pray that this work of Bible study will be in our church this year.

### **The second principle of the applying the Word Bible study is to taste great joy in applying the Word of God.**

Look at Nehemiah 8:17 – "The entire assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in them. The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day And there was great rejoicing." Why did the Israelites rejoice greatly? The leaders who gathered around Ezra, the priest and the scribe, gained insight into words of the law of Moses, rejoiced greatly because they obeyed God's command to build and dwell in booths on the Feast of Tabernacles. In order to better understand the Israelites who rejoiced greatly in obeying the Word, we need to know another important meaning of "the Feast of Tabernacles." Another important meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles was thanksgiving and praise to God who made the land bear fruit and made the land exist. Therefore, the Feast of Tabernacles is also called the 'Feast of Thanksgiving'. Remembrance of the tabernacles and thanksgiving for the harvest are combined into one and expressed as the time of joy. Thanksgiving of true joy comes from faith in God, who gives us harvests in the midst of successive seasons and also enables our ancestors to survive the trials (Internet). 'The reason why they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles with joy is that through the commemorative event, they recall the love and power of Jehovah revealed in the wilderness and move forward in faith (Park). Also, after reaching the promised land in the wilderness and tasting the fruit there, at the time of harvest, the Israelites were to build a tent with palm branches and leaves and stay in it for a week (Leviticus 23:33-

43). The Israelites build a hut and stayed in it for a week, rejoicing greatly (White). In particular, since this was the first time the Israelites had celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles together in such a grand manner from the time of Joshua to that day, they were very happy. This was the fundamental cause of the great joy of the Israelites who kept the Feast of Tabernacles according to the Law of Moses. It was none other than the joy of obeying the law. The eighth day, the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, is called 'Simchat Torah' in Hebrew, which means 'the joy of the Torah'. On this day, the most solemn ceremony of the year is celebrated in the synagogue, where all the scrolls of the Torah are removed from their chests and paraded around the synagogue seven or more times. Children also participate in the procession, carrying flags and singing songs. After the service, children were given candy or sweet fruit as a reminder of Psalms 19:10 – “They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb” (Internet). So, as in today's text, Nehemiah 8:18, one of the Feast of Tabernacles God gave to the Israelites, Ezra read the book of the law of God every day from the first day to the end, and the Israelites listened to the words of God that were sweeter than much gold and sweeter than clusters of honey.

Do we have this great joy now? Just as the Israelites kept the Feast of Tabernacles with great joy because they all obeyed the Law of Moses, do we really have great joy in keeping this holy Sunday, the Lord's Day? Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Lord of the Lord's Day, we are advancing toward the land of promise, the heavenly city, and we celebrate this week with gratitude for the love and power of the Lord who abundantly fills us with grace to help in times of need in a world like the wilderness. Are we celebrating with great joy? Although we are living in this wilderness-like world and are wearing the tabernacle of the flesh, sooner or later, on the day of the Lord's return, on the day we meet the Lord, we will take off this tabernacle of the body and build a house that God built, not made with hands, but an eternal house in the heavens. Because we have the faith to enter into the house build by God in heaven (2 Cor. 5:1), we are truly celebrating together with great joy as we praise and worship God this Sunday. We will dwell there for eternity, not for seven days, in the eternal tabernacle that God has built in heaven. We will celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles forever in heaven, not in this world.

# The problem of sin

## [Nehemiah 9:1-5]

Pastor Dong-won Lee said in his book 'Acts of Repentance': 'As a layman, C.S. Professor Lewis diagnosed the era we live in as an era in which the spirit of seeking has been lost' (Lee). One of the proofs is that modern people no longer have a serious approach to sin. It means that there are not that many people who are troubled and in pain because of their sins, and who shed tears to try to overcome their sins. That is why there are so many believers who do not experience the thrill of being saved from sin or the joy of overcoming sin.

What do you think of this word? Are we worried about our sins? Are we struggling to overcome our sins? Now fewer and fewer believers are humbly listening to sermons pointing out sin. Now the word "sin" may be in danger of disappearing. As 2 Timothy 4:3 says, "the time will come." That time is none other than the time when people do not receive sound teaching, and their ears have itching, so they have many teachers to follow their own desires. We are closer to sin than to the Lord. Now we live a life that is more closely related to sin than to the word of the Lord. If we look at the annotation "Be Determined", it says: "Separation without devotion to the Lord becomes isolation, but devotion without separation is hypocrisy" (Wiersbe). How many Christians live in isolation? They struggle to keep their faith separate from the world and sin, but in the end, this separation without devotion to the Lord puts them in a state of isolation. So, it seems that there are many Christians who have cut off fellowship with their neighbors and live a lonely life alone. But more than these isolated Christians are probably Christians who live a hypocritical life. There are countless Christians who profess with their lips that they have dedicated themselves to the Lord, but live in harmony with the world and enjoy the things of the world. Aren't we such Christians? Too many of us Christians live without enjoying true freedom of heart. Because of the problem of sin, we cannot enjoy the peace that God gives, and our hearts are bound by the chains of "guilt." That is why I personally hold onto the words of Psalms 119:32 more and more. The Bible says that when we run toward the Lord's word (commandment), the Lord sets our hearts free. I would like to think about how to solve the problem of sin in two ways, focusing on the words of Nehemiah 9:1-5.

**First, we must separate ourselves from the world in order to solve the problem of sin.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:2a – “Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. ....” Separation in heterosexual relationships, is it possible? When I was ministering in Korea, some sisters in Christ had a conversation about heterosexual relationships with non-believers. It was possible to get a glimpse of what everyone was worrying about in the conversation. When one of the three sisters asked what to do with men who do not believe in Jesus, I advised them to break off heterosexual relationships based on 2 Corinthians 6:14, “Do not be yoked with unbelievers.” At that time, what I usually hear is, ‘Pastor, my boyfriend doesn't believe in Jesus right now, but after we get married, can't I bring him to church and make him believe in Jesus?’ In other words, she was asking if it would be okay to evangelize her boyfriend after getting married. What do you think?

The problem in the days of Ezra-Nehemiah was the mixed life with the Gentiles. So, Ezra said to the Israelites: “Now make confession to the LORD, the God of your fathers, and do his will. Separate yourselves from the peoples around you and from your foreign wives” (Ezra 10:11). Among the mixed life with the Gentiles, the one that was particularly problematic was the marriage to the Gentile woman, or, in today's words, the marriage to an unbeliever. In the end, King Solomon also sinned against God by marrying foreign women and serving their foreign gods. Paul's logic is clear. Look at 2 Corinthians 7:14b-16a: “... For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? ....” What do believers and non-believers have in common? How can we be in harmony with God and idols? Are we trying to achieve harmony in serving God and money together? How can light and darkness be friends? This is pointless! When God created the heavens and the earth, He divided the light from the darkness (Gen. 1:4). Children of light and children of darkness cannot mix. As children of light, we must not engage in the works of darkness, but rather rebuke them (Eph. 5:7).

Do you know why water and oil don't mix? This is because the properties of the two materials are different. ‘Water molecules have a very weak electric charge. This electricity is not an intensity that we can feel, but it is an intensity that cannot be ignored in the world of molecules. Therefore, water molecules mix well with molecules that are similar to them, that is, molecules that are charged with electricity. This is because electrically charged molecules attract each other well, just like small bar magnets lined up. On the other hand, oil molecules do not carry electricity. Therefore, the water molecules do not mix with each other. On the other hand, oil molecules mix well with molecules that are similar to them, that is, molecules that do not carry electricity. This is because non-electric molecules mix well with non-electric molecules. However, sometimes water and oil mix. This happens when a substance that mixes well with water and mixes well with oil is sandwiched between them. That substance is soap. Soap molecules are elongated, with one end slightly

electrically charged and the other part uncharged. Therefore, soap molecules are miscible with water and with oil. For this reason, if you use soap, you can dissolve oil stains in water and wash them' (Internet). The main component of soap is a surfactant. Surfactants have a structure like a match, with a lipophilic hydrocarbon part that is highly soluble in oil at the head and a hydrophilic carboxyl group that is soluble in water at the tail. Surfactants are characterized by removing surface tension, which is the force that attracts water molecules to each other to minimize the surface. According to the container of oil and water, you can see that the oil is in the upper layer and the water is in the lower layer without mixing. The water and oil separate into two layers because surface tension minimizes the area where they touch each other. If you add soap solution here and stir well, the oleophobic part dissolves in oil and the hydrophilic part dissolves in water, removing the surface tension of water, so water and oil mix (Internet). The world we live in is like this "soap." Just as soap removes the surface tension of water to mix water and oil, this world keeps tempting to remove the 'surface tension of light' and eventually mixes it with 'molecules of darkness'.

How should we live in this world? In this world that is like "soap," we must live separately like water and oil.

(1) We must have a clear sense of belonging.

We must remember that we are not of this world. Look at John 17:16 – "They are not of the world, even as I (Jesus) am not of it."

(2) We must pray not to fall into evil.

Look at John 17:15 – "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one."

(3) We must strive to become holy through the truth.

Look at John 17:17 – "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

**Second, we must confess our sins in order to solve the problem of sin.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:2-3: "Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers. They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God." On July 24, three weeks after the Feast of Tabernacles, all the children of Israel gathered together and stood for about three hours to read the Law of Moses, and for another three hours they fasted, clothed in sackcloth, and covered in dust, and confessed their sins and the transgressions of their ancestors (vv. 1-3). Here, clothed

in sackcloth and covered in dust is a sign of mourning, and it is said that ancient Israel expressed sorrow externally like this (Gen.37:34; 1Sam. 4:12; 2Sam. 1:2, 3:31, 21:10) (Park). This fact is rather interesting. The reason is, in Nehemiah 8:9, on the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites, who had heard and understood the Law of Moses through Ezra, wept at the Water Gate Square for about six hours. We may be a bit puzzled why the Israelites, who had kept it with joy, externally expressed sorrow because of their sins and the sins of their ancestors in today's text again after about three weeks. It is probably because after the Israelites enjoyed the Feast of Tabernacles, they naturally remembered their sins and wickedness (Fensham). So, the Israelites confessed their sins.

So, what does it mean to “confess” your sin here? Pastor Kwang-Hyun Park's interpretation of the original language says the meaning of “confession” in today's text (Internet): ‘Confession longs for God’s hand of love, acknowledges and confesses one’s sins and transgressions that deviate from God’s will, mourns, shakes off one’s sins, stretches out one’s hands with the conviction of forgiveness, praise and worship God.’ Here, we can apply 5 things to the fact that the Israelites confessed their sins: (1) It is to admit that we deviated from God's will. (2) It is to confess our deviation from God's will. (3) It is to grieve for our sins and transgressions that deviated from God's will. (4) It is to cast off our sins. (5) It is to praise and worship God with the assurance of forgiveness. Of these five application principles, I would like to think more about the last three. What do you think of the third principle, tears of repentance? Dr. Park Yun-sun said: ‘It is good for modern people to control their sad emotions, but this is a bad thing that paralyzes the emotional aspect of personality. Modern people often laugh at things that should be sad. The hearts of those who express no sorrow are liable to harden’ (Park). I think it makes sense. We modern people seem to be getting used to our hearts being hardened because we do not express our sorrow when we should be sad. Next, the fourth principle is that we must cast off our sins. We all know this, but we cannot cast our sins, but rather seem to be close to it. The psalmist was close to the word of the Lord (Ps. 119:31), but it seems that there are many times when we live a life that is rather close to sin. What could be the cause? I am reminded of the second half of Genesis 6:5 – “... every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.” One last thing I want to think about is praising and worshiping God with the conviction of forgiveness. Looking at Nehemiah 9:3b, the Bible says that the Israelites worshiped the Lord their God. In particular, in verses 4 and 5, the names of the Levites are listed. At that time, their job was to lead public worship, mainly crying out to God in prayer (v. 4). What is interesting is that all of these names are related to the name of Jehovah (Park): “Jeshua” - Yahweh saved, “Kadmiel” - God is first, “Bani” - Yahweh created, “Shebaniah” - Jehovah has restored me, “Sherebiah” - Jehovah has opened. These Levites said to the Israelites: “... Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting. " "Blessed be your glorious name, and may it be exalted above all blessing and praise” (v. 5).

I had a conversation with my mother-in-law this week. Thursday morning, while I was sleeping, her wife suddenly entered the room and said with tears in her eyes that the lump on her mother's body was malignant. In other words, breast cancer. Seeing her wife kneeling in front of me, unable to send her first son, Dillon, to school, I closed my eyes and tried to pray. I called my mother-in-law when I

saw that my wife was dropping off our son, Dillon, at school. Thankfully, my mother-in-law's voice was clear and she also said that cancer was a "great gift" from God. My mother-in-law told me that she wanted God to take out all the 'sinful things' in her heart through this "great gift." So, I told my mother-in-law that I wanted to pray with her, even over the phone, and then prayed to God. Based on Genesis 7:23 preached during the Wednesday Prayer Meeting, I declare with faith that God, who wiped out everything except people and animals in Noah's ark with water, has already wiped out all our sins through the blood of Jesus on the cross. And I prayed to God so that we could come before Heavenly Father's throne of grace. God wants to solve the problem of sin in the soul even in the midst of physical pain. Just like cutting off cancerous cells, God cuts off our sins, but makes us confess them so that in the end, we will praise and worship the Lord our God.

# God who fulfills His word

## [Nehemiah 9:6-8]

There is a French proverb that goes like this: 'People count the faults of those who keep them waiting.' This statement applies to the appointment time. In other words, being late for an appointment is more costly than you think. It's because you can buy the other person's hatred with something insignificant (?). If you look at the Internet site called "Money Today", you will find a story about Chairman Jae-joon Lee, the founder of Daelim Industrial, told by his aide: I once went on a trip to China with him. I went out at the appointed time, but the president was already there. I was perplexed. The next day came 7-8 minutes ahead of time, but the president was still there. I had no choice but to leave about 20 minutes early the next day. Then, after a while, the president came out. I looked at my watch and it was exactly 15 minutes ago. Later, I asked the chairman why he came out so early. Then he said this. 'I make it a rule to leave 15 minutes earlier than the scheduled time. The reason for this is: First, if you leave early, you can maintain a relaxed mind because you are not in a hurry. Second, if you leave early, you can buy the other person's favor. Third, if you go out early, you can take the subway or bus, but if you hurry, you have to take a taxi, so it's economically good (Internet). Being on time may seem like a small thing. But it is by no means trivial. It is because the meaning of 'I treasure my promise with you, I value your personality' is hidden in it (Geun-tae Han).

There are also very valuable promises in our life of faith. That is the promise between God and me. I think you can think of this promise in two ways: What God promises to me and what I promise or pledge to God. When we think about the second one first, we have to ask the question, 'Are we really keeping the vows we made to God?' Look at Ecclesiastes 5:4-5: "When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it." The promise we want to focus more on today is the promise God gives us. Heavenly Father, who redeemed us with the blood of Jesus, is the God who cherishes and honors us and gives us promises.

Furthermore, our God is the God who fulfills His promises according to His Word. Centering on



today's text, Nehemiah 9:6-8, I would like to meditate on two things about what kind of God the God who fulfills according to His words is under the title "God who fulfills His word."

### **First, God who fulfills His word is the God who gives the word of promise.**

What was the word of promise that God gave to Abraham? It was that He would give the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendants. Look at Nehemiah 9:8 – "You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. ...." In order to solve the problem of sin, the children of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners and worshiped God while confessing their sins and the sins of their ancestors (9:1-5). Then, starting from Nehemiah 9:6, God's goodness to Israel is specifically mentioned. The key word that comes up repeatedly in this reference to God's goodness is "give." This word appears at least 16 times in Nehemiah 9 alone. The reason is because our God is the God who richly gives us all things to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17). He is truly a giving God. God gave the Israelites the land (Neh. 9:8, 15, 35), the law (v. 13), the "good Spirit" (v. 20), the food and the water (vv. 15, 20), and also "deliverers" (v. 27) and gave them victory over their enemies (vv. 22, 24). The word of God's promise to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants has already been written in Genesis 15:18-21. But interestingly, if we look at Genesis 15:13-16, we will find 4 surprising facts about God's promise to Abraham:

- (1) It is the fact that the descendants of Abraham will serve the Egyptians while being afflicted by them for 400 years as "strangers in a country," that is, as aliens in Egypt.

Look at Genesis 15:13 – "Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years." This fact teaches us that there is suffering and hardship until the word of promise is fulfilled.

- (2) It is the fact that the descendants of Abraham will come out of Egypt with "great possessions" after experiencing the power of God.

Look at Genesis 15:14 – "But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions." This fact teaches us to experience God's power and provision in the process of fulfilling the word of promise.

- (3) It is the fact that Abraham himself will not see the fulfillment of the promise.

Look at Genesis 15:15 – "You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age." This fact teaches us that the word of promise may not be fulfilled in his generation. So, Hebrews 11:13a says: "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not

receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. ....”

(4) It is the fact that we have to wait about 400 years for the word of promise to be fulfilled.

Look at Genesis 15:16a – “In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here ....” This fact teaches us that considerable patience of faith is required until the word of promise is fulfilled.

These facts teach us what causes us to fail to hold on to God's word of promise. The word of God's promise to our church is Matthew 16:18 – “... I ... will build My church ....” We can think of three causes that prevent us from holding on to the word of promise:

(1) The first cause is hardship and suffering.

Like the Israelites in the days of Nehemiah, in building the church, which is the body of the Lord, they worked hard to rebuild it, but the enemies ridiculed, threatened, attacked, and there was a conspiracy to assassinate the leader. And because there are so many trials in the process of experiencing economic difficulties, there is a good risk that we will get tired of the trials and give up holding on to the word of promise that the Lord has given us.

(2) The second cause is that we do not experience God's power and provision.

During this year, if we have not experienced the power and provision of the Lord who is building the church, we may no longer hold on to the word of promise that the Lord will build His church.

(3) The third cause is lack of patience in faith.

It took the Israelites about 400 years for the promise given to Abraham to be fulfilled. How long is this? This is something that requires a lot of patience and faith. It also applies to our church. When the Lord promised to build this church, we must persevere in faith.

‘The person who meets the promise is the person who meets the impossible. Even in all impossible situations, those who hold on to the promise see the possibility hidden in it’ (Internet). Are you one of those who hold on to His promise? Do you see the possibility hidden in impossible situations? No matter what situation we are in, we must hold on to the Lord's word of promise. And no matter what hardships and sufferings we may experience, we must build the church, the body of the Lord, with the patience of faith while experiencing God's power and provision.

**Second and last, “God who fulfills His word” is the God who fulfills the word**

## **of promise.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:8 – “You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous.” What does “covenant” mean here? The literal meaning of the Hebrew word for “covenant” is “cut.” In Genesis 15:17, Abraham obeyed God's command and took a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon (v. 9), and took them all, and cut them in half, and arranged the halves opposite each other (v. 10). Then, when the sun has set and it is dark, “a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces” (v. 17). Then, in verse 18, there is a scene in the Bible where God makes a covenant with Abraham and promises to give him the land of Canaan flowing with milk and honey. What does this mean? Originally, when this covenant was concluded, the two parties to the covenant had to pass between the pieces of meat. The reason was to make a solemn oath that if they did not keep the covenant, they would be killed like a piece of meat. But here, only the torch sent by God passed between the pieces of meat. This is God's one-sided promise. Also, it contains a strong will that God will directly fulfill the promise (Ki-joo Kim). The word “covenant” consists of two things. It is “God's promise” and “human obligation”. God's promise to Abraham was to make him a great nation, to make his name great, and to make him a source of blessing. To Abraham, who did not even have a son, God gave the word of promise that he would make a “great nation.” His name was “Abram,” meaning “exalted father,” but God promised to change his name to “Abraham,” which means “father of a multitude,” and make him great. He also gave the word of promise that he would bless others through those who had not been blessed. What, then, was Abraham's responsibility? His responsibility is said in Genesis 12:1 – “... Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.” In other words, Abraham's responsibility was to believe in God's word of promise, hold onto it, and obey it. “So Abram left, as the Lord had told him” (v. 4). So, he obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going (Heb. 11:8).

Today's Bible, Nehemiah 9:8a, tells us our human responsibility: “You found his heart faithful to you, ....” In other words, in the midst of making a covenant, our human responsibility is to keep our hearts faithful before the Lord. But why do we, like Abraham, doubt the word of promise God gave to our church? Why are you living a church life that denies the word of Matthew 16:18 that the Lord will build His church? The reason is because we are not growing in the knowledge of God. It is because we don't know who God is. It is doubt, indifference, and disloyalty that come from ignorance. In today's text, Nehemiah 9:6, what kind of God does the Bible say our God is? It says four things: (1) He is the only God [(v. 6a) “You alone are the Lord ...”]. (2) God is the God who created the heavens and the earth [(v. 6b) “... you made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them ...”]. (3) God is the God who preserves what He created [(v. 6c) “... You give life to everything ...”]. (4) God is a God worthy of worship [(v. 6d) “... and the multitudes of heaven worship you”]. (5) God is a righteous God [(v. 8b) “... You have kept your promise because you are righteous”]. Why is God a righteous God? The reason is because He is the God who fulfills His promises to us.

God has given our church the word of His promise, Matthew 16:18 - "... I ... will build my church. ...." Our righteous God is fulfilling this promise. What is our responsibility? Our responsibility is to believe this word of His promise. Also, we must hold on to this word and obey it in faith like Abraham did. We must follow the word of promise given to us by the Lord by faith. How should we follow it? Our hearts must follow with faithful before the Lord.

It is said that Kanzo Uchimura, a famous Japanese theologian, was stripped of his teaching job as a teacher at the Tokyo First High School for refusing the order of the Japanese emperor to give him an 'educational title.' At that time, when they heard the sound of reading the title of education, everyone stood up and listened attentively. However, Uchimura insisted that the emperor was also a human being and there was no need to pay respect to God. He went to America at a young age and studied while washing dishes at a restaurant. Then, when someone asked him, 'Why are you going through all this hardship?' He replied, 'I am not interested in worldly wealth or fame. All I want is to give God greater glory.' He did his best to practice God's good will and expand the breadth of his love in order to give great glory to God. For those who have promised to be faithful to God, what is more important than the wealth and glory of the world is to win the crown after fighting evil spirits. Whoever has given allegiance to the mission entrusted to him by the Lord will participate in the joy and receive the crown of life. The Bible promises, 'Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life' (Rev. 2:10) (Internet).

# God who divides the sea

## [Nehemiah 9:9-12]

There are websites on the Internet that provide maps. For example, if you want to know how to get to church from my house, it will give you the quickest way [it also tells you how many miles (distance) and how long (time) it will take]. If you had a short road and a long road ahead, which one would you choose? Maybe you will take the shorter route. But what would you do if you knew that danger lurked along the way? Would you rather take the long way back or would you rather take the short way even if it is dangerous?

Exodus 13:17-18 tells us that there were two roads on the way from Egypt to the promised land of Canaan: Short way and long way. The shortest way is the way of the land of the Philistines, but there was a “war” if there was any danger lurking on the way. So, God said, “If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt?” So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. Therefore, God did not lead the Israelites through the land of the Philistines, but led them through the wilderness of the Red Sea by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (vv. 21-22). But when the Israelites reached the Red Sea, they felt a crisis. They were very afraid. The reason is because they were in a quandary. The Red Sea in front, and Pharaoh's Egyptian army trying to kill them in the back are approaching. What would you do if you were like the Israelites? The Israelites began to grumble against Moses in fear: ‘Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Didn't we tell you to leave us alone? It is better to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness’ (14:11-12). At this time, Moses said to the Israelites: “... Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still” (vv. 13-14). At that time, the Red Sea was divided, and the sea turned into dry land, and the Israelites crossed the Red Sea (and were saved), and the Egyptian army was completely destroyed. Today, under the title of “God who divides the sea,” I would like to meditate on three things about what kind of God the God who accomplished the work of the Exodus is.

**First, “God who divides the sea” is the God who sees us suffering.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:9 – “You saw the suffering of our forefathers in Egypt; you heard their cry at the Red Sea.” If there is one of the most frequent questions from those who oppose the Christian faith, it is why do those who believe in God suffer? If God is alive, why is he allowing those who believe in God to suffer? However, it seems that not only these people but also we Christians are asking ourselves a similar question: ‘Why do believers in Jesus have to suffer?’ In particular, this question raises the question, ‘Why do the righteous have to suffer?’ in comparison with ‘the prosperity of the wicked’. What do you think? Have you ever asked this similar question?

We see the Levites praising and worshiping God, beginning with Abraham, their ancestor, and praising and blessing the God of their ancestor, the Israelites, in the time of the Exodus in Nehemiah 9:9-12. In the midst of this, they praised and blessed the God who saw the suffering of their ancestors in Egypt and had compassion on them (vv. 9-10) (Park), and the God who heard their cry. The basis for this statement is Exodus 3:7, 9: “The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ... And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.” Here, the Bible clearly tells us that our God is the God who sees our suffering. So why do we think that our God is not seeing us when we are suffering? In other words, why do we not feel God's presence in our suffering? The reason is because the hardships we are going through seem bigger than God.

In the minds of the children in my family, when it comes to how we express the fact that God is great, compared to people or things, we always say that God is greater. Of course, these conversations are when these kids are in the mood. But when we fight, we don't say anything about God, and our daughter, Yeri, often cries. When we think that we are blessed by God, God looks great. However, in the midst of pain and suffering, my tears and wounds seem bigger than God's. The great and mighty God (1:5) who created and preserves the heavens and the earth and is worthy of worship (9:6) is the unchanging God, but we keep changing God's image in the environment of blessings and suffering: A God who is great in blessings and a God who seems small in suffering. Why? It is because of the weak faith that does not acknowledge the God of God and the sovereignty of God. Look at Job. Job possessed the faith to acknowledge God's sovereignty, regardless of whether he was blessed or suffered. What should we do in the midst of suffering? We must believe in a God who allows suffering. Why? They say there are 10 reasons to believe in God who allows suffering (Internet):

(1) The freedom to make one's own decisions entails sufferings.

Freedom is part of being human. A world without freedom of decision would be far worse than a world without suffering. And an even worse world would be one where people can make bad decisions without feeling any suffering.

(2) Suffering warns us of danger.

Without suffering, none of us would be aware of our illness and would not go to the doctor. We humans would not seek God if there were no remorse of conscience, no bitterness over the meaninglessness of our daily lives, no certain pressure of bitterness. And it couldn't be much more satisfying.

(3) Suffering helps us to know ourselves better.

Our capacity to love or hate, to forgive or retaliate, to be heartbroken or to let go, is all especially tested in suffering. When all is well, we cannot know our true strengths and weaknesses.

(4) Suffering sharpens our view of eternity.

If death is the end of everything, a life full of sufferings is not justified. However, if the end of this life is the threshold to eternity, then even the happiest human being in the universe is only a person who has discovered through suffering that the present life is not all that human beings pursue.

(5) Suffering teaches us to let go.

Every new suffering makes this world seem less glamorous. We learn to let go and steadfastly move on to the next life (Eccle. 12:1-14).

(6) Suffering presents an opportunity to trust God.

Job came to the conclusion that he could absolutely trust God, who has power and wisdom and who created the entire universe, even in times of suffering.

(7) God suffers with us.

No one has suffered more than our heavenly Father. No one has ever paid a higher price for this sinful world. No one wept more than He did over the suffering of selfish humanity. No one has suffered as much as Jesus, who paid the price for our sins on the cross and thereby showed how much God loves us.

(8) God's comfort is greater than our suffering.

The apostle Paul asked God several times to take away his suffering. In response, God responded, 'Trust completely in my grace, for my power is especially manifested in you when you are weak.'

(9) In the midst of a crisis, we draw closer to each other.

We remember that we need each other - and above all else we need God. Whenever we find God's comfort in our own afflictions, our ability to help others also grows.

(10) God can turn our suffering into good.

Through the life of Joseph, we can finally say to those who rejected us, hurt us, and sold us into slavery, 'My brothers tried to harm me, but God turned it for good' (Gen. 50:20).

**Second, "God who divides the sea" is the God who strikes our enemies.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:10 – "You sent miraculous signs and wonders against Pharaoh, against all his officials and all the people of his land, for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. You made a name for yourself, which remains to this day." During the time of the Exodus, God saw the suffering of the Israelites and had compassion on them. He heard and answered their prayers in the midst of suffering. What was the answer to that prayer? He struck Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, all his servants, and all the people of the country with 10 "signs and wonders" (disasters). Therefore, He delivered the Israelites from Pharaoh's hand and from Egypt (salvation). However, the interesting fact here is that the reason why God struck Pharaoh, all his servants, and all the people of the country, who caused suffering to the Israelites, was not the answer to prayer, but the Israelites in the time of Nehemiah gave another reason: "... for you knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. ..." (v. 10). This is the same principle as James 4:6 (quote: Prov. 3:34; b. Ps.138:6): "... God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." God knew not only the contents of the prayers of the Israelites, but also the arrogance of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. That was why he destroyed Pharaoh and the Egyptians with 10 plagues.

We can know that God is the God who defeats the proud through the book of James and Pharaoh in Nehemiah 9 of today's text. How, then, can we know Pharaoh's arrogance? In other words, what is human arrogance? In the book of Exodus, there is a repeated phrase that tells us about Pharaoh's arrogance. It is none other than 'Pharaoh hardened his heart' (Exod. 7:13, 22; 8:15; Note: 8:19, 32; 9:7, 12, 35; 10:20, 27; 11:10). What does it mean to harden your heart? It is interpreted in the dictionary as hard-tempered and stubborn. Hardness is an attitude that consciously and willfully solidifies one's position and opinion, as well as an active and subjective attitude. In other words, it's almost instinctive rather than accidental. It refers to a hard heart that closes the door of the heart against the Word and does not break a heart like an old field (Internet). I looked for the answer in Exodus 9:21. It is to ignore the word of the Lord. To not take God's word to heart means not to listen to the word of God or obey it, so do not take the word as your own (Ps. 119:56).

When we suffer because of the proud like Pharaoh, God is a righteous God who strikes down the proud who oppose us. The Bible says that God is the God who resists and strikes those who oppose us. Therefore, God is the God who gains honor (v. 10). In other words, just as God revealed His power, justice, and holiness to Israel's enemies, Pharaoh, and all the Egyptians in the time of the Exodus, so that the Israelites



praised and worshiped Him, in the time of Nehemiah, the Israelites also praised God's holy name. So what are we to do? All we have to do is to bow down humbly to God in the midst of suffering and pray. We must not harden our hearts like our adversaries and try to hit our adversaries. Vengeance must be left to the Lord in prayer. We must listen to the words of Ezekiel 36:26 – "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." As we pray to the Lord for a soft heart and run diligently toward the Lord's word, we must diligently and faithfully break up our hearts like the fallow ground.

### **Third and last, "God who divides the sea" is the God who guides us.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:11-12: "You divided the sea before them, so that they passed through it on dry ground, but you hurled their pursuers into the depths, like a stone into mighty waters. By day you led them with a pillar of cloud, and by night with a pillar of fire to give them light on the way they were to take." The God who saw the suffering of the Israelites in the time of the Exodus and had compassion on them, the God who heard their cries and gained honor by striking the arrogant Pharaoh and the Egyptians with 10 plagues. (v. 9), the Israelites, in the days of Nehemiah, praised the God who divided the Red Sea. Furthermore, they were praising the God who made the Israelites pass through the middle of the sea like dry land and threw all the Egyptian soldiers who had followed them into the waters of the Red Sea. And in the wilderness, they praised God for guiding them along the way with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

Do you have assurance of God's guidance? Just as the Israelites were hemmed in the wilderness in the time of Moses, do you pray with assurance that God will guide you when you cannot find a solution to a problem no matter how much you look around in the midst of your life? Do you believe the words of Proverbs 3:5-6? "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." If "No," why are we not sure about God's guidance? Why? The reason must be that we do not acknowledge God, the Almighty Creator who divided the sea. And the reason why we cannot acknowledge God in every moment of our lives is because we rely on our own understanding. We who rely on our understanding maximize the problems or hardships that lie in front of us rather than looking at the greatness of God, so we are dragged around by those problems or hardships. In other words, rather than experiencing God's presence, companionship, and guidance through His presence in the midst of suffering, we experience the guidance of suffering itself (a life that is led by suffering). An example of this is Sarah in Genesis 16. After 10 years of holding on to God's promise to give her a son, her husband Abraham knew that she could still have a baby (age 85). But she knew that she could no longer have a baby, so she relied on her own understanding. So, she urged her husband Abraham to lie with her maidservant Hagar, and eventually Ishmael was born. However, as a result, a fight broke out in that family, and the fight in the Middle East can also be called a fight between the descendants of Isaac and Ishmael. This result was the result of doubting God's power in an impossible situation and relying on one's own understanding instead of holding on to His promise.

What would you and I do if we faced problems like Moses and the Israelites? Are we 'problem

oriented' or 'solution oriented'? If we look at Brian Tracy's 'The Art of Achieving Goals', there is this article (Internet): Let's not forget that most of the time, you become what you think. When faced with a problem or difficulty, successful people exhibit a special mindset called 'solution orientation'. Successful people spend most of their time thinking about solutions, while unsuccessful people spend most of their time thinking about problems and difficulties. A solution-oriented person seeks ways to get over, around, and through the obstacles that stand in his way. Problem-oriented people resent problems, who or what caused them, and how unhappy or angry they are. A solution-oriented person, on the other hand, just asks, 'How can I solve it?' He thinks about it, and he takes the effort to solve the problem.' There were two groups of people in front of the Red Sea: the "problem-oriented" Israelites and the "solution-oriented" Moses. The problem-oriented Israelites were trapped in the north, south, east, and west, especially when they saw the Egyptian army pursuing them from behind. They thought about their life in Egypt in fear, and when they thought that they were going to die, they complained to Moses and God. However, Moses, the "solution-oriented" leader, prayed to God in a state of being trapped in north, south, east and west. Moses chose the right and best solution. Then he heard God's voice and took his staff and struck the Red Sea, and the sea parted like dry land, and Moses and the Israelites crossed the Red Sea like dry land and were saved. However, the Egyptian army that pursued them was completely submerged in the waters of the Red Sea and died. God is the solution to all our problems! As we rely more and more on God who makes the way of the sea, we must overcome the difficulties of life with faith. Just as God led the Israelites with the pillar of cloud and fire, God the Holy Spirit dwells in us and is leading us to the promised land. So we can praise God for the chorus of the hymn "I Can Hear My Savior Calling": "Where he leads me I will follow, where he leads me I will follow, Where he leads me I will follow, I'll go with Him with Him all the way."

What kind of God is our God? God is the God who was watching Jesus suffering on the cross. However, our God regarded His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, as His enemy and nailed Him to the cross to die. Just as God killed all the first sons of Egypt, the 10th plague, in the event of the Exodus, He killed Jesus, His only begotten Son, on the cross. Why? For our salvation, to give us eternal life, and to guide us to the promised land of heaven through the indwelling Holy Spirit, Jesus, the only begotten Son, died on the cross. Therefore, like the Red Sea in the wilderness, He divides the blocked sea on the way to Heaven, so that we can advance toward the high place today.

# God of heaven

## [Nehemiah 9:13-15a]

Christian A. Schwarz surveyed 1,000 of the healthiest growing churches in 32 countries worldwide and found eight characteristics (Internet): (1) Leadership that develops the spiritual potential of the laity, (2) Gift-oriented ministry given by the power of the Holy Spirit, (3) 'Passionate spirituality' rather than just fulfilling one's religious duties, (4) Functional structure according to the mission of the church, (5) Worship that inspires the work of the Holy Spirit regardless of style and language of worship, (6) Holistic small group activities that apply the message to their specific daily lives rather than just discussing Bible passages, (7) Needs of non-believers focus on evangelism, not "manipulating", and (8) Relationships that do not talk about love, but practice Christian love. How about our church? In order for our church to become a healthy church established by the Lord, what our church is pursuing this year is education. Christian Schwarz's 6th applies: 'Holistic small group activities that apply the message to their specific daily lives rather than just discussing Bible passages.' How do we do this? We can think of it in two ways. (1) We must listen to God's voice. In other words, we must be trained to listen to God's voice through His Word. (2) We must obey the Word. Therefore, we must eat spiritual food well and grow up to become a strong church built on the rock of Jesus.

Centering on Nehemiah 9:13-15a, I took the title of "God of heaven" and thought about what kind of God the God of heaven is in two ways, and how the church the Lord builds can become a healthy church.

### **First, "God of heaven" is the God who speaks with us from heaven.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:13 – "You came down on Mount Sinai; you spoke to them from heaven. You gave them regulations and laws that are just and right, and decrees and commands that are good." God, who delivered the Israelites from Egypt through Moses, divided the Red Sea and led them to Mount Sinai. There, God spoke with the Israelites from heaven and gave them just and right regulations and laws, and good decrees and commands (v. 13). Why did God give the Israelites a just,

true, and good commands from heaven? The reason is because the God of heaven is just, truthful, and good. Among those commands, if we look at verse 14, the fourth commandment of the Ten Commandments, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exod. 20:8) is written: “... You made known to them your holy Sabbath ....” The key here is the fact that the God of heaven is the God who makes known His will to us through His Word.

We need to look at Exodus 19-20 to know this fact more accurately. Look at Exodus 20:22 – “Then the LORD said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites this: ‘You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven.’” What was the reaction of the Israelites at that time? They were afraid. So, they wanted to hear the voice of God through Moses. Look at Exodus 20:19 – “and said to Moses, ‘Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die.’” At that time, Moses told the reason why God had descended from Mount Sinai and spoke to the Israelites. The reason was to “test” the Israelites so that they would fear God and keep them from sinning (v. 20).

Why does God speak with us from heaven? We can think of 3 reasons for this:

(1) God speaks with us from heaven to test us.

One example of this is Genesis 22. In that chapter, God tests Abraham. God calls Abraham to test him (v. 1). Likewise, God is the God who calls us to test us. So, we need to have the thought that we are taking God's test when we listen to God's word. It will be one of two things: If we listen to and obey the Word, we will pass the test. But if we disobey, we will fail. If we pass, it is a blessing. But if we fail, it is a punishment.

(2) God speaks with us from heaven to make us fear Him.

Why did God call and test Abraham? Look at Genesis 22:12 – “‘Do not lay a hand on the boy,’ he said. ‘Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son.’” We must have reverence for God when we hear the word of God. Furthermore, we should be in awe when we hear the word of God.

(3) God speaks with us from heaven to keep us from committing sins.

A holy God does not want us to sin. That's why God gives us a sign like this before temptation comes and we commit sin (For example, the warning given to King Solomon, which offends our conscience). But the clearest sign is the Word of God. God helps us not to fall into the abyss of sin by illuminating and exposing our sins with His holy words and making it clear that they are evil.

Does God still speak with us from heaven like in the time of Moses? The answer is “no”.

However, for us living in the New Covenant era, the indwelling Holy Spirit speaks to us through the Word of God. We must listen to that voice. The personal Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts, speaks to us, and guides our lives. How can we hear the voice of God the Holy Spirit speaking? How can we discern and obey God's voice?

(1) We must thoroughly confess that Jesus is our Lord.

(2) We must have faith that the Holy Spirit lives and works within us to deliver the Word of God to our souls.

There is the voice of the Lord heard during worship, listening to the Word, and praying. God speaks to us. Sometimes He speaks with the inspiration of the Word, sometimes with an inner voice, and sometimes with realization. Sometimes He speaks through the voice of a person of faith, and sometimes He speaks through events.

(3) We must obey the word of God we have heard and act in faith.

To hear what God says to us is to listen and obey. To disobey is to ignore what He said. We must not quench the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit working in us is extinguished, grace and blessings are extinguished.

(4) We must wait for God's time.

There is a time for everything, and God has His times and His ways. Jesus said to pray and not give up.

(5) We must seek the advice of faithful friends of faith.

We need comrades of faith who will pray together, discuss religiously together, and hold on to each other in faith. Being helpful in terms of faith is very beneficial in life and spiritual aspects (Internet).

How should we proceed? Let's all engage in QT (Quiet Time) together. Let's all have a time of devotion! What is QT? QT is a time to meet God through His word. It is a time to hear God's voice through His word. It's about setting aside time (quiet time, quiet place) to commune with God through His word, meditate, and apply the insights gained to enjoy the benefits of God's guidance and life transformation. QT training can be divided into the following steps and methods: prayer and worship, reading the Bible (observing the text), meditation (interpretation), and application (practice). As a guide for meditation, there is the SPACE method (George Muller's method): (1) S: Sins to confess, (2) P: Promises to claim, (2) A: Actions to avoid, (3) C: Commands to obey, (4) E: Examples to follow. Ending

QT with just reading the Bible and knowing God's will is not enough. What's important is taking what we've read today, meditated on, and understood, and applying it to our daily lives—living according to the words of the Bible. This is what we call application. Application is the fruit of QT. Therefore, application is crucial to the extent that we can say QT without application is not really QT. There are three Ps in application: (1) Personal, (2) Practical, (3) Possible. Furthermore, we should develop the habit of recording in our notes the insights and the parts that have deeply moved us from observing and meditating on the Word, as well as the aspects that should be applied to our lives. We should also share them. Sharing means discussing with others what we have received through QT: the messages given to us, the areas in which we need transformation, our issues, and prayer topics, as well as the grace and lessons we have received through meditation. There are spiritual benefits that we can gain through QT: we receive God's guidance, experience spiritual growth and maturity, receive spiritual strength for a fulfilling life, find satisfaction in our souls and abundance in life, gain the ability to overcome sin, live a life that resembles Christ, and live a life within the Word, making it a living Word.

### **Second and last, our "God of heaven" is the God who provides manna from heaven.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:15a – “You provided bread from heaven for them for their hunger, You brought forth water from a rock for them for their thirst, ....” In the time of Nehemiah, the people of Israel are recalling the events of their ancestors during the Exodus period when they were journeying from the wilderness to the land of Canaan. They are confessing how God provided manna from heaven when their forefathers were in the wilderness and how He brought water from a rock when they were thirsty. Look at verse 20b: “... Your manna You did not withhold from their mouth, And You gave them water for their thirst.” What was the manna that God provided from heaven? We cannot know exactly what manna was. It was something like white flakes that appeared on the ground, resembling coriander seed and tasting like honey (Exod. 16:31). Israel could not gather and hoard manna in large quantities. They were only supposed to collect enough for one day (vv. 12-20). If they gathered too much out of greed and tried to keep it overnight, it would spoil; this is what manna was like. However, there was an exception. Since work was not allowed on the Sabbath, they had to gather enough for two days on the day before the Sabbath, and the manna collected before the Sabbath did not spoil (vv. 23-31). Manna was heavenly food. Ultimately, manna can only be understood as a symbolic sign of the food that God provided (internet). The symbolic significance of this manna is none other than Jesus Christ, who becomes the bread of life. After performing the miracle of feeding the five thousand, Jesus taught the people who followed Him that He is the bread from heaven, giving people eternal life (Jn. 6:33). The core of His teaching is that He is the bread that came down from heaven. Look at John 6:51 – “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” Here, eating the bread of life means believing in Jesus Christ (v. 29).

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, who is the bread of life sent from heaven? Do you believe that

eternal life can only be obtained through faith in Jesus? Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst" (v. 35). Only those who believed Jesus Christ, who is the bread of life from heaven, as their Savior and Lord receive eternal life (salvation). Only those who believe in Jesus can enter the promised land of heaven.

Why do so many people in this world continue to spiritually hunger and thirst, wandering and searching to fill that hunger and thirst? We are living in a time when the prophecy of the prophet Amos has come true: "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord God, "when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). Pastor Young-soo Park of Korea's Sungmoon Church once said, 'Why do we feel so spiritually thirsty even though God's word seems more abundant than ever before? We hear the word a lot, but Jesus tells us in Matthew 25 that the reason we wander and search in various directions is simply because believers have not staked their lives on the word. And He specifically outlines this faith in two aspects in verse 24. Namely, without self-denial and taking up the cross. ... Specifically, because we have heard the word without these two things, we have heard it, but our spiritual thirst has not been quenched' (internet). To alleviate spiritual thirst, we must stake our lives on God's word. We must run diligently and faithfully toward His word. When we listen to God's word, we must approach it with a heart that denies ourselves and is willing to bear the cross. Therefore, through obedience to the word, we not only alleviate spiritual thirst but also live a life filled with the word and the Holy Spirit.

# Forgiving God

## [Nehemiah 9:15b-17]

Can you forgive someone who killed your son? While reading Eugene Peterson's "A Long Obedience in the Same Direction," I contemplated the concept of "human relationships." In that passage, I found insight in David's behavior when he distanced himself from his son Absalom after the tragic incident where David's other son, Amnon, killed him. David never truly forgave Absalom, and even after allowing him to return to his city, he didn't seek him out or welcome him back. In other words, David kept Absalom at a distance. Absalom, the son who sought acceptance, personal forgiveness, and the embrace of his father, was refused genuine forgiveness by David. David's forgiveness was impersonal, and he rejected Absalom rather than embracing him. I shared this reflection with my siblings, and one of them responded: 'Who could easily forgive and embrace someone who killed their son? It's challenging enough to forgive once, let alone follow the instruction to forgive not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Is it really possible to forgive someone who killed their son?' Is forgiving the person who killed your son an impossible task?

Who is the most difficult person to forgive in this world? Many people, including us Christians, often say that certain individuals can never be forgiven. However, in my opinion, the most challenging person to forgive in this world is "myself." For instance, when I lived through about a year of torment, burdened by guilt, thinking, "My child Charis died because of my sin," I couldn't forgive myself. When we believe that someone we love died because of our own actions, we can't put that guilt into words. No comforting voice can be heard, only our own inner voice saying, "It's your fault..." That voice torments our hearts. Consequently, we begin a life sentence in an invisible prison. Walking a painful path without true inner freedom and peace because we can't forgive ourselves. What do you think?

In today's passage, Nehemiah 9:15b-17, God is referred to as the "God of forgiveness," or in other words, the "Forgiving God." Take a look at verse 17: "...but you are a forgiving God. ...." Today, I would like to reflect on two things in the context of this verse: (1) Whom does God forgive? (2)



Why does God forgive?

### **Firstly, whom does God forgive? God forgives us, who are proud.**

What is pride? Thomas Aquinas said, 'Pride is the root of all sin' (Aquinas). All other sins stem directly from pride. Pride begets jealousy, anger, and greed. Pastor Dong-won Lee defines pride in three ways in his book 'Acts of Repentance':

#### (1) Pride is an extremely self-centered sin.

A prime example of this is the Pharisees mentioned in the Bible. They were those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt (Lk. 18:9). This differs from healthy self-esteem discussed in psychology. Respecting and valuing oneself is not inherently bad. However, the Pharisees' extreme self-centered love bordered on pathological self-righteousness. Loving only oneself, believing oneself to be righteous, and thus being unable to love and despising others is pride.

#### (2) Pride is the sin of building walls and barriers between oneself and one's neighbor.

In Luke 18:11, when we look at the Pharisee's prayer, he didn't even want to pray together with the tax collector; he separated himself to pray (in a distinct place). Moreover, in his prayer, he repeatedly emphasized that he was not like the tax collector, expressing contempt for the tax collector and displaying the root of pride, which was a deep-seated spiritual superiority within himself. Having an excessively aggressive and critical attitude towards others, failing to see the plank in one's own eye while noticing the speck in others', all of these behaviors are symptoms of pride and involve building walls in one's relationship with neighbors.

#### (3) Pride is the sin of trying to deceive oneself even before God.

When we look at the Pharisee's prayer in Luke 18:11-12, the word "I" is repeated multiple times: "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'" Instead of genuinely praying to God, this is more about boasting and self-promotion. It's about presenting oneself in a self-aggrandizing manner before God, highlighting how exceptional and accomplished one is.

In today's passage, Nehemiah 9:15b-17, the Bible talks about how the Israelites during the Exodus were prideful in the eyes of God. Surprisingly, in Nehemiah 9:10, it mentions the pride of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, which the people of Israel, God's chosen people, seemed to have learned

from. Just as Pharaoh became prideful and hardened his heart, now it was the people of Israel who were prideful and hard-hearted. When did this happen? After God had divided the Red Sea, given the Law on Mount Sinai, provided manna from heaven and water from the rock, the Israelites became prideful. In other words, their hearts became haughty after their stomachs were satisfied. This brings to mind the book of Judges. When they were in need, they sought God, and when God raised up judges to deliver them, they became proud and acted sinfully. Isn't this a reflection of our own behavior? This pride of the Israelites during that time can be summarized in one phrase from today's passage: "stiff-necked." In English, it is written as "Stubborn" (NASB). Look at Nehemiah 9:16-17a: "But they, our forefathers, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and did not obey your commands. They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. ...." This phrase "stiff-necked" in the Hebrew carries the original meaning of rebelling against carrying a load, like oxen resisting carrying a burden. Think about how strong an ox is, and yet, consider the strength it takes for an ox to resist carrying a load. That is precisely what pride represents. Ultimately, because of this sin, the Israelites of the Exodus generation wandered in the wilderness for 40 years and faced their demise (Num. 14:33).

This "stiff-necked" or "being proud" can be thought of more specifically in three aspects based on today's Scripture:

(1) To be proud or to stiff-necked means to rebel, in other words, to refuse to listen.

Look at Nehemiah 9:16b: "... stiff-necked, and did not obey your commands" (Note: Numbers 14:22). During the time of the Exodus, the Israelites did not obey God's commandments. They refused to listen to God's words. In Numbers 15:31, it is written that they despised the word of the Lord. Pride closes our ears. It makes us unable to hear not only the voice of God but also the voices of our loving brothers and sisters (when a pastor is being proud, for instance). The reason is because in the ears of the proud, only self-centered voices, voices of boasting, and the voice of Satan can be heard. How frightening and alarming is that?

(2) To be proud or stiff-necked means to forget, in other words, to refuse to remember.

Look at Nehemiah 9:17: "they refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. ...." During the time of the Exodus, how many amazing wonders did God perform among the Israelites? Despite witnessing these astonishing supernatural acts of God, they refused to remember them. Isn't that astounding? How could they forget so quickly? The reason for quickly forgetting (refusing to remember) God's work on their behalf is to boast about their own actions rather than God's deeds. This applies within the church as well, where you find humble individuals who boast about God's work, and on the other hand, proud individuals who seek to elevate their own achievements. In Numbers 14:11, God says, "...How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not

believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them?" Refusing to remember the wonders God has performed is equivalent to refusing to believe in God.

(3) To be proud or stiff-necked means to desire to go back.

Look at Nehemiah 9:17 again: "... They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. ...." (Ref.: Num. 14:4). During the process of the Exodus, the Israelites even sought to appoint a leader to return to Egypt, where they had been slaves. Why did they do that? The primary reason was that among the twelve men sent to spy out the land of Canaan, all but Caleb and Joshua had given "a bad report" (Num. 13:32). Look at Numbers 13:32-33: "So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, 'The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.'" Therefore, upon hearing this bad report, the Israelites, instead of crying out in prayer, turned their lamentation into grumbling (14:1) and their grumbling turned into rebellion: "All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, 'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?'" (vv. 2-3).

So what are the ultimate consequences of pride?

(1) It leads to the wrath of God.

In His wrath, God disciplines the proud. One form of discipline is described in Psalms 78:33 – "So He brought their days to an end in futility And their years in sudden terror."

(2) It saddens God.

Look at Psalms 78:40 – "How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness And grieved Him in the desert!"

(3) It gives birth to the sin of rebellion (Num. 14:43, Ps. 78:17).

Proud individuals reject God's help and instead seek to return to their former way of life, relying on themselves. Therefore, the inability to receive God's assistance is the tragic outcome of pride. Eventually, God has no choice but to abandon such individuals (Lee).

## **Lastly, why does God forgive us, the proud? The reason is because our God is a forgiving God.**

God cannot but forgive us because our God possesses the nature of forgiveness. Look at Nehemiah 9:17 – "... But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them" (Ref.: Num. 14:19). God's forgiveness of sinners is rooted in His character (Spurgeon). I wholeheartedly agree with this statement. So, what is the nature of the forgiving God? Based on Nehemiah 9:17, we can consider three aspects:

### (1) God is gracious and merciful.

Why do we struggle to forgive each other? Why do we find it difficult to forgive? In short, it's because we often fall short of reflecting God's nature of grace and mercy. One pastor summarized the reason we struggle to forgive as follows: 'It is because we either haven't received God's grace, have forgotten it, or haven't received it in a profound way' (Internet). Joseph was able to forgive his brothers because God's grace was greater than the pain and suffering he endured. It was God's grace that covered the wounds and pain he received from his brothers, enabling him to forgive them. So why haven't we received or forgotten God's grace? The reason is pride. Our pride doesn't see the need for God's grace. The English word for compassion derives from the Latin "pati" and "cum," combining to mean "suffer with." Compassion calls us to go to where there is hurt, to enter places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish together, as Henry Nouwen puts it. The Hebrew word for "compassion" is "rachamim," which means "the womb of Yahweh (God)." Henry Nouwen says, 'How deep, strong, and tender are the feelings that Jesus, in his compassion, moves in our Lord's womb, is a way to express what cannot be said about it' (Nouwen). Through His grace and compassion, God delights in forgiving us, the proud. Furthermore, the faithful and blessing God of forgiveness doesn't see our faults and rebellions (Num. 23:21). Our God eagerly waits to show us His grace because He regards us with compassion (Isa. 30:18).

### (1) God's forgiving nature is characterized by being slow to anger and abounding in mercy.

Look at Nehemiah 9:17 – "... But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. ...." I see this aspect of God's nature in the story of Jonah as well. Jonah 4:2b reads, "For I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity." When the people of Nineveh repented of their sins, Jonah became very angry because he expected God to destroy them (Jonah 3:10). His anger was so intense that he said he would rather die (4:9). However, God spared the repentant people of Nineveh and showed them His rich mercy. What's even more astonishing to me is the scene where God deals with Jonah, His reluctant and angry servant.

Despite Jonah's unrepentant and angry heart, God treats him with patience, richness, and tender love. God causes a plant to grow on the east side of the city to give Jonah shade and comfort as he watches to see what will happen to Nineveh (v. 6). Then, God sends a worm to chew the plant (v. 7) and prepares a scorching east wind to make Jonah's head hot (v. 8). These events show Jonah that he did not labor for the plant or provide for its growth, yet he cherished it. After that, God questions Jonah's indignation over the salvation of more than 120,000 souls in Nineveh (v. 11). The apostle Paul described God's slowness to anger as long-suffering or infinite patience (1 Tim. 1:16). David, in Psalms 63:3, celebrated God's abounding love, considering it better than his life. It's a reminder that God desires to forgive our prideful hearts with His slowness to anger and abounding mercy.

(2) God's forgiving nature, which delights in forgiving our pride, does not abandon us.

Look at Nehemiah 9:17 – "... Therefore you did not desert them." A remarkable scene in Deuteronomy 31 illustrates this. Before the Israelites entered the Promised Land of Canaan, God, through Moses, assured them of His presence, saying, 'The Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you' (Deut. 31:6). However, in verse 16, God says to Moses that He knows the Israelites will forsake Him and break the covenant He made with them. In other words, God knew in advance that the Israelites would forsake Him and violate His promises and commandments. Yet, through Moses, God gave the promise that He would never leave nor forsake them. Can you imagine it? The Father who knew He would be forsaken by His children still declares through His promise that He will never leave nor forsake them.

Why does God not abandon us, the proud, and desire to forgive us? It is because God has loved us and desired salvation for us, even to the point of sacrificing His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, on the cross. God, despite knowing that He would forsake His only begotten Son, did not forsake us, the sinful and proud, but extended His grace to save us and be with us eternally. If we receive this great grace from God, how can we not forgive others, even our enemies?

I still remember when I was an elementary student that I watched the movie 'The Atom Bomb of Love,' which depicted the diary of Pastor Yang-won Son. I cried a lot. However, I learned about the martyrdom of his eldest and second sons through the book 'My Father, Pastor Yang-won Son,' written by his son. On October 19, 1948, amidst the turbulent atmosphere of the liberation upheaval, Yeosu became a stronghold of the rebel forces. The rebel forces used students with a tendency towards wrongdoing to identify and capture reactionaries, which included political figures, members of political parties, the wealthy, and Christians, and they mercilessly massacred them. On October 21, 1948, leftist students relentlessly beat Pastor Yang-won Son's two sons to the point of being covered in blood, calling them 'Jesus followers.' During the attempted execution, Pastor Son's eldest son said these words: 'You can kill my flesh, but you cannot kill my soul! Now, if I die, I will go to heaven, but how will you ever pay for your sins? Repent and believe in Jesus even now.' Then he said, 'If you have any last words,

speaking them.’ At that time, the eldest son of Pastor Son, who was a choir singer, asked to sing one last hymn before they were executed. He chose the hymn "The Bright, Heavenly Way," which goes: "The bright, heavenly way, before me, Lies clearly in my sight; And though sorrows sore beset me, And troubles black as night, At the splendor from the skies Ev-'ry darkling shadow flies, While we trust the grace of Jesus And look ever to that Light." After singing the hymn, when the executioners pulled the trigger, Pastor Son's eldest son began to say, 'Father, my soul...' but couldn't finish his sentence before he was martyred. Witnessing this, Pastor Son's second son, who was still alive, embraced his fallen brother and cried out, 'Brother, Brother, I will follow you to heaven!' He then rose up, carrying his brother, and shouted at the group of killers: 'Why are you shedding innocent blood? Are you not afraid of God's judgment in heaven? Is this acceptable? Repent!' He said, 'My faith is no different from my brother's faith. Shoot me too. I will go to heaven with my brother. I don't want to live in this filthy world. Come, shoot me as you wish.' At that moment, the murderers said, 'Oh, he's even worse than his brother,' 'Such a person cannot be spared,' and attempted to kill him. Pastor Son's second son prayed, 'Father God, please accept my soul. Forgive their sins. Bring them to repentance. And my mother and father...' He couldn't finish his words before he was shot and killed. The one who shot them, known as Cheol-min Kang, fired two more shots during the confirmation execution. During the funeral for the two sons, Pastor Yang-won Son read nine thanksgiving prayers. Among them, the seventh thanksgiving prayer expressed gratitude to God for giving a heart of love to the enemies who had martyred his beloved sons, wanting to make him his son. It said: 'Seventh, I thank God for giving a heart of love to the enemy who martyred my two beloved sons and for wanting to make him my son' (Dong-hee Son). Pastor Yang-won Son obeyed Jesus' command to love one's enemies, making his enemy into his adopted son by sharing the gospel. He truly exemplified the forgiving nature of God. I hope and pray that all of us may live a life that reflects this forgiving nature of God.

# God who guides

## [Nehemiah 9:8-21]

Do you know the word "길치"? While "박치" refers to someone who has no sense of rhythm and can't keep a beat, and "몸치" describes a person who can't dance well, "길치" refers to someone with poor navigation skills, often due to a lack of a sense of direction. It's used to describe someone who can't find their way even on familiar roads. The term "길치" led to the creation of GPS navigation systems, designed to help people, especially those who are directionally challenged, find their way accurately. Despite the economic downturn, the demand for in-car navigation systems is increasing, especially among novice drivers and "길치" individuals who rely on this device to reach their destinations safely. What is the "navigation system" for your life and mine? Many people seem to rely on "blind guides" as their life's navigation system, just as described in Matthew 15:14. It's like one blind person leading another, and the result can be falling into a pit. We should place Jesus Christ as the navigation system for our lives. By doing so, we can walk faithfully in His footsteps, guided by His light, and ultimately reach our destination, which is the kingdom of heaven.

There are five stages to receiving God's guidance:

(1) "YIELD": Yielding means entrusting oneself to God.

It involves letting go of one's desires, ambitions, and cravings and desiring only God's way. Paul prayed while entrusting himself to God, asking, 'What will you have me do?' Isaiah also entrusted himself to God, saying, "Here I am; send me" (Isa.6:8). In the case of Amaziah, the Bible states, 'He volunteered himself for the service of the Lord' (2 Chron. 17:16).

(2) "CONFESS": If we desire to be in God's will, we must confess our hidden sins and seek forgiveness.

We should remember the words of the psalmist who said, "If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,

the Lord would not have listened" (Ps. 66:18). Additionally, we must confess our weaknesses and rely on God's strength (139:23-24). Furthermore, we should confess Jesus Christ before people and acknowledge our faith in Him (Acts 1:8).

(3) "PRAY": We should regularly seek God's guidance through prayer in His presence.

We should firmly hold on to the promise He made to guide us. Our prayers should have the ultimate purpose of glorifying God (Col. 1:9; 4:12).

(4) "STUDY": Dedicate a significant amount of time to studying God's Word.

Kneel down and read the Bible. Ask God to speak through His Word. Meditate on the Scriptures as we read them slowly. Read with expectation (2 Tim. 2:15).

(5) "WAIT": If God does not respond immediately, wait (Ps. 62:6).

If we have prayed for God's guidance and there is no immediate response, waiting right where we are is a part of God's guidance for us. If we truly trust God, we won't be anxious. Isaiah 28:16 says, "he that believeth shall not make haste." God reveals His will to us in various ways. He may use one method or a combination of methods (Internet).

I would like to focus on Nehemiah 9:8-21, centered around the theme of "God who guides," and explore three questions: (1) Whom does God guide? (2) Why does God guide us? and (3) How does God guide us?

**First, whom does God guide? God guides those of us who acknowledge His guidance.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:18 – “even when they cast for themselves an image of a calf and said, ‘This is your god, who brought you up out of Egypt,’ or when they committed awful blasphemies.” For instance, imagine a father's son crosses a river using stepping stones with the father's arm for support and claims, ‘It wasn't God who helped me cross the river safely, but the stepping stones I used.’ How would you react as the father in this scenario? Would you continue guiding your son, or would you abandon him, saying, ‘Then do as you wish’? In today's passage verse 18, the Israelites are acknowledging their first major sin, which was making a (golden) calf and committing idolatry, even referring to it as the God who brought them up from Egypt. This incident is detailed in Exodus 32, where the Israelites made a golden calf, committed the sin of idol worship, and dishonored God. Concerning these actions, the Bible states the following:

(1) Aaron, who was a leader, allowed the Israelites to run wild.



Look at Exodus 32:25 – “Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies.” Aaron, as a leader of the Israelites, should have exercised control over the crowd. However, he failed to do so, ultimately allowing the Israelites to run wild, becoming a subject of ridicule to their enemies.

(2) The Israelites became corrupt.

Look at Exodus 32:7 – “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt.’” Being corrupt implies, first, departing quickly from the way of the Lord (v. 8); second, being stiff-necked (v. 9); and third, behaving wickedly (v. 22). From a corrupt heart, only corrupt actions can emerge. It's when the heart and conscience have become corrupt, professing God with the lips while denying Him through actions. Titus 1:15-16 illustrates this: "... but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good."

Are we any different from the corrupt and wayward Israelites? I think not. We are not much different from the Israelites who, even though they may have professed God with their lips, often denied Him through their actions. We may praise God's guidance and sing His praises. We may pray to Him and speak to one another about Him. But in our actions, we frequently forget and fail to acknowledge His guidance. How can we recognize this? By observing our behavior when faced with difficulties, challenges, and problems, and by seeing how quickly we forget the past work of God's guidance. We can see it in our tendencies to doubt and worry instead of trusting in God's continued guidance. Yet, even when our confidence in His guidance falters, the God who continues to guide us is the same. Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." Despite our tendency to rely on our own understanding rather than acknowledge His guidance, even when we insult God by attributing our journey to a "golden calf," God faithfully continues to guide us today. How great is God's grace and mercy toward us?

**Second, why is God leading us? The reason is because He is merciful God.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:19 – “Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the desert. ....” We have already considered the word "compassion" in English and its Latin roots, which derive from "pati" and "cum," meaning "to suffer together." In other words, compassion urges us to go to places where there is pain, to enter places of suffering, and to share brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish together (Nowen). But the meaning of the Hebrew word for "compassion" is truly remarkable. In Hebrew, it is "rachamim," which refers to the womb of Yahweh (God). The womb's characteristic (wisdom) is that while all other bodily tissues have a function of rejecting foreign substances, the womb readily accepts the fertilized egg (the union of sperm and egg in the fallopian tube) without any rejection response, even allowing the subsequent development of placental blood vessels that penetrate into the uterine lining. The reason for

accepting the penetration of placental blood vessels is to facilitate communication with the mother's blood vessels, providing nourishment and promoting the growth of the placenta. It is important to note that this acceptance is not limitless; after a certain depth of penetration, it inhibits further penetration to prevent the placental blood vessels from circulating throughout the mother's body. Another feature is that while all cells constantly undergo cycles of creation and destruction, the uterine lining secretes hormones to prevent natural cell death for about ten months. Additionally, the uterine lining appears thick and robust in the early stages of pregnancy, but it becomes thin and soft in the later stages to facilitate the baby's movements within the mother's womb (Internet). God's compassion, His wisdom, is like the womb that does not reject but accepts us sinners, just as it does not reject the "foreign substance." Furthermore, just as the womb accepts the penetration of placental blood vessels to provide nourishment and allow the placenta to grow, so too does Jesus Christ accept even the sinful penetration of us sinners. In other words, He bears our sins on the cross to supply us with the bread of life. Therefore, for those who believe in this bread, Jesus Christ, He now no longer prevents the sinful penetration and blocks the communication of sin, so that our body and soul are no longer defiled. Furthermore, just as the uterine lining prevents the natural death of cells during a baby's growth in the womb, and in the later stages of pregnancy, it becomes thin and soft to facilitate the baby's movements, the Holy Spirit of God enables us to live a vibrant faith life within the Lord and allows us to move freely. Through this compassionate God, the Holy Trinity, you and I are receiving God's guidance just like the Israelites.

This merciful God will never abandon us and is the God who guides us. Even if we betray and forsake Him countless times, He desires to protect us and lead us into His embrace. God will never, under any circumstances, leave us alone in this wilderness. The reason for this is that, just as a fetus would die if left outside the mother's womb, God does not abandon these Israelites alone, for fear they would perish, so He never forsakes them but guides them. How do we know this? If we think about the phrase from verse 19 in today's passage, "... you did not abandon them in the desert," it becomes clear. Translated again, it means that He bestows abundant mercy upon us. In other words, it means that He showers us with mercy countless times, not just once or twice. This is the God who always wants to be with us, who does not leave us alone in a world like the wilderness, who desires to share our suffering with us. This God is your God and mine.

### **Third and last, how does God guide us? We can think of it in three ways:**

#### **(1) God illuminates our path.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:19 – "... By day the pillar of cloud did not cease to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take." This is something that happened a week ago. At night, my third daughter, Karis, often comes into our room to play with me before going to sleep in her own room. We play games like falling down on the bed when we say "Bible". On that particular night, Karis didn't want to leave and go back to her room. But I had to tell her it was time to sleep, so I turned off the lamp and lay on the bed. As she was reluctantly walking towards her room in the dark, suddenly there was a loud "thud," and she started crying. The reason

was because without the light, she couldn't see ahead properly and had bumped into the corner of the closet door. I couldn't help but laugh inside while thinking about it. Just like that, without light, we can't walk straight, and we end up walking crooked. Here, walking crooked means, as mentioned in Ephesians 5:8, not walking as children of light. In other words, if Jesus, who is the Light, does not illuminate our path, we cannot bear the fruit of light, which includes "all goodness, righteousness, and truth" (Eph. 5:9). Ultimately, as Paul said, it means becoming involved in the deeds of darkness without bearing fruit (v. 11). How many Christians are involved in the deeds of darkness without bearing fruit? How many Christians live in the darkness of this world and, as children of light, should walk in a way that exposes the deeds of darkness, yet they gradually lose their light and live their faith life dimly? We need to heed the words of the Psalmist: "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Ps. 119:105). We should be guided solely by God's Word. When we receive guidance according to the Word that becomes light on our path, we will be able to walk straight towards the promised land of our heavenly inheritance.

## (2) God teaches us.

Look at Nehemiah 9:20 in today's passage: "You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst." The background of this verse can be found in Numbers 11:17, 25 when Moses, feeling overwhelmed, pleaded with God to let him die because he couldn't bear the responsibility of leading the Israelite people alone. At that time, God commanded Moses to appoint 70 elders to share the burden and placed His Spirit upon them to lighten Moses' load. The "Spirit" in question is referred to as the "good Spirit" in today's verse, which essentially means the "good Holy Spirit." In today's terms, we could say it's like a head pastor who was struggling to shepherd 600,000 members alone, feeling overwhelmed and on the verge of exhaustion, praying to God for help. In response, God appoints 70 elders and fills them with the Holy Spirit, enabling them to share in the ministry and the responsibility of caring for the people. Indeed, after the "good Spirit" (the Holy Spirit) came upon them, what did these leaders teach the Israelite people? They taught them God's good laws and commandments (Deut. 9:13). In other words, Moses and the 70 elders were appointed to teach the Israelite people God's good laws, imparting wisdom and understanding to them. In Nehemiah's time, while the Israelite people confessed their sins, acknowledging the sin of idol worship when they made a golden calf during the Exodus despite God's guidance, they also confessed the grace of God who, despite their past transgressions, allowed the good Holy Spirit to come upon Moses and the 70 elders to teach the Israelite people His good laws. Are they currently confessing and remembering this work in any context? Yes, it is happening right now through the revival of the Word at the Water Gate, led by the Spirit-filled scholar Ezra. As Ezra stands and reads the Law for about six hours a day, standing for seven days, the people are moved to tears (Neh. 9:8-9) and great joy (v. 17). Through the reading of the Word, they come to understand and acknowledge the mercy and guidance of God, who, despite their idol worship in the past, has raised up leaders filled with the Holy Spirit to teach His Word, the law of Moses, and lead them on the right path without turning to

the left or the right, making them His holy people.

How does this word apply to us? To answer this question, we first need to address the question of why God has sent the Holy Spirit to those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. We can find the answer in John 14:26: "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." In other words, God teaches us through the Holy Spirit, who is the author of the Word of God, guiding us on the path we should take. Look at Psalms 32:8: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." The problem is, we often reject the teaching of the Holy Spirit. The cause of this rejection is our pride and stubbornness. Our hearts become hardened, and there is no room for God's Word to enter. A heart that refuses to learn follows the guidance of the world rather than the guidance of the Spirit. It pays more attention to the voice of Satan than the voice of the indwelling good Spirit. Why is that? Look at Hosea 10:12 - "Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of unfailing love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes and showers his righteousness on you." Because we do not break up the unplowed ground of our stubborn hearts and seek the Lord in humble reliance (Hosea 10:13), we refuse the teaching of the Holy Spirit and turn to idols. Nevertheless, we have hope. The merciful God, who is rich in mercy, has given us the promise of His Word through the prophet Ezekiel, and He is fulfilling that promise: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Ezek. 37:26-27). The God who guides us has removed our stubborn and hardened hearts in Jesus Christ and given us soft, new hearts. Furthermore, He has sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts to enable us to obey God's good commandments.

### (3) God nurtures us.

Look at Nehemiah 9:21 - "For forty years you sustained them in the desert; they lacked nothing, their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen." The God who led the Israelites also nurtured them so that they lacked nothing. In other words, God became a good shepherd to the Israelites, providing for their needs so that they lacked nothing. God ensured that their clothes did not wear out, and their feet did not swell. This reminds us of Psalms 23:1, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in need." The God who guided His people through the wilderness and led them to the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey, made sure that they lacked nothing. So why do many believers feel a sense of lack? The reason is often greed. Look at Numbers 11:4 - "The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat!" Influenced by worldly desires and driven by greed, the Israelites, who had been provided with manna from heaven, still complained and craved meat. Similarly, we, as believers, need to remember that God is our good shepherd who nurtures us and provides for our needs. We should not be like the Israelites who, despite being led by the Word of the Lord (Deut. 8:3),

constantly sought worldly desires and complained. Instead, we should follow the guidance of our Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and live by His Word, giving thanks in all circumstances (Phil. 4:11). We must be led by the heavenly nourishment provided by Jesus and the truth of His Word and walk humbly on this path of faith.

A neurophysiologist once conducted an experiment with two groups of mice. In one group, they provided ample food and water, allowing them to sleep whenever they wanted. In contrast, the other group had to navigate a maze, overcome obstacles, and endure challenges, such as electric shocks, to access food and water. After a certain period of nurturing, they examined their brains and discovered a surprising difference. The brains of the mice that grew up in comfort showed signs of lacking brain cells or a decrease in the dendritic branches resembling nerve cells, almost as if they had regressed to a more infantile state. On the other hand, the mice raised in adversity showed no shortage of brain cells, and their nerve cells' dendrites were robustly developed. It was evident through a microscope that maze learning, physical activity, and adversity had vividly activated their brains (Internet). Life, I believe, is like maze learning. Currently, we are on our way to the wedding feast of the Lamb, the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, in this world that resembles a wilderness, amidst trials and tribulations. We cannot go alone without the guidance of God. God's Word illuminates the maze of our lives, and we are heading towards the promised land, our heavenly homeland, where the wedding feast is prepared. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit resides within us, teaching us through His Word as we journey through the maze of life towards our destination, the heavenly kingdom. Our Shepherd, our Lord, supplies our needs, ensuring that we lack nothing as we continue to walk towards the eternal world, the kingdom of heaven where our Lord resides.

# God's "womb"

**“Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the desert. ...” (Nehemiah 9:19a).**

"What is "compassion"? "Compassion" is derived from the Latin words 'pati' and 'cum,' combining to mean 'to suffer with.' In other words, "compassion" urges us to go to the places where there is pain, to enter the places of suffering, and to share brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish together (Nowen). However, the meaning of this Hebrew word "compassion" is quite interesting. The reason is because "compassion" is the Hebrew word 'רַחֲמִים' (rachamim), which has the meaning of 'womb.' It raises the question of why the Bible uses a word that means 'womb' in its original Hebrew when speaking of God's compassion.

Therefore, while searching for information about the womb on the internet, I came across an article titled 'Wisdom of the Womb' and summarized it in three points:

- (1) The unique feature of the uterus is its ability to accept what can be considered foreign substances, specifically the fertilized egg (the modified egg formed when sperm and egg meet in the fallopian tube), without any rejection response. Furthermore, it also accepts the subsequent development of placental blood vessels that penetrate into the uterine lining. The reason for accommodating the infiltration of placental blood vessels is to facilitate communication with the uterine blood vessels, supplying nutrients and allowing the placenta to grow. It's important to note that this doesn't mean the uterus accepts an unlimited infiltration of placental blood vessels. After a certain point, it inhibits further infiltration to prevent the placental blood vessels from circulating throughout the mother's body.
- (2) Another unique feature is that while most cells undergo a continuous cycle of generation and death, the uterine lining secretes hormones that prevent natural cell death for up to ten months.

- (3) Additionally, the uterus initially appears robust and thick in early pregnancy, but as pregnancy progresses, it becomes thinner and more pliable, making it easier for the fetus to move against the mother's abdominal wall.

Here, we learn about God's compassion and His wisdom...

- (1) Just as the uterus does not reject and accepts what can be considered foreign substances, our Heavenly Father does not reject and instead accepts us, sinners.
- (2) Furthermore, just as the uterus accepts the infiltration of placental blood vessels to nourish the placenta and allow it to grow, so too does our Lord Jesus Christ accept even the infiltration of sin of us sinners. In other words, He bears our sins on the cross, supplying us with the bread of life. Therefore, those who believe in Jesus, who is this bread of life, no longer allow sin infiltration and prevent sinful communication from defiling their body and soul.
- (3) Moreover, just as the uterine lining prevents the natural death of cells during a baby's growth in the womb and, in later pregnancy, becomes thinner and more pliable to facilitate the baby's movements against the mother's abdominal wall, the Holy Spirit enables us to live a vibrant and spiritually active life within the Lord, allowing us to move freely in our faith journey.

Through the compassion of the Triune God, you and I are being led by God's guidance, much like the Israelites. This merciful God will never abandon us but continues to guide us. God desires to protect us in His embrace, even when we betray and forsake Him countless times. He will never leave us alone in this wilderness. The reason is because just as a fetus would die if left outside the mother's womb, we would perish if God were to abandon us. Therefore, God will never forsake us and guides us. How can we know this? Think of the phrase from Nehemiah 9:19, "Because of your great compassion ...." Translated again, it means that God bestows "abundant compassion" upon us. In other words, it signifies that God extends His compassion to us not just once or twice, but countless times. God wants to be with us always, not leaving us alone in the wilderness of this world, willing to share our suffering, and that is the God who is your God and mine.

# God who guides me

**“Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the desert. By day the pillar of cloud did not cease to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take. You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst. For forty years you sustained them in the desert; they lacked nothing, their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen.” (Nehemiah 9:19-21)**

Indeed, I reflected on my life today in light of Nehemiah 9:19-21. I've summarized it into three points:

## **First, God has illuminated my path.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:19b: "... By day the pillar of cloud did not cease to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take." Just as God led the Israelites through the wilderness with a pillar of fire at night, the Lord has illuminated my life during its darkest times. I spent nearly half of my life, around 20 years, in the darkness of my heart. On the surface, I was a pastor's son who attended worship services every Sunday, offering praise and gratitude to God with my lips. However, internally, my heart was shrouded in guilt due to sin. I struggled with a deep sense of darkness, especially during worship services or Bible study times when I would hear God's Word but fail to live according to it. I saw myself as a sinner who couldn't live in accordance with God's Word, constantly plagued by guilt. I focused on myself, not being able to follow God's commands and excelling in what He had instructed me not to do. I saw only my own sin, and the cross seemed distant. Consequently, I lived as a slave to sin, imprisoned by my own guilt, unable to



escape the dark room of my heart. As this darkness persisted, self-blame turned into self-loathing, and I even had suicidal thoughts. Though I knew in my head that I should look up to Jesus, who shed His blood on the cross for my sins, I couldn't lift my eyes to behold Him. It was in the midst of such a life that, in His time, God in His compassion and grace opened my spiritual eyes and enabled me to look up to the light — the crucified Jesus. God then illuminated my life, rescued me from the dark chamber of my heart, and granted me true freedom within the truth. God allowed me to rely on the blood of Jesus shed on the cross. God enabled me to see that there was no place to go but the cross. Hallelujah!

## **Second, God has taught me.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:20a: “You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst.” To understand this, we need to refer to Numbers 11:17, 25. In Numbers, we see that when Moses complained to God, saying, "the burden is too heavy for me" (Num.11:14), God instructed Moses to appoint 70 elders to share his burden. Why did God do this? It was so that the same Spirit that came upon Moses would also come upon these 70 elders, lightening Moses' load. That very "Spirit" is referred to as the "good Spirit" in Nehemiah 9:20, namely, the good Holy Spirit. Indeed, after this good Spirit came upon them, what did these 70 elders teach the Israelites? They taught them God's good commands given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai (v. 13). In other words, Moses and the 70 elders taught the Israelites God's good laws (commandments) to impart understanding and wisdom to them. In Nehemiah's time, the Israelites confessed their sins and the idolatrous sins of their ancestors during the exodus from Egypt, acknowledging the grace of God who, despite their past sins, allowed the good Holy Spirit to come upon not just Moses but also the 70 elders to teach the Israelites God's good statutes. Under what circumstances are the Israelites remembering and confessing this work? It is precisely during the time when there is a revival of the Word at the Water Gate through the Spirit-filled scholar Ezra. As the Israelites stand and listen to the reading of the Law for about six hours, they realize its significance and weep (vv. 8-9). They also rejoice greatly as they obey the Word (v. 17). By confessing (acknowledging) that the unchanging God has shown them mercy, they acknowledge that their ancestors and themselves, who once arrogantly engaged in idol worship, were led and instructed by the mercy-showing Word and the Holy Spirit. The unchanging God, through the Spirit-filled leaders He appointed for their ancestors and themselves, taught them the Word of God, Moses' Law, and led them without swerving to walk the right path as God's holy people.

I meditated on this word, reflecting on how God has led my life. In John 14:26, Jesus said, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” I thought about how God has taught me through the author of the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, and shown me the way for my life. Some moments and verses come to mind. First, when I was in college, God taught me through the pastor's message about 1 John 5:11-12, which are verses about the assurance of salvation. The pastor explained the "Fact," "Faith," and "Feeling" aspects of these verses, which led me to have confidence in my faith and enabled

me to live a life of faith. Another memorable moment was during a university retreat at our church when God spoke to me through John 6:1-15. That night, I repented and surrendered my life, feeling called to become a pastor and prepare for seminary. I also remember Psalms 34:8, which God impressed upon me during our marriage ceremony about 13 years ago. I reflected on God's goodness and said, "God is so good," to which my wife responded, "All the time." This has become a joyful exchange between us. Lastly, an unforgettable Bible verse is Psalms 63:3, "Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you." God gave me this verse when our firstborn, named Joo-young (meaning "the glory of the Lord"), was facing a life-threatening condition. It helped us make the decision to let her go peacefully, knowing that God's eternal love is greater than our 55-day-old daughter's life. These moments and verses have guided and shaped my life and ministry.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path" (Ps. 119:105).

### **Third and last, God has nurtured me.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:21 – "For forty years you sustained them in the desert; they lacked nothing, their clothes did not wear out nor did their feet become swollen." The God who led the Israelites also nurtured them so that they lacked nothing. In other words, God became their good shepherd, providing for their needs and ensuring they lacked nothing. God made sure their clothes did not wear out, and their feet did not swell. This reminds me of Psalms 23:1, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." The people of God, led by the Lord as their good shepherd in the wilderness and guided into the promised land of Canaan, lacked nothing. However, I have pondered why I sometimes feel lacking, and I believe it's because of greed within me. Consider Numbers 11:4: "The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, 'If only we had meat to eat!'" Just like the Israelites who, influenced by worldly desires, craved meat and complained even though they had the heavenly manna that God provided (Exod. 16:3), I sometimes found myself praying with discontent, asking for things other than God's Word. In the past, I would sit at the dinner table and, before eating, I would think about the daily bread provided and be overwhelmed with gratitude and tears, but now, my stomach is full, and those tears are no longer there. My belly is satisfied. However, God, in His mercy, has humbled me, making me feel spiritually needy, and caused me to seek the riches of His Word (Ps. 119:72). He has taught me the secret of contentment (Phil. 4:11), leading me to pursue only Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven, and His truth that comes from His mouth. Through His guidance, God is leading me to walk humbly and faithfully on the exalted path before me. All of this is by His grace and through His guidance.

I believe that the God who has guided me until today is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Just as He has guided me in the past and continues to guide me in the present, I trust that He will also guide me in the future. The God who illuminates and instructs, guiding me, and shepherding me, will lead me to green pastures and quiet waters, even if I were to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I believe that He will guide me to the everlasting kingdom.

“Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life,  
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Ps. 23:6).

# The God who bestows great blessings

## [Nehemiah 9:22-26]

It is said that in 1999, in the UK, a 72-year-old grandmother named Angie Clens, who lived alone, bought a lottery ticket. However, she won a whopping £200,000. Concerned about Clens' weak heart and the possibility of heart failure, the lottery company visited Reverend Ames, whom the grandmother attended at the Anglican church, and explained the situation. Reverend Ames cautiously asked the grandmother, 'How do you think you would feel if you won the lottery?' The grandmother replied, 'Oh, Reverend, whom am I ... It wouldn't happen.' The Reverend said, 'No... but still.' After a moment of thought, the grandmother said, 'Well then, Reverend Ames, you take it all.' As soon as Reverend Ames heard this, he died of heart failure. In the end, the grandmother received all the money... It is said that she gave half of it to the family of the deceased Reverend Ames (Internet). I came across an internet article that says 'Blessing or Sin - The heated debate over the lottery.' As the first week of the New Year in the UK heated up with speculation, voices of criticism erupted from the religious community. Archbishop Simon Barington-Ward of Coventry urged for the abolition of the lottery, claiming that it fosters people's greed. He strongly criticized it as a sin that corrupts society as a whole in an interview with the BBC. However, in an interview on the same program, Prime Minister John Major of the UK countered Archbishop Simon Barington-Ward's criticism of the lottery as completely wrong. The Prime Minister argued that the profits earned from the lottery business, millions of pounds a year, are invaluable to support sports, arts, cultural heritage, and charity projects that the government simply cannot afford to cover with taxes (internet).

What do you think, is winning the lottery a blessing or a sin? How do you feel about it? What is true blessing? What does the Bible say about blessings? I would like to focus on Nehemiah 9:22-26 and learn about the blessings that God gives us, and how we should enjoy the blessings that God gives us.

**We can think about what kind of blessings God gives us in two ways:**

(1) The blessing that God gives us is material blessing.

What aspect of faith do Korean Christians misunderstand? It is the prosperity gospel. What is the prosperity gospel? The prosperity gospel is believing in faith as a means to achieve and acquire the happiness and values one sets for oneself. It means that I have to go to church, seize Jesus in order to become happy and successful (Internet). In other words, the prosperity gospel is 'Believe in Jesus and receive blessings.' However, in the process of believing in Jesus, there is no concept of the cross that one must bear as part of the blessing. Among us, there are far too many Christians who hold this prosperity gospel. One of the main reasons they believe in Jesus is to obtain material blessings. This deadly influence within the church has turned God from the object of worship to a tool for material blessings and personal happiness, and has placed the purpose of faith in believing in Jesus Christ on worldly things such as personal fortune and business prosperity (Internet). It is also dangerous to unconditionally condemn material blessings as sinful just because the prosperity gospel is wrong. The reason is because God clearly gives us material blessings as well. If prosperity gospel is believing in Jesus as a means to obtain material blessings, then we can say that the material blessings God gives us are the result of believing in Jesus (not the means).

Then what were the material blessings that the Israelites received?

The material blessing that God gave to the Israelite people was the "land."

Look at Nehemiah 9:22-25: "You gave them kingdoms and nations, allotting to them even the remotest frontiers. They took over the country of Sihon king of Heshbon and the country of Og king of Bashan. You made their sons as numerous as the stars in the sky, and you brought them into the land that you told their fathers to enter and possess. Their sons went in and took possession of the land. You subdued before them the Canaanites, who lived in the land; you handed the Canaanites over to them, along with their kings and the peoples of the land, to deal with them as they pleased. They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they reveled in your great goodness." The word "land" appears a total of seven times in these four verses. This blessing is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham, as stated in Genesis 17:7-8: "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God" (Ref.: 13:14-18). Ultimately, God blessed the Israelites with the promised land of Canaan during the Exodus era because, in addition to fulfilling the covenant with

Abraham, He desired to be the God of His descendants, the Israelite people. The material blessing that God gave to the Israelites included "all kinds of beautiful things." Look at Nehemiah 9:25: "...They took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees in abundance. ...." During the Exodus era, the Israelites obeyed God's command to enter and take possession of the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. Therefore, in addition to the land, they also took possession of all the produce, as well as the property of the previous inhabitants, including houses, wells, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees. However, one important fact we must acknowledge here is that we bear responsibility as recipients of material blessings. When God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants, the Israelites had a responsibility (Covenant: God's Promise & Human Responsibility). That responsibility was none other than to enter and take possession of the land of Canaan (v. 23). It was their responsibility to obey God's command. The fact that we receive material blessings from God teaches us that we have a responsibility. Thinking that we deserve material blessings for disobedience to God's command is a misconception and arrogance.

There are Ten Commandments for material blessings:

- (a) **The first commandment is to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.** Then God will supply the necessary material blessings (Mt. 6:33).
- (b) **The second commandment is not to put your hope in uncertain riches, but to hope in God who richly provides everything for us.** We cannot serve both God and material wealth; where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (1 Tim. 6:17; Mt. 6:21, 24).
- (c) **The third commandment is not to love material possessions more than God.** If we love only material things, it can lead to all sorts of evil, even causing us to lose what we already have (1 Tim. 6:10).
- (d) **The fourth commandment is that if we forsake all our possessions and family for the sake of Jesus and the gospel, we will receive a hundredfold blessing in this present age and in the age to come, eternal life** (Mk. 10:29-30).
- (e) **The fifth commandment is to not store up treasures on earth for ourselves, but to store up treasures in heaven.** Treasures stored in heaven cannot be taken away by anyone (Mt. 6:19-20).
- (f) **The sixth commandment is not to steal from God, but to give a full tithe.** Test God by giving a full tithe and see if He will not pour out blessings (Mal. 3:8-10).
- (g) **The seventh commandment is that you reap what you sow.** The one who sows

sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully (2 Cor. 9:6).

- (h) **The eighth commandment is not to give out of compulsion or with reluctance, for God loves a cheerful giver** (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- (i) **The ninth commandment is to invest more than your ability in God's work** (2 Cor. 8:3).
- (j) **The tenth commandment is that all material possessions belong to God, and His children are merely stewards.** Therefore, always be prepared, as there will be a day of accountability (Mt. 25:14-30) (internet).

(2) The blessing that God gives us is blessing of people.

I remember the sermon of the officiating pastor during my wedding ceremony. The pastor mentioned three blessings, and one of them was specifically 'Blessing of people' (the other two were God's blessing and material blessing). What is blessing of people? In the words of the elders, 'blessing of people' means meeting good people in life, which is considered one of the blessings (Internet). Parents should meet their children well, students should meet their teachers well, and teachers should meet their students well. Leaders should meet their followers well, and followers should meet their leaders well. It goes both ways. What was the blessing of people that the Israelites received?

**(a) It was the blessing of descendants.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:23a - "You made their sons as numerous as the stars in the sky ...." This blessing is the fulfillment of the promise spoken to Abraham in Genesis 22:17 - "I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies." After passing the test of offering his son Isaac, whom God granted to Abraham when he had no children, God promised him the blessing of descendants (Gen. 22). And in a span of about 400 years, during their sojourn in Egypt, God multiplied them as numerous as the stars in the sky. The children of promise are a blessing from God! Why is that? It's because God's covenantal intent will continue to be fulfilled not only through our lives but also through our children.

**(b) It was the blessing of the Canaanites.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:24: "... You subdued before them the Canaanites, who lived in the land; you handed the Canaanites over to them, along with their kings and the peoples of the land,

to deal with them as they pleased.” God not only gave the Israelite people the land of Canaan, but He also made the inhabitants of that land, the Canaanites, subject to them. In other words, the Israelite people were now able to deal with the Canaanites as they pleased. Isn't that fascinating? After serving the Egyptians in a foreign land for about 400 years, the Israelite people, now in the promised land of Canaan, were no longer slaves, but were in a position to rule over the Canaanite inhabitants as they saw fit. Meeting a good supervisor at work, encountering capable employees in business, all of these are blessings. But are material prosperity and worldly success truly the blessings that the Bible speaks of? The answer is "no." The true blessing, the ultimate blessing in the Bible, is receiving the blessing of God, namely, Jesus Christ. The Bible emphasizes the suffering of Christians in this present world rather than material blessings, and paradoxically underscores that receiving the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is the most blessed state (Internet). The ultimate blessing is Jesus Christ. Living a blessed life means living with our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the source of all blessings, as our Savior and our Lord.

**Second, how should we enjoy the blessings that God gives us? We can consider two things:**

(1) We must not squander the great blessings from the Lord.

Look at Nehemiah 9:25b - "... they reveled in your great goodness." The word "reveled" here means to enjoy to the fullest, indulge; (in drink or gambling) become absorbed; spend (time or money) extravagantly, waste. The Hebrew word carries the meaning of "to luxuriate," which implies "living in luxury, enjoying (something)." The Israelites abused the blessings bestowed by God. They went from being a people who enjoyed the fullness of God's blessings to becoming people who were full of themselves (v. 25), and this was the cause of their downfall (Wiersbe). They became like the prodigal son in Luke 15, desiring the father's wealth but not his will. The Israelites allowed material wealth to dominate them. Furthermore, they did not manage the blessings given by God wisely. They lacked the right faith and mature character to handle the blessings that God had granted them.

When we enjoy the blessings God gives us, we may inadvertently forget to take delight in the One who bestowed those blessings. In other words, delighting in the gift while neglecting the Giver is akin to finding joy in the gift but not in the Giver. The Israelites reveled in the great goodness of God, but the Lord was not pleased. Therefore, we must be cautious. Instead of squandering the great blessings that God gives, we should joyfully embrace them while also finding our greatest joy in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate source of all blessings.

(2) We must prioritize God's Word over God's blessings.



Look at Nehemiah 9:26: "But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they turned their backs on your law. They killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you. They committed awful blasphemies." Here, we can see evidence that the Israelite people, amidst enjoying the great blessings God had given them, did not find joy in the Lord who bestowed those blessings. Instead, they prioritized the blessings over God's Word. The Israelites, who were filled to the full and lived in great luxury from the great blessings God provided, became prideful, leading them to disobey and rebel against God, committing the sin of blasphemy. They disregarded the admonitions of the prophets who urged them to turn back to the Lord and, instead, killed them, committing awful blasphemies. By not giving precedence to God's Word over His blessings, they bore the fruit of sin, which amounted to great blasphemies against the Lord.

We have the responsibility to give great glory to the Lord through the great blessings He provides. To do this, we should use the great blessings God gives not to simply satisfy ourselves and indulge, but rather to follow God's great commandments of loving Him and loving our neighbors.

I would like to share an essay from an ordinary believer titled 'Distorted Perspective: When Material Wealth Measures Faith.' It discusses various issues within the church community, such as the pressure from church leaders to contribute financially, the practice of making special offerings for positions of leadership, and the emphasis on fundraising rather than focusing on spiritual maturity in events like revivals and guest speaker invitations. In particular, it highlights the observation of a pastor who pointed out that one's financial status is given undue importance in the selection process for positions of leadership, and even mentioned instances where pastors offered blessings and prayers specifically for those who donated over a certain amount for special church projects, often exceeding one million won (around \$900). These examples serve as clear evidence that materialism within the Korean church has reached concerning levels. Beneath these prevailing trends in the Korean church lies a flawed perception that associates material wealth with God's blessings. This misguided belief suggests that those who possess great wealth are considered to have deep faith and are recipients of God's favor, while those who are financially less fortunate are viewed as lacking in faith. It is essential to recognize that viewing material wealth as a measure of God's blessing is a misconception. Material possessions are gifts given by God for His purposes alone.

## **How should we enjoy the blessings we receive?**

**“They captured fortified cities and fertile land; they took possession of houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. They ate to the full and were well-nourished; they reveled in your great goodness. But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they put your law behind their backs. They killed your prophets, who had admonished them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies.”  
(Nehemiah 9:25-26)**

During the first week of this month, during the Friday and Saturday prayer meeting, I consecutively praised God with the hymn "When Upon Life's Billows." I particularly focused on verses 1 and 2, emphasizing that when faced with the storms of life, and when burdened by worldly anxieties, we should count the blessings that the Lord has granted us. I shared that I have come to realize that it's not when life is free from storms, worries, and troubles, but rather when we face great tempests, difficulties, and even crises, that we should count the blessings bestowed by the Lord. I encouraged the members of the church to reflect on the blessings that God has granted each of us, our families, and our church as a whole. Especially, I urged them to pray, keeping in mind the passage from Nehemiah 9:22-24. I emphasized that the remarkable grace of God was evident when, despite the Israelites not deserving the blessings, God, as promised to Abraham, not only gave them the land of Canaan ("land" is mentioned seven times in verses 22-24) but also allowed them to take possession of all the beautiful possessions of the Canaanite people, including "houses filled with all kinds of good things, wells already dug, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees in abundance" (v. 25) (blessings of material wealth). Furthermore, God made them as numerous as the stars in the sky, just as He had promised Abraham (v. 23). God also ensured that the Israelites, who had been enslaved in Egypt,

would become masters in the promised land of Canaan, while the Canaanite peoples would serve them (v. 24). With such material and spiritual blessings, how did the Israelites enjoy the great blessings they received?

**First, the Israelites squandered the great blessings that the Lord had given them.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:25b - "... and reveled in Thy great goodness." Here, the term 'reveled' in English means "to take great pleasure or delight; to indulge in merrymaking or festivity; to engage in wild, noisy, or drunken revelry." In Hebrew, the word carries the meaning of "to luxuriate," signifying extravagant living or indulgence, reveling in something with delight or pleasure. In simple terms, the Israelites not only misused the blessings given by God but also wasted the great blessings bestowed upon them. They became like the prodigal son in Luke 15, desiring the father's wealth (the "fat of the land" in verse 25) but not his will. They allowed material wealth to dominate them. Moreover, they did not manage the blessings from God wisely. The Israelites lacked the proper faith and mature character needed to steward the blessings that God had granted them.

We can enjoy the blessings given by God, much like the Israelites did, and yet not find joy in the One who bestowed them. Initially, when we think about the blessings from God, we express gratitude and find joy in Him. However, as we gradually indulge and squander the blessings, we might fall into the trap of being addicted to the blessings themselves, rather than finding joy in the One who gave them. In other words, while we delight in the gifts, the Giver of those gifts may not find delight. We must avoid committing this sin. Instead, we should find contentment and joy solely in the Lord, who is the source of the greater blessing—the ultimate source of all blessings. Even if material blessings or prosperity bestowed upon us due to life's storms were to disappear, we should take it as an opportunity to count even greater spiritual blessings. We should consider every spiritual blessing that God has granted us in Jesus Christ. Therefore, let us sing praises, saying, "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing": (v. 1) Come, Thou Fount of ev-'ry blessing, tune my heart to sing Thy grace Streams of mercy, never ceasing, Call for songs of loudest praise. Teach me some melodious sonnet, Sung by flaming tongues above Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it, Mount of God's unchanging love.

**Second, the Israelites prioritized God's great blessing above God's commandments (His Word).**

Look at Nehemiah 9:26: "But they were disobedient and rebelled against you; they put your law behind their backs. They killed your prophets, who had admonished them in order to turn them back to you; they committed awful blasphemies." Here, we can find evidence that the Israelites, amidst enjoying the great blessings God provided, did not take joy in the Giver of those blessings. Instead, they placed God's Word below the blessings He granted. The Israelites, who were filled and satisfied" by God's great blessings, became prideful, leading them to disobey God and rebel against

Him, committing the sin of ignoring the prophets who urged them to turn back to God and even killing them, thus committing awful blasphemies. In other words, the Israelites committed the sin of placing God's Word beneath His blessings, which led to great blasphemies against God. Isn't it astonishing? The Israelites, instead of using the great blessings they received from God to bring great glory to Him, ended up committing grave offenses against Him.

We have a responsibility to glorify God greatly through the great blessings He bestows upon us. As we receive great blessings, we also bear a great responsibility. We must not use the blessings God grants us to merely satisfy ourselves and become bloated. Instead, we should be led by God's Word. In other words, we should live lives guided by God's Word, rather than being led by the blessings. We must not live being led by blessings, but rather, we should live being led by God's Word. In short, we should use the great blessings we receive from God for the glory of God. We should use the great blessings bestowed upon us by God to fulfill His great commandments of loving God and loving our neighbors. In doing so, we will be able to greatly glorify God through the great blessings we receive from Him.

We are living in a financially challenging world. We are also living in a world where relationships with others are not easy. Even if we may not have material wealth or worldly success, we must count all the spiritual blessings that God, through Jesus Christ, has graciously bestowed upon us. And we should enjoy these blessings, but never misuse them. We must not waste the great blessings given to us by God. Furthermore, we must not prioritize the great blessings we receive from God above His Word. Instead, we should use the great blessings we receive from God to bring great glory to Him. To do this, we must base our actions on God's Word and use the blessings He has given us. We should never put God's blessings before His Word.

# Great merciful God

## [Nehemiah 9:27-31]

What is depression? Someone described depression as a one-way path to suicide without an exit. This likely means that once you step onto that path, it's hard to get out without external help. The causes of depression can be varied, but the most fundamental trigger often stems from feeling unloved or not knowing the purpose of one's existence. Christian counselors suggest that realizing that Christians are recipients of God's deep love and discovering the purpose that God has set for our lives can serve as a remedy for the sickness of the heart (Internet). How should depression be treated for believers? Depression should not be hidden; instead, it should be actively diagnosed and treated. If there are support groups within the church where people can open up about their inner struggles, it can prevent the condition from becoming severe. The church should have a counseling system in place for believers to share their pain and not hesitate to seek help (Internet). However, what is the problem? The fundamental issue is that there is a lack of support groups or counseling systems within the church. But even more fundamentally, individuals are not opening up about their struggles. The reason for this is a lack of people who empathize together. To put it in biblical terms, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15).

Around 600 years ago, a person named Julian, who lived in England, is said to have prayed to God for three wounds: (1) The first is the wound of repentance. Julian prayed, 'Oh God! Let me be wounded with the pain of repentance. Make me sorrowful for having sinned and let me live in that sorrow.' (2) The second is the wound of longing for God. Julian prayed, 'God! Grant Yourself to me. With You alone, I am content. If I were to seek anything other than God, I would always be thirsty, for to me, God is everything.' Additionally, she said, 'Oh, God! Wound me with an incurable longing. Since this world is not my true home, how can I settle here? How can I not long for the homeland of heaven?' (3) The third is the wound of mercy. Julian desired to have compassion for the world like Jesus. Pastor Tozer says that the greatest enemy of Christianity today is not materialism or liberalism, but rather 'un-Christlike Christians'. They may believe in orthodox doctrines but do not understand what mercy is. He spoke about the wound of mercy in this way: 'I do not want to heal this wound. Rather, I want to feel the pain with those who are suffering, to empathize with their wounds, and to share in their suffering' (Tozer).

Today, I want to meditate on Nehemiah 9:27-31, with the title "Great merciful God." In this meditation, I hope to receive the teachings that God grants us, as we consider how God, who is full of mercy, dealt with the Israelites. Through this meditation, I earnestly pray that both you and I may receive the wound of mercy.

### **First, great merciful God is a God who warns us.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:29a - " You warned them to return to your law, ...." When the Israelites of the Exodus era were enjoying the great blessings from God, indulging themselves by putting God's law behind their backs (v. 26) and "ate to the full" (v. 25), God warned them to return to God's law (v. 29). This brings to mind hymn "Come Home! Come Home!", based on the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Particularly, I think of the third verse and the chorus: " Come home! come home! From the sorrow and blame, From the sin and the shame, And the tempter that smiled. O prodigal child! Come home! oh come home! Come home! Come, oh come home!" How did God warn the Israelites? Look at Nehemiah 9:30: "... By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. ...." The Spirit of God warned the Israelites through the prophets. God, giving His good Spirit (v. 20) not only to Moses but also to 70 elders, instructed them to teach the Israelites His good decrees and commands (v. 13). However, the Israelites, in their pride, disregarded these good decrees and commands and wasted the great blessings God had given them, committing sins. At that time, God, through the same Spirit of God, warned the Israelites through the prophets. But how did the Israelites respond? They acted stubbornly. They not only refused to listen to God's commandments but also stiffened their necks and turned their backs on the Lord. In short, the Israelites did not heed God's warning. Look at Nehemiah 9:29-30: "... but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, by which a man will live if he obeys them. Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen. For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you admonished them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, ...."

We must receive God's warning like the Psalmist David. Look at Psalms 19:11 - "By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward." David confessed that by receiving God's law as warning and keeping them, there is a great reward. What is this great reward that David speaks of? It is the refinement of David's soul (v. 7), him becoming wiser (v. 7), and an increase of joy in his heart (v. 8). Additionally, David's enlightenment shines brightly (v. 8), leading him to acknowledge his own transgressions and seek deliverance from hidden faults (v. 12). In other words, David prays for God to prevent him from committing willful sins so that they may not rule over him (v. 13). There is an analogy: The Central America ship was en route from New York to San Francisco. However, in the middle of the sea, a hole was punctured in the bottom of the ship. Seawater began to seep in slowly. At that moment, a rescue ship approached and shouted, 'Passengers are in danger. Quickly transfer them to the rescue ship.' The captain of the Central America showed little concern. It was true that there was a hole in the bottom, but it could hold until tomorrow morning. Don't worry too much. However, the ship was gradually sinking. The crew of the rescue ship repeatedly sent warning messages, 'Have all passengers come up to the deck.'

The situation was urgent, but the captain remained calm. It is a dark night now. There may be casualties during the process of transferring to the ship. Just wait until tomorrow morning. The next morning, the Central America sank into the sea without a trace. It was a catastrophe caused by the captain's negligence. Faith is the same. The weapon that Satan likes to use is simple. 'You are still too young. Believe slowly.' We are like the crew members of the rescue ship in this story. We have a responsibility to repeatedly send warning messages to souls in peril. Look at 2 Corinthians 6:2b – "... I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation." We must not succumb to Satan's temptation of 'believe slowly.' We must now accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord to receive salvation."

### **Second, great merciful God allows distress to come upon us.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:27a – "So you handed them over to their enemies, who oppressed them. But when they were oppressed they cried out to you. ...." What does it mean when it says, "handed them over to their enemies"? It means that God allowed the Israelites, who did not heed the warnings, to be defeated and oppressed by their neighbors, who were their adversaries (v. 30). Therefore, through neighboring nations, God caused the Israelites to experience distress and hardship (vv. 27, 28, 30). In present terms, we can say that believers may be temporarily subject to unbelievers, experiencing tribulation and suffering. Especially in the later period after King Solomon's reign, the nation of Israel split into two. Northern Israel later fell to Assyria, and then Southern Judah fell to Babylon and was taken into captivity. Ultimately, God sought to fulfill the promise He made to Abraham by bestowing the blessed land of Canaan upon the Israelites. However, the Israelites, who misused this blessing, faced the consequence of their sin, being driven out of that land and taken captive by foreign nations. Therefore, God spoke to the Israelites in this way: "My God will reject them because they have not obeyed him; they will be wanderers among the nations" (Hosea 9:17). How fearful is God's discipline in this regard? The great blessing that the Lord gave became a great curse for the disobedient and prideful Israelites (Cf.: Josh. 24:20). The prideful Israelites, who did not humbly enjoy the blessing of the land of Canaan, now found themselves taken captive in the land of the Gentiles, living the very life they once sought. So now, it was not God who governed the Israelites, but their adversaries, the Gentiles, who now ruled over them (Neh. 9:28). This is akin to how we as Christians, when we do not humbly use the blessings God has given us for His glory, may have them taken away by the world, leading to our suffering. We should fear the God who temporarily allows us to be abandoned to our adversaries (unbelievers). We must come to realize how painful it is to reject God's rule and be governed by unbelievers.

Here we encounter a faithful God. In other words, amidst the unfaithfulness of the Israelites who did not heed God's warnings, God's faithful light shone even brighter. That is to say, when Israel obeyed the Lord, He, in His faithfulness, bestowed great blessings upon them. However, when they disobeyed, God, in His faithfulness, disciplined the Israelites. We seem to be more accustomed to God's faithful blessings than His faithful discipline. Why is that so? The reason is because discipline does not seem pleasant at the time, but painful (Heb. 12:11). The writer of Hebrews speaks about discipline, saying: "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives" (v. 6). God, who regards

us as true sons (vv. 7-8), disciplines us for our own benefit (v. 10). Through this, He makes us partakers of His holiness and brings forth "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" in us (vv. 10-11). We should confess and praise God for His faithful discipline, just as in Psalms 119:71, 75: "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees" (v. 71), "...in faithfulness You have afflicted me" (v. 75). We must bear in mind that while God delights in bestowing many privileges upon us, He never grants us the privilege to sin at our own discretion. Therefore, when we use the blessings God has given us as we please, He, in His love for us, has no choice but to discipline us. We should not take this discipline lightly.

### **Third and last, great merciful God is the one who rescues us.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:28b - "... When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven, And many times You rescued them according to Your compassion." The stiff-necked Israelites, who ignored God's warnings and did not heed His commandments (v. 29), and the Israelites who defiantly killed the prophets who urged them to turn back to the Lord (to return to His word) and caused great outrage (v. 26), ultimately found themselves handed over by God to the hands of their enemies out of His love for them, causing them to suffer distress. It was during this hardship that the Israelites cried out to the Lord (v. 27). Here, the original Arabic meaning of the Hebrew word for 'cried out' is "sound as thunder." It conveys a loud cry for help in times of great trouble. The Israelites cried out together in their distress, seeking God's help and deliverance. At that time, the Lord heard their thunderous cries from heaven and in His abundant mercies, gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies (v. 27). However, after attaining peace, the Israelites once again committed evil before the Lord (v. 28). Therefore, the Lord allowed them to be abandoned to the hands of their enemies, giving their adversaries control over them (v. 28). Then, when the Israelites turned and cried out to the Lord, He heard from heaven and many times, in His abundant mercies, delivered them (v. 28). He also warned them to obey His commandments again (v. 29). However, the Israelites once again defiantly sinned against God (v. 28). This pattern is reminiscent of the behavior of the Israelites described in the Book of Judges: Israel's sinfulness - God's discipline - Israel's cry for help (supplication) - God raising up judges to rescue the Israelites.

In today's passage, Nehemiah 9:28-30, we must pay attention to two words: "again" (vv. 28, 29) and "many" (vv. 28, 30). Just like the Israelites who, after obtaining peace, "again" committed evil before the Lord (vv. 27-28), we, as God's people, are often obstinate and unyielding, repeatedly falling into sin. Despite this, God, in His abundant mercy, saved them (delivered them) when they cried out in distress (v. 28). Furthermore, God forgave them for "many years" (v. 30). The God of Israel is a long-suffering God who endures for many years. Our God, once again, not only forgave them for their repeated sins but also extended His abundant mercy to save them. He forgave the sinners, the Israelites, and He did so with great patience, for our God is a God of great mercy (vv. 27, 28, 31). Therefore, God did not utterly destroy or forsake the Israelites (v. 31).

Our great merciful God is a God who is deeply troubled in His heart. Look at Judges 10:16 - "... And he could bear Israel's misery no longer." God, who is troubled in His heart, why is His heart troubled?



The reason is the "misery" of His children, us. Just as a father cannot bear to see his children in pain and suffering, our Heavenly Father is troubled in His heart when He sees our misery. He is a God who cannot endure seeing us in pain any longer due to our misery. What's truly remarkable is that He endures and endures, even as He sees our repeated sins. Why does God endure and bear witness to our children's sins? The reason is because He desires His kindness to lead us to repentance (Rom. 2:4).

Yet, our God did not hesitate to be troubled in His heart by allowing His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to bear the weight of all our sins, yours and mine. He did not hesitate when He saw the "misery" of the cross of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. He did not delay but rather, He allowed Jesus Christ to be crucified. Why did He do this? It was because He was troubled in His heart over the misery of hell, the place we deserved to go. He could bear it no longer, so He caused His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to descend into hell for three days (as stated in the Apostles' Creed, "He descended into hell"). In doing so, He made Jesus Christ experience the misery of hell on our behalf. Can you see Jesus with these wounds of great mercy?

# **“Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before You”**

**[Nehemiah 9:32-38]**

Do you think lobsters feel pain? Or do you believe they don't? Animal rights organizations have claimed for years that boiling lobsters alive for cooking amounts to torture, which led to a research initiative supported by the Norwegian government at the University of Oslo, conducted by a team of scientists. As per one scientist's report, lobsters do not appear to feel pain even when immersed in boiling water. They concluded that lobsters, along with crabs, insects, snails, and most invertebrates, likely lack the capacity to experience pain. While initially one might think it's a relief if humans couldn't feel pain, it could lead to even greater tragedies. It brings to mind an old tale I once heard about lepers not being able to feel pain. How tragic would that be? Even if our noses fell off, we wouldn't feel a thing. The lesson we should draw from this is that pain is beneficial for us. What's one of the benefits of pain? It is the fact that it leads us to pray to God.

Today, I want to focus on Nehemiah 9:32-38, under the title of "Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before You," and I hope and pray that we may receive two things from God as a lesson:

**First, the title "Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before You" refers to not regarding our wrongdoings as insignificant.**

As humans, we have a sinful tendency to downplay our wrongdoings. In other words, we often don't fully realize how serious our sins are. As an example, in 1 Samuel 8, when Samuel, the last judge of Israel, appointed his sons as judges, they did not follow their father's ways. Instead, they took bribes and perverted justice (v. 3). When the elders of Israel saw this, they gathered and came to Samuel, saying, "now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have" (v. 5). Is this a major sin or a minor one? This is a major sin. Look at 1 Samuel 12:17: "Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call upon the LORD to

send thunder and rain. And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the LORD when you asked for a king.” Why was seeking a king considered a great wickedness in the sight of the Lord? The reason is stated in 1 Samuel 8:7 - "And the LORD told him: ‘Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.’” The Israelites, who had been personally delivered from all disasters and tribulations by God, rejected Him and asked for a king like the nations (10:19). They considered it a great sin in the eyes of God to forsake the unseen King of kings and Lord of lords and to ask for a visible king like the nations. We, like the Israelites, often live as if we prioritize the visible person or thing in our lives over the unseen Jesus Christ. Many times, we prioritize ourselves in our hearts rather than making Jesus our Lord and living according to His will. We commit grave sins, yet often regard them as trivial (insignificant) sins, or perhaps we don't even consider them as sins. Isn't that the case far too often?

We have reflected on the merciful God who observes our repeated sins while enduring them with great patience, yet when He sees our distress, He extends salvation with a heart unable to bear it any longer — a God of great mercy. However, as we look at today's passage, we find that in the case of these Israelites, God eventually meets His holy self who manifests justice. Look at Nehemiah 9:33 - "However, You are just in all that has befallen us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly." Our God waits patiently for His people to repent and turn back from their sins. But when a certain limit is reached, He eventually administers the rod of love. We can see this in Jonah 1:2 - "...for their wickedness has come up before Me." We witness that even after the people of Nineveh reached a limit in their wickedness in the sight of God, He initially sent the prophet Jonah to provide them an opportunity for repentance. However, the Israelites responded by brutally mistreating and killing many prophets who were sent to urge them to repent (Neh. 9:26). Here, we need to contemplate the wickedness of the Israelites. The reason for this is because they regarded their wrongdoing as insignificant, which led them to continue in their grave sins. However, there came a point where God could no longer regard their transgressions as insignificant. So, what were the wrongdoings of the Israelites? We can consider two main points:

(1) The first wrongdoing of Israel was the sin of disobedience to God's word.

Look at Nehemiah 9:34 – “Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept Your law, nor heeded Your commandments and Your testimonies with which You testified against them.” Astonishingly, even the priests, who were God's servants, did not lend their ear to God's word and lived lives of disobedience. This is a devastating sign. Look at Hosea 4:4-8: “But let no man bring a charge, let no man accuse another, for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest. You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you. So I will destroy your mother - my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. "Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children. The more the priests increased, the more they sinned against me; they exchanged their Glory for something disgraceful. They feed on the sins of my people and relish their wickedness.” Isn't this the current state of our church? Saints are contending

with the pastors, and pastors are forsaking the knowledge of God. And as the number of pastors increases, are they not sinning against God even more? Rather than feeding the flock with the Word, pastors are feeding them with sin. If we do not obey God's word, the more pastors there are, the more the church is likely to increase in sin. Ultimately, the church will inevitably commit the sin of turning God's glory into shame.

(2) The second wrongdoing of Israel was the sin of not serving the Lord.

Look at Nehemiah 9:35 - "For they have not served You in their kingdom, or in the many good things that You gave them, or in the large and rich land which You set before them; nor did they turn from their wicked works." Despite enjoying the great blessings that God generously bestowed upon them, the Israelites used them to persist in their wickedness. Here, we have an important lesson to understand. Receiving great blessings from the Lord comes with a corresponding greater responsibility in serving Him. This is akin to the time of Hosea when the Israelites used the grain, new wine, oil, gold, and silver that God had given them not for God, but for the idol Baal. Look at Hosea 2:8 - "For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal." We must not consider the sin of disobedience to God's word and not serving Him lightly. In other words, disobedience to God's word and failing to serve Him constitute a great sin. Therefore, we must now implore the Lord in this way: 'O Lord, please do not consider my great sin lightly!'

**First, the title "Do not let all the hardship seem insignificant before You" refers to not regarding our distress as insignificant.**

Look at Nehemiah 9:32 - "Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, do not let all the hardship seem little to you, that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day." We tend to have a tendency to perceive our great sins as small, while at the same time, we tend to magnify the afflictions and hardships we face due to the consequences of those great sins. This is why we cry out to God like the Israelites did each time they faced affliction. Look at Nehemiah 9:27-28: "Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies." Why do we perceive our great sins as small while magnifying the afflictions we face? The reason is because sin is something we commit against God, and affliction is God's loving discipline towards us. In other words, from our perspective, as we are self-centered, the wrong we do to God may not seem as significant because it doesn't cause us direct harm. However, affliction, being a result of God's loving correction, hurts us directly, so it appears greater. It's similar to a child who, when disciplined by their parents, feels the pain more than when they themselves wrong their parents.

In Nehemiah 9:32-38, why did the Israelites face affliction? The reason is because God could no longer endure seeing the Israelites' wickedness and chose to discipline His beloved people. Ultimately, the Israelites suffered severe distress or great distress as a result of God's discipline (v. 37). How fearful is the discipline of God? Though the Israelites received the great blessings of the promised land, they used them to turn away from God, not giving Him the great glory they should have, but instead forsaking God's law and persisting in their great wickedness. As a result, they faced great distress (v. 37). Look at verse 36: "Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves." How wretched is this sight? After entering the promised land and using the blessings God had given them to greatly dishonor God, the Israelites not only lost the privilege of enjoying those blessings, but they also became slaves to the nations, no longer ruling over the foreign inhabitants as they once did (v. 24). In the end, due to their sins, the Israelites became slaves in foreign lands, enduring great hardships (v. 37).

Why does God give us great (severe) distress as an act of loving discipline? The reason is that God desires to humble us through great distress. While God has granted us great blessings, when we use those blessings to dishonor Him rather than giving Him the great glory He deserves, God uses great distress to train us, equipping us with the faith and character needed to bear great responsibility. How does God train us? He does so by making us pray. Look at verse 27: "Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven." God, who knows us, lowers us in our arrogance through great distress and compels us to humble ourselves and cry out to Him. The words of the prophet Isaiah are true. Look at Isaiah 26:5 - "For he has humbled the inhabitants of the height, the lofty city he lays low." The God who knows us knows that when we are in distress, we will humbly seek Him in fervent prayer. Look at Isaiah 26:16 - "O Lord, in distress they sought you; they poured out a whispered prayer when your discipline was upon them." Therefore, the Israelites, in the midst of their prayers, realized the sin of not using the great blessings God had given them to serve the Lord. Moreover, God not only makes us pray but also makes us serve Him faithfully. Just as the Israelites, who grew fat on the abundant land and squandered the blessings God had given them, were stripped of those blessings, no longer serving as masters but as slaves to foreign kings (v. 37), God trained them to serve Him once again. Even though they enjoyed the great blessings God gave them before facing affliction, they did not serve the Lord. However, when they suffered affliction and were made to live as slaves, God made them serve Him again. God did this to make them realize that serving the Lord, even in the midst of serving foreign kings, leads to true freedom.

The question we raise here is whether God is a God who regards our "distress" (all suffering) as small. I don't believe so. Our God and Father is a God who cannot bear to see us in distress. He looks upon our suffering and cannot endure it, so He quickly comes to rescue us. Why does our Father God regard our distress as significant and rush to save us? The reason can be found in the latter part of Isaiah 64:9 - "In all their distress he too was distressed." Our Father God joins us in our distress caused by sin and discipline. He regards our distress as significant and rushes to save us because He is a Father who bears our suffering together with us.

However, our Father God did not join in the suffering of His only Son, Jesus, on the cross. God regarded the suffering of Jesus on the cross as insignificant. Why did He do so? The reason is because our loving Father God saw the agony of our hellish suffering as too great. Therefore, God wanted to rescue us from the pain of hell, and that's why He regarded the suffering of Jesus on the cross as insignificant. Why did our Father God view the tremendous suffering of Jesus in hell as small? The reason is that our Father God saw the "transgressions" of Jesus, who bore all our great sins on His behalf. Did our Lord Jesus commit any sin? No, He did not. He is our sinless Lord. However, our Father God rightfully regarded the crucifixion of Jesus, who took responsibility for all our great transgressions, was led to the slaughter, and was nailed to the cross, as necessary. The reason is because our Father God desired to forgive all our great sins and lead us to an eternal paradise without sin and suffering.

# The responsible Christians

## [Nehemiah 10:28-31]

An employer was looking for someone to work for him. Since many volunteers gathered he interviewed them one by one. Then this was a conversation with one of the applicants (Internet):

Employer: "This must be done by someone who can be responsible."

Applicant: "Then I am that person. If something went wrong at my last job, everyone said it was my responsibility."

It's ridiculous. Unfortunately, this humor is a reality. We, the irresponsible Christians, are now taking a position in the church and serving the Lord and His church.

In the book "Who are They anyway, co-authored by BJ Gallagher and Steve Ventura, the authors talk about 'professional victims' who shift their responsibility at every critical moment. One of the key questions gives three answers on how to turn a "professional victim" into a "responsible person". The shortest answer is that you can never change the person. The long answer is that you can only change yourself. And the longer answer is even though you can only change yourself, you can take the lead and influence somethings to others. The authors also solve the alphabet of "ACCOUNTABILITY" and suggest what we need to do to implement responsibility (Internet):

A: Acknowledge the situation

C: Courageously face the difficulties

C: Communicate with positive language

O: Own the problem ... and the solution

U: Understand others' viewpoints

N: Negotiate solutions that work for everyone

T: Take on new responsibilities

A: Act, don't simply react

- B: Be willing to reassess and renegotiate
- I: Influence others and collaborate
- L: Leave the 'poor me' victim mentality behind
- I: Initiate thoughtful and deliberate solving
- T: Take pride in your results
- Y: 'Yes' leads to success

Are we avoiding responsibility type people or responsible people?

Today, I want to learn from Nehemiah 10:28-31 three things that the responsible Christians should do, under the heading "The responsible Christians".

**The first thing that we, the responsible Christians, must do is to separate ourselves from the worldly things.**

Look at Nehemiah 10:28 – “The rest of the people--priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples ....” Why did the Israelites separated themselves with the Gentiles in Nehemiah's days? The reason is because of “all this” (9:38). Look at Nehemiah 9:38 – “In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.” The phrase “all this” refers to the fact that the forefathers of the Israelites had often been transgressed and punished in the past. So now, because of all this, the congregation of Israel made a binding agreement in writing, and the leaders of Israel, the Levites and the priests, all sealed the document (v. 38). The list of the names is found in Nehemiah 10:1-27. It's like we are signing our promise and responsibility to God by resolving that we won't be like our ancestors who had committed sins against God and who had received the punishments. Then, what was the promise that the Israelites made to God? It was to obey God's law (v. 28). As the Israelites congregation was experiencing the revival of the Word at the Water Gate, they determined not to transgress like their forefathers by disobeying the God's law but to keep and observe all the commandments of God. To what extent did they resolve, they decided that the Israelites would swear that if they didn't keep the commandments of God they should be cursed (v. 29). To make a decision to obey God's commandments, this is truly the fruit of revival.

What did the Israelites put into action at that time? It was to separate themselves from the neighboring peoples (v. 28). The reason was not to defile themselves by the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors. Look at Ezra 6:21 – “So the Israelites who had returned from the exile ate it, together with all who had separated themselves from the unclean practices of their Gentile neighbors in order to seek the LORD, the God of Israel.” Does spending time with fellow faithful Christians help us in our Christian life or spending time with unbelievers help us in our life of faith? As you know, when we have a lot of fellowship with believers, it helps us in our life of faith. But what if we spend a lot of time with unbelievers and enjoy the worldly things together? They will be barbs in our eyes and thorns in our sides. Look at Numbers 33:55 – “But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides.



They will give you trouble in the land where you will live.” But the sad reality is that so many church members have "thorns" on their sides and live their faith. They live in faith without separating themselves with the worldly things, so their life of faith is painful and there is no growth of their faith. No matter how long they attend the church, their faith isn't growing. How can we expect our faith to grow when we aren't separate ourselves from the worldly things?

I heard the news that one day, a tourist bus carrying many Korean old people here in the US and going to a casino was hit by a fire truck and one of them died and about 50 people were injured. I still remember hearing that the news pointed out that the gambling degree of the elderly in Korean town is getting worse. Why aren't many people getting out of gambling, alcohol, nicotine addiction, drug addiction and sex addiction? Why are you addicted? In an article from the Korean Anti-Drug Campaign, I found some reasons for being addicted (Internet):

(1) The first cause is the social environment.

It is said that the socio-environmental prevalence of materialism and the high number of people who are aiming for money are also a factor in promoting poisoning during gambling. It is especially difficult to break up when exposed to adolescents who lack self-regulation. In addition, 'dreaming of one big success' which is socially ill, is a major influence on gambling and lottery addiction.

(2) The second cause can be attributed to personality factors.

Usually a thrill-seeker is easily addicted. This is the case of "addictive" personality people who need an endless new, intense stimulus.

(3) The third cause is depression.

Depressed patients are susceptible to gambling addiction.

(4) The fourth cause can be said to be reality escape.

The reason why escaped reality people are at high risk of addiction is that they are introverted and quiet, often have few friends and weak social activities.

(5) Another thing is that there is a medical cause.

Gambling addiction is called "pathological gambling" or "gambling mania" in medical terms. This is not a habit that can be fixed by an individual's will, but a kind of impulse control disorder. In other words, because the desire for gambling is so strong that they cannot control their own behavior, they are known to start from alcohol or drug addiction. There is no fatal effect on the body, but it is a kind

of brain dysfunction.

If they fall into a gambling poisoning state, characteristic symptoms appear.

(1) That's tolerance appears.

Once they fall in love with gambling, that's all they think. To get the same excitement, they need to spend more and more time gambling and more and more money. In the end, they won't blink your eyes at any amount of money.

(2) Another scary symptom is symptom of prohibition, and most gamblers feel that they are having trouble at some point.

If they have serious problems at home or at work, they may decide to temporarily restrain themselves. But these efforts are often failed due to prohibition symptoms. If they don't gamble, they are nervous and anxious. Then from the moment they gamble, the unpleasant feelings disappear and they are excited again. If these symptoms are repeated, they will reach a stage where they cannot quit without them knowing.

We must take seriously these problems of addiction that are emerging in society. How can we, Christians, who are responsible for separating ourselves from the things of the world, separating ourselves from these wickedness? We shouldn't step in from the beginning. But what if we have already stepped in and tasted them? Look at 2 Corinthians 6:17 – “Therefore come out from them and be separate ....” The Korea Anti-Drug Headquarters says: ‘It's hard to stop yourself. Once you're addicted to gambling, it's not easy to stop yourself. It is because, like other addictions, if you stop gambling you will have withdrawal symptoms such as depression, anxiety and insomnia. It is similar to a alcoholic who is looking for alcohol again. Therefore, gambling symptoms should be treated aggressively as soon as possible. Addicts never recognize gambling as a disease. People around you, such as your family, must force you to be treated’ (Internet). To get out of addiction, we need to be able to protect our hearts. It means that we must get rid of a life of letting our physical bodies to control our hearts and that we must reform so that our hearts and our souls control our physical bodies. In order to do so, we must enrich the Word of God in our hearts. As we seek “knowledge and understanding” (Neh. 10:28), we must understand the commandments of God and observe them. And we must live a life of faith that separates ourselves from the worldly things. We must earnestly pray to Jesus, the Doctor, who came to cure sin-addicted mankind.

**The second thing that we, the responsible Christians, must do is we must be responsible for the marriage of our children.**

Look at Nehemiah 10:30 – “and that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons.” How hard is it to marry our children these days? Dr. Sun-Hee Bae, a senior researcher and family doctor at the Korea Family Counseling Education Research Institute, said in an article

titled, 'It's not to push our children to get marry, whether they won't marry or will marry late' (Internet): 'My daughter is almost thirty but she isn't thinking about getting married. So I am worried and I say the words of marriage. Then she gets very angry. I am afraid that it will become a fight. So if I decide to leave her alone, I am worried that she may lose the opportunity to get marry and may live alone rest of her life. When I think about my daughter's marriage, I wake up at night. What should I do as a mother?' Most parents with unmarried children at this age group seem to have this concern. Perhaps it is natural for parents to think and worry about their children marriage, marrying them to the right person at the right time because it is their primary responsibility and duty. That's why there is a saying that marriage is the greatest filial duty. To that extent, parents have a lot of concern in their children's marriage and sometimes tend to cling on it. How important is the parent's responsibility to marry their children? It's never easy. As the parents who are raising the children, it is a big responsibility to marry them.

The Israelites' second decision in keeping the God's commandments was to take responsibility for the marriage of their children. They decided not to marry their children with the Gentiles. This was a pledge of the Israelites not to intermarry with the Gentiles, but also a repentance movement of returning to God according to the God's words given to Moses in Deuteronomy 7:3-4 (Park). Look at Deuteronomy 7:3-4: "Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you." Marriage between the God's people, the Israelites and the Gentiles, was a great problem among the Israelites in Ezra and Nehemiah's days. Look at Ezra 9:2 – "They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness." As God's holy children, the Israelites' leaders took the lead in this sin of mixing with the Gentiles. If we now speak of these Israelites' commitments to children's marriage, we Christian parents are determined not to marry our children to unbelievers. Why should we? The reason is because it is God's commandment. Look at 2 Corinthians 6:14 – "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" Why did God give us such commandment? What is the will of the Lord? The reason is to prevent our children from being tempted by unbelievers and leaving God to worship idols (Deut. 7:3-4). How many people are there around us who married unbelievers and left the churches they used to attend? But the question is whether it is possible to marry our children to other believers. I still remember that when I was working in Korea, a sister in Christ asked me whether it is possible for the Christian singles sisters in Christ could get marry because statistically they were more Christian single sisters in Christ than single brothers in Christ. It may be difficult statistically. We may also present many other difficult problems in our human minds. But the important thing is to marry our children by faith, not statistically.

We are to be instructed in the "marrying children" of Abraham, the father of faith. When Abraham chose his daughter-in-law, he told his servant Eliezer not to get a wife for his son Isaac from the daughters of the Canaanites (Gen. 24:3) but go to Mesopotamia (v. 10) and chose from his country and his own relatives (v. 4). This shows how carefully Abraham considered his son's marriage. He obeyed God's commandment in Genesis 24:7 – "The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my

birth, and who spoke to me and who swore to me, saying, 'To your descendants I will give this land,' He will send His angel before you, and you will take a wife for my son from there." Like Abraham, we must also carefully consider our children's marriage. Regarding their marriage, we must act as directed by God, and we must refuse to marry our children with unbelievers. Nevertheless, there are some of our children who are married to unbelievers because of money, honor, status, and appearance, and others. If we let our children to marry because of these things and if our children marry as they are led by their own greed, then their families will not stand firmly in the Lord. The families without the truth and not being claimed by God should be concerned about the danger of falling.

**The third and the last thing that we, the responsible Christians, must do is to keep the Lord's Day holy.**

Look at Nehemiah 10:31 – "As for the peoples of the land who bring wares or any grain on the sabbath day to sell, we will not buy from them on the sabbath or a holy day; and we will forego the crops the seventh year and the exaction of every debt." Determining in the revival of the Word, the Israelites in Nehemiah's day committed themselves to follow God's law by separating themselves from the Gentiles. In the meantime, they determined not only no to marry their children with the Gentiles, but also to keep the Sabbath day holy as the fourth of Moses' Ten Commandments said (v. 31). How did they commit themselves to keep the Sabbath day holy? They determined not to buy wares or any grain on the Sabbath day when the people of the land of Canaan would sell them on the Sabbath day or a holy day (v. 31). Another thing was that every seventh year they determined to forgo working the land and cancel all debts (v. 31). In other words, for the first year of the seventh year, the land would be left uncultivated (thus the land becomes fertile). In addition, they resolved to cancel the debts of the debtors in that year. Therefore, the debtors once again had the hope and opportunity to build a new economic foundation. As a result, the gap between rich and poor had narrowed in society. Dr. Park Yun-sun said: 'This does not condemn the sale itself, but prohibits the commercial acts taken to hinder the rest of the body or hinder the spiritual worship.' Here, the rest of the body doesn't refer to a state of inactivity and of doing nothing. Resting on that day means that the body and the soul enjoy God and enjoy peace together without suffering from the affairs of the world (Park).

How should we observe the Sabbath, the Lord's Day? As I grew up I grew up learning that I shouldn't spend money on Sunday. Also, I shouldn't study too on Sunday. This problem has changed in the seminary. While listening to one of my professors, I thought it was okay to use money on Sunday, that is, to buy and sell. Then, after becoming a senior pastor, I stopped buying and selling on Sunday. How should we keep the Lord's Day holy? This is what the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) Book of Church Order (BCO) 48th says: "It is the duty of every person to remember the Lord's Day; and to prepare for it before its approach. All worldly business should be so ordered, and seasonably laid aside, as that they may not be hindered thereby from sanctifying the Sabbath, as the Holy Scriptures require" (48-3), "The whole day is to be kept holy to the Lord; and to be employed in the public and private exercises of religion. Therefore, it is requisite, that there be a holy resting, all the day, from unnecessary labors; and an abstaining from those recreations which may be lawful on other days; and also, as much as possible, from worldly thoughts and conversation" (48-4). How challenging

is this? Are we become accustomed to preparing the Lord's Day in advance? On the contrary, aren't we trying to do everything that we couldn't do during the week on Sunday? Therefore, aren't we keeping the Sabbath day holy as the Bible requires? Shouldn't we refrain from entertainment on Sunday, but is it becoming more common for us to have fun on Sunday? The 12th President of the United States, General Zachary Taylor, was to be inaugurated as President of the Constitution on March 4, 1849, and he refused to take office on Sunday. This was because keeping the Sabbath day, that is Sunday, was the command of God that preceded the inauguration of the president (Internet).

Ashley Smith, a 26-year-old widow who was taken hostage by the legal gunman murderer Brian Nichols (33), read Reverend Rick Warren's book "The Purpose-Driven Life" to Nichols. As she was reading that book "Day 33 – How real servants act", this was how Ashley Smith tried to convince Nichols: Taking me hostage was according to God's providence, and preaching the gospel in a prison that you would go because of your act of murder might be your purpose of life.' After hearing this, Nichols, the killer who lost his mind, returned to his heart, and soon released Ashley and surrendered (Internet). Isn't this the life of the responsible Christian? Yet, too many of us, the Christians, don't seem to live our lives as responsible believers. But Jesus died on the cross in order to be responsible for our salvation, such sinners like us who are not responsible. Did Jesus need to be responsible for our salvation? Was he responsible for us who aren't separated from the worldly things, who aren't responsible for the raising of children, who aren't keeping the Lord's Day holy? How shall we Christians live?

# **“We will not neglect the house of God.”**

## **[Nehemiah 10:32-39]**

One day, a pastor was preaching earnestly, but there was a sister in Christ who kept getting up and sitting down, looking around restlessly. The pastor found it irritating, but he thought to himself, ‘Maybe she is just counting how many people have come.’ He held his tongue. After the worship service, he asked her why she had acted that way. She replied, ‘Pastor, I was expecting a lodge money from another sister in Christ, who promised it the day before yesterday. Since I hadn't heard anything, I came today to see if she showed up.’ The pastor inquired, ‘Did you come to receive the lodge money, or did you come to worship?’ She answered, ‘Well, it's both’ (Internet). It seems that she was not considering the offering she should be giving to God for the ministry before Him, but only thinking about the lodge money she was expecting to receive. This is a reality where one is not focused on what she should be giving to support God's work.

Matthew 6:21 says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." What do we consider as our "treasure"? What captures our hearts? During the time of the prophet Haggai, the focus of the Israelites was on their "paneled houses" (Hag. 1:4). At that time, God spoke to the Israelites through the prophet Haggai, saying, "Is it time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?" The Israelites were guilty of neglecting the house of God. Today, I want to reflect on the revival of the Word experienced by the Israelites at the Square Gate, as described in Nehemiah 10:32-39. I want to consider four things that the Israelites committed to giving for the sake of God's house as they stood before God and declared, "We will not neglect the house of God" (v. 39).

**First, what the Israelites intended to contribute for the sake of God's house was temple tax.**

Look at Nehemiah 10:32 - "We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God." Are you faithfully paying your taxes to the state? I remember a distinguished professor from Yonsei University who came to give a lecture a

long time ago, urging us Christians to willingly pay taxes to the state. I wonder why he felt the need to say that, considering how many Christians may not be honestly paying their taxes. I recall seeing newspaper ads advocating for conscientious tax payment in the "Christian Ethics Practice Movement" (KEPM). When we look at Matthew 22:21, Jesus said, "... Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." However, it seems that many Christians are not as diligent in contributing to the state as they are in giving offerings to God.

Looking at the background of Nehemiah 10:32, the Israelites were required to contribute half a shekel each year for the service of God's temple, starting from the age of 20 and above (Exod. 30:11-16). This tax served as a reminder to the Israelites that God had redeemed them, paying a price to set them free. Additionally, the temple tax encouraged the Israelites to act as a people belonging to God. Originally, this tax was used to make sockets for the panels of the sanctuary, as well as the bases and hooks for the pillars of the temple (38:25-28). However, it later came to be used to cover the expenses of the ministry. In today's passage, Nehemiah 10:32, it mentions not half a shekel, but "a third of a shekel." This is likely because at that time, due to foreign oppression, the Israelites had become too impoverished, which resulted in the reduction of the tax to one-third of a shekel (Park). However, later during Jesus' time, we can see that it returned to half a shekel (Mt. 17:24-27). When all the Israelites contributed this one-third shekel annually, how was it used? The money given by the Israelites was used for all the needs of God's temple. It was used for everything required for the ministry in God's temple. Look at Nehemiah 10:33 - "for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, at the New Moon feasts and at the appointed festivals; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God."

If we were to use today's terminology, we could call the temple tax "offering." In a similar vein, we can say that the church, through the offerings of all its saints, supports the ministry, just as the Israelites contributed one-third shekel each for the temple of God. We must support the Lord's church financially. However, it is crucial that we first give our offerings with a heart dedicated to God in Christ. This is because many Christians seem to be satisfied with simply offering material possessions to God without giving much thought to their dedication (Park).

**Second, what the Israelites intended to contribute for the sake of God's temple was the wood offering.**

Look at Nehemiah 10:34: "We—the priests, the Levites and the people—have cast lots to determine when each of our families is to bring to the house of our God at set times each year a contribution of wood to burn on the altar of the Lord our God, as it is written in the Law." This pertains to the "grain offering" mentioned in Leviticus 6:8-13 (Num. 28:1-8), where it states that the fire on the altar should never go out. Therefore, a constant supply of wood was necessary. In other words, since there would always be sins in Israel, offerings needed to be placed on the altar in order to atone for them, and thus, the fire on the altar had to be kept burning. This is why the Israelites cast lots to determine the times when each family

would bring wood to the house of God. However, in the New Testament era, there was no longer a need to continue offering the grain offering. This is because Jesus Christ, who became the true "grain offering," forgave our sins and died on the cross once and for all. Therefore, we do not need to supply wood to ensure that the fire on the altar, symbolizing the grain offering, remains perpetually burning.

So, how can we compare this Israelite practice of a "wood offering" to something in our present time? I believe that we can compare it to the words and prayers of Jesus Christ in order to keep the fire of the Holy Spirit burning. In other words, just as the Israelites offered wood to keep the fire on the altar burning for the grain offering, we should dedicate ourselves daily to the word of God and prayer to ensure that the fire of the Holy Spirit does not go out in our hearts. Unfortunately, many of us Christians are like dimly lit candles. In other words, we are like smoldering wicks. Instead of shining brightly with the light of Jesus Christ in this world, we are living a feeble faith life, overshadowed by darkness. The reason for this is that we are not dedicating ourselves to the task of kindling the fire of the Holy Spirit through the Lord's word and prayer. For example, I don't know how expensive gasoline prices are these days. However, even if it costs a lot of money, we still put gasoline in our cars to drive. Yet, as people of the Holy Spirit, despite the fact that we need the fuel of the Holy Spirit, namely the word of God and prayer, to keep the fire of the Holy Spirit burning brightly, we hesitate to invest in it. In other words, we are not dedicating ourselves to prayers. In this state, how can the body of our Lord's church, as a community, radiate the light of Jesus Christ to those around us?

### **Third, what the Israelites intended to contribute for the sake of God's temple was the firstfruits.**

Look at Nehemiah 10:35-37a: "We also assume responsibility for bringing to the house of the Lord each year the firstfruits of our crops and of every fruit tree. As it is also written in the Law, we will bring the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, of our herds and of our flocks to the house of our God, to the priests ministering there. Moreover, we will bring to the storerooms of the house of our God, to the priests, the first of our ground meal, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees and of our new wine and olive oil. ...." Why did the Israelites offer their firstfruits to God? The reason is because all firstborn, whether human or animal, belonged to the Lord. Look at Exodus 34:19 - "The first offspring of every womb belongs to me, including all the firstborn males of your livestock, whether from herd or flock" (Note: Lev. 27:26). When God inflicted ten plagues upon Egypt during the Exodus, He took the lives of all the firstborns of both humans and animals who had not smeared the blood of the lamb on their doorposts. Therefore, God redeemed the Israelites. In the end, the firstborns were redeemed through sacrifice because they belonged to God. So, what else did the Israelites offer as firstfruits? It was the very best of the firstfruits from their land. Look at Exodus 23:19a - "Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God ...."

We are to offer our very best first to the Lord. For example, we should dedicate the very first part of our day to the Lord (e.g., morning prayer, meditation on the Word). Additionally, we should set



aside the very first portion of our material possessions, namely our offerings, to God. Let's offer the very first of our health to the Lord (e.g., maintaining the best of our health when we come to the Lord on Sundays).

**Fourth and last, what the Israelites intended to contribute for the sake of God's temple was the tithe.**

Look at Nehemiah 10:37b-39: "...and we will bring a tithe of our crops to the Levites, for it is the Levites who collect the tithes in all the towns where we work. A priest descended from Aaron is to accompany the Levites when they receive the tithes, and the Levites are to bring a tenth of the tithes up to the house of our God, to the storerooms of the treasury. The people of Israel, including the Levites, are to bring their contributions of grain, new wine and olive oil to the storerooms, where the articles for the sanctuary and for the ministering priests, the gatekeepers and the musicians are also kept. We will not neglect the house of our God." What is a tithe? The word "tithe" itself means "tenth." A tithe is a contribution of one-tenth of one's income to God. There were three types of tithes in the Old Testament:

- (1) The Jews offered one-tenth of their produce to the Lord each year to support the Levites (Lev. 27:30-34).

The Levites, who received tithes from the Jews, in turn gave one-tenth of that tithe to the priests. Therefore, tithes were used to sustain the livelihoods of both the Levites and the priests (Num. 18:25-32).

- (2) In Deuteronomy 26:1-11, it is explained that in addition to the tithe, the Jews also brought one-tenth from the remaining 90% to the temple for the annual feasts.

- (3) Apart from these two tithes, there was another tithe given once every three years to assist the needy in society, amounting to one-tenth (Deut. 26:12-15, 14:28-29).

When it comes to tithing, the most frequently quoted passage is likely Malachi 3:8. Let's take a look at Malachi 3:8 - "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings." Why is not tithing considered a sinful act according to this passage? Here are three summarized points:

- (1) Failing to acknowledge that everything comes from God, and humans are merely stewards entrusted with it.
- (2) By giving one-tenth to God, humans practice minimizing greed, which is a fundamental step in letting go of attachment to material possessions.

Through this practice, one can prevent themselves from becoming enslaved to materialism.

(3) It goes against God's loving intention.

God planned the redistribution of income through the operation of tithes to establish a welfare society.

However, during the time of Malachi, the people of Israel did not observe the ordinance of tithing, thus deliberately undermining God's plan. God challenges us today regarding tithing: "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows" (Mal. 3:10). God issues a challenge to us today: Test Me!

Tithing unto God can bring great blessings to us. To make this possible, we should avoid at least three things: (1) Offering tithes with wrong motives (for example, grudgingly or out of greed – expecting God to make me rich if I tithe!), (2) Thinking that once we've tithed, we can use the remaining 90% however we want, and (3) Only tithing and not offering love gifts to the Lord (Internet).

Winston Churchill is said to have stated: "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give." The true revival of the word in Nehemiah resulted in support for the house of God. It brings to mind hymn "I Gave My Life for Thee." The explanation of this hymn goes like this: While studying in Germany, John S. B. Monsell came across a famous painting titled 'Look at this man' in a gallery in Düsseldorf. It was a portrait of Jesus wearing a crown of thorns. Beneath it were the words: 'I did this for you... What have you done for me?' After seeing this, Monsell sat down and wrote this hymn. Later, Monsell visited poor women in an almshouse, and when he read this hymn to them, they unexpectedly received great blessings and expressed warm gratitude. The sacrificial love that the Lord has bestowed upon us is so immense that it surpasses our imagination. Therefore, there is no way we can repay this grace through any of our efforts. This hymn expresses such sentiments in urgent language (Internet).

# All the men who volunteered

## [Nehemiah 11:1-2]

Do you know where the term "volunteer" originated? In the Western world, it started being used to refer to support soldiers who volunteered for military service during World War I, and from there, the term evolved to encompass modern volunteerism. Today, it not only pertains to activities in social welfare but has spread to various areas including transportation, environment, crime, and community issues. Therefore, when we say "volunteers," we refer to people who willingly take action to create a better community. Volunteerism possesses three key characteristics (Internet):

(1) The first characteristic is "voluntarism": "How can I not do this?"

Voluntarism emphasizes taking action based on individual free will and agency. Especially in today's highly specialized society, it requires individuals to proactively address the suffering of neighbors or communal crises and societal issues without turning a blind eye. It's the determination to step forward voluntarily when faced with situations where someone must take action, thinking, "How can I not do this?" Anyone can think of doing something good, but the crucial question is, 'Who will take voluntary action first?'

(2) The second characteristic is "publicness": It's not just about cleaning in front of my own house.

Even if one has voluntarism in abundance, if they lack a sense of welfare or public spirit, their actions cannot be considered volunteer work. For example, someone immersing themselves in hobbies like playing board games or fishing out of personal preference cannot be classified as volunteer work. Even in cleaning, it's not just about cleaning in front of one's own house or a close friend's house; it's about cleaning the entire neighborhood. Volunteerism is a societal activity for the prosperity of the community we live in together.

It means taking responsibility as a member of the community, considering the problems of neighbors as one's own, and working together with neighbors to lead a blessed life.

(3) The final third characteristic is "unpaid": What's the reward?

Volunteer work stems from a genuine desire to help society, others, or the environment, not from a desire for personal gain. It's not about seeking any material reward. There are occasionally places that provide minimal expenses like transportation or meals. But from the volunteer's perspective, expecting and participating in activities for such rewards is not the intention. Volunteer work is a civic duty that one naturally undertakes as a citizen. Above all, engaging in volunteer work leads to personal happiness.

Today, in Nehemiah 11:2, the phrase "volunteered" is mentioned. After the reconstruction of the walls and gates of Jerusalem, there was a need for people to live there. In other words, now that the walls and gates of Jerusalem had all been restored, it was important for Jews to live there and for the population to grow in the central city. Additionally, while living there, the Jews had the responsibility to protect and guard Jerusalem. The reason being that they never knew when enemies might launch an attack. Of course, Jews would have been safer living somewhere other than Jerusalem. However, despite the risks, someone had to step up to protect this city of Jerusalem. Therefore, today, focusing on Nehemiah 11:1-2, under the title of "All the men who volunteered," I would like to reflect on who volunteered to stay in Jerusalem, considering the two groups of volunteers, and receive the lesson that God wants to impart to us.

**The first group of volunteers who chose to stay in Jerusalem were the leaders.**

Looking at Nehemiah 11:1a - "Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem, ...." Another expression of dedication shown by the Israelites who experienced the revival at the Water Gate was the leaders of the people relocating their homes to Jerusalem (Packer). Their determination was to live a life centered around the Jerusalem temple. The leaders of the people set an example in this matter.

I'll share an experience I had while I was in Korea. There was a couple in our church who were helping with the church website. They used to live in Sanggye-dong, but they moved to Seogyo-dong (near Hongdae), which is close to our church. The reason was that both of them wanted to be more dedicated to their faith and actively involved. So now, since the church is nearby, they even participate in the early morning prayer meetings and pray for both me and our church. The revival of the Word experienced by the saints is about living a church-centered life. In the community of Korean immigrants who have lived in the U.S., there has always been a church, regardless of where or when. This was especially prominent in the first generation of the Korean community. This phenomenon was also true for immigrant groups from Europe. Immigrant groups from the UK and Scandinavia

generally established Protestant churches, including the Anglican Church. Irish and Italian communities centered their lives around the Catholic Church. Russian, Jewish, and Eastern European communities focused on the Russian Orthodox Church (or Eastern Orthodox Church). However, among immigrants from Northeast Asia, only Koreans consistently formed church-centered communities. This was because Korean immigration to the Americas began with referrals from American pastors, and church congregations were at the center of recruitment, so there were already many church members from the start. Among the 7,200 people who came to Hawaii between 1903 and 1905, 40 percent were church members. Several factors contributed to the church becoming the most central organization in the Korean community. However, the most crucial factor was the strong religious sentiment of the Korean people, coupled with the stimulus of losing independence in their homeland due to Japan's invasion. This led to a determination to contribute to independence in any way possible, and it opened the eyes of the first and second generations to life and history through Bible study. They were also urged to raise their educational levels by learning Korean and social life. Living abroad as a subject of a lost nation heightened their affection for their language and culture. The Chinese immigrant group, traditionally based on strong family values, came to the U.S. and still sought out extended family and engaged in activities centered around lineage associations. They established many temples and were particular about their origins within Japan. However, Koreans uniquely developed their social lives around churches, fostering a sense of community. Enjoying cultural activities and organizing their social lives around the church played a significant role in this development. It's worth noting that this factor, which cannot be underestimated, also contributed to the growing sense of community (Internet).

So, the purpose of the leaders of the Israelite people moving to Jerusalem and dedicating themselves to a life centered around the Jerusalem Temple was what? They moved not for their own sake, but for the sake of Jerusalem. Their purpose was to exalt the glory of God and to truly elevate Him by creating a strong community (Packer). Is this realistically possible? Can one voluntarily move closer to the church for geographical proximity? We must serve with an affectionate attachment, loving the temple of God. The expression of this love is not only the ability to move closer to the church, but also to frequently come and go, cherishing and serving the church while engaging in word and prayer life at the temple. Nowadays, one aspect of the church holds regional (cell) gatherings. We often gather together with saints in the local area to exalt the glory of God and aim to create a strong (healthy) community.

Is our church community growing into a strong (healthy) community that exalts the glory of God? How can we know this? If we list three characteristics of our body's cells, the first is specialization, the second is diversity, and the third is unity (Internet):

- (1) Specialization: First, let's take a look at how specialized the organs that make up our body are.

Our eyes are composed of over 100 million cone cells and 7 million rod cells, allowing us to distinguish very small light and subtle colors. We can appreciate abstract paintings like Picasso's or works with countless dots like those by Seurat. What about our ears? Through the outer antennas, they can pick up sounds even from several kilometers away, and when answering the phone, they are specialized enough to recognize the voice of a loved one. The thin eardrum, which is less than 1mm thick, can detect numerous sounds at once, and the three small bones in our ears vibrate about 300 times per second when a piano key is pressed, allowing us to discern the sound.

(2) Diversity: Our body is composed of a wide variety of cells in terms of function and form, which has led to the human body being referred to as five organs, six parts, four limbs since ancient times.

God does not desire uniformity; rather, He delights in creating marvelous diversity. Just look at the universe He created. He made thousands of species of insects, including over 300,000 types of beetles alone. Everything that flies in the sky, crawls on the ground, or swims in the water is made diverse. While our body is composed of various parts, none of them are superfluous. In fact, some parts that may seem weak and apparently useless are often crucial and frequently serve vital functions. For instance, the paralysis of a few weak nerve cells can lead to blindness and rotting of the limbs. When a seemingly inconspicuous nerve cell on the sole of the foot is paralyzed, the sensation in the foot dulls. Unaware that the ondol (heated floor) is scalding hot, a person may unknowingly rest their foot on it, leading to an infection and eventual decay, necessitating amputation. The church, like the body, is diverse, but there is no member that is without value.

(3) Unity: Thirdly, based on the principle of unity, all the cells in our body, though different in nature, possess the same genetic factor. By examining this genetic code, one can easily determine to which organ each cell belongs.

This is what DNA is. In the church, it represents the Spirit of Jesus Christ. In every cell's nucleus lies a chromosome, which, like DNA, is composed of these genetic codes. Similarly, the church should be a congregation of saints who carry Jesus Christ in the center of their hearts. This should be the only criterion that proves they are one body.

When we look at these three characteristics of our body, I believe we can examine whether our church is growing into a strong (healthy) community: (1) Is our church preserving specialization? In other words, is each person serving according to the given gift or talent? (2) Is our church pursuing diversity? I believe we can answer "yes" (e.g., the three ministry). (3) Is our church upholding unity? Is it effectively maintaining the oneness that already exists within the body of Christ?

Our church, particularly in this diversity, must transform into a church that upholds unity. In this process, each of us should discover and develop the gifts and talents given to us, and willingly participate in God's work of establishing His church, which is the body of the Lord. Especially church leaders should serve with a heart of volunteering, dedicating their gifts and talents for the body of the Lord, while engaging in a faith-centered life centered around the church.

**The second and last group of volunteers who chose to stay in Jerusalem consisted of one-tenth of the remaining people aside from the leaders.**

Let's look at Nehemiah 11:1b – "... and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, ...." After the reconstruction of the walls and gates of Jerusalem, apart from the leaders who volunteered to live there, one-tenth of the remaining people were chosen by casting lots to dwell in the holy city of Jerusalem. Similar to what we contemplated in Nehemiah 10:37-38, where the Israelite people dedicated themselves not to forsake the house of God and vowed to bring their tithes, Nehemiah also directed one-tenth of the Israelite population to move from other cities to Jerusalem by casting lots. In Nehemiah 7:4, the Bible states, "Now the city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt." In other words, living in Jerusalem was not particularly desirable due to the less favorable conditions, which made many Jews hesitant to relocate there. Who would willingly choose to live in uncomfortable and less developed neighborhoods or houses? If we were to suggest to our church members to move closer to the church in order to build the body of Christ and serve the Lord's work, what might happen?

From this, I can learn two lessons:

(1) One thing is that it seems that just being there can be considered ministry.

Therefore, we must not underestimate the significance of being where God desires us to be. While we may not receive a demand for an impressive ministry, the fact that we are present itself constitutes ministry. Both leaders and the remaining one-tenth of the people, men, women, and children, who resolved and obeyed in faith to immigrate to Jerusalem, served God, His kingdom, and future generations by their presence in the city.

(2) One more thing is that within the community, leaders and the 10% of the saints may lead the entire congregation.

I'm reminded of something Pastor John Maxwell, an expert in leadership, once said in his book: '20% of the congregation leads 80% .... Here, we can consider two principles:

(a) **The Pareto Principle.**

It's the 80/20 rule, named after the famous Italian economist Pareto. He sometimes observed that the value of small items quantitatively was much more significant than that of larger items. He analyzed this phenomenon and created a simple diagram, signifying that with only 20% of the input, 80% of the output is achieved. In other words, it's a fact that "20% of the population owns 80% of the wealth, 20% of the core staff does 80% of the work, 20% of the customers contribute 80% of the revenue, and 20% of the core products bring in 80% of the profits," among other things (Internet).

(b) The second principle is the 2.6.2 rule.

An ecologist closely observed ants at work. Although all the ants seemed to be working hard, it turned out not to be the case. It's estimated that about 20% belong to the "hardworking group," around 60% are in the "middle," and about 20% belong to the "lazy" group. Among the 20% hardworking group, there's another division: 20% are "very hardworking," 60% are "moderately hardworking," and 20% are "less hardworking." So, he named this phenomenon the 2.6.2 rule and claimed that this rule also applies to the human world.

When we associate these two principles with the 10% of the Israelite population who migrated to Jerusalem in today's passage, we can think that a small group, which constitutes 1/10 of the Israelite population, can lead the remaining 90%. However, what matters is which "one-tenth small group" it is. Let's consider three possible scenarios for the "one-tenth small group" of the Israelite population:

(1) Obedient Individuals or Volunteers:

Among the Israelite people who immigrated to Jerusalem, there were not only those who were chosen by casting lots (11:1), but also individuals who voluntarily relocated (Park). These two groups of people can be described as obedient individuals or volunteers. I believe that these individuals, who have the ability to influence the remaining 90% of the Israelite people, can be considered leader types.

(2) Dedicated Individuals:

Finding "dedicated individuals" nowadays has become challenging even within the church. If those who shy away from dedication become the leaders, constituting 10% of the church, they will not be able to lead the remaining 90% of the congregation properly. However, the small group of people, one-tenth of the Israelite population, who immigrated to Jerusalem, showed a level of dedication that was not easy. Whether through obedience or voluntary action, relocating to the holy city of Jerusalem was itself a demonstration of profound dedication. In a way, it was moving to a danger zone, taking one's wife and children to



Jerusalem, a city under constant threat of attack by foreigners. This was not a typical form of dedication. Dedication always comes with a cost. To choose something, something else must be relinquished. However, the key to a joyful and victorious Christian life lies in living a life of costly dedication.

(3) People with a sense of mission:

If the small group, constituting one-tenth of the Israelite population, who immigrated to Jerusalem lacked a sense of mission, would they have relocated to Jerusalem so resolutely? I believe they were individuals fervently committed to the sense of mission to increase the population in the holy city of Jerusalem, alongside the leaders, and to support the city for God's purpose. Without such fervent sense of mission, they would not have left other cities, which were peaceful and posed less risk, to migrate to Jerusalem, a city with significant risks. In a way, these one-tenth of the Israelite population, who were fervently committed to their mission, can be described as 'Risk-takers.' They understood the value of their own mission and were faithful to it, allowing them to take on even greater responsibilities. In the parable of talents, it is also said, "Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities" (Mt. 25:23). It is most beautiful when one is in the position they are meant to be. Knowing what one's duty is, understanding the mission given to them, is a shortcut to living a wise and fulfilling life.

During yesterday's leadership Bible study, as we studied the Good Shepherd in John 10, I gained a new insight. As a shepherd, the function of a king can be broadly categorized into two main roles. One is to govern the people with righteousness and love (Ps. 45, 72), and the other is to go to war, defeating and annihilating the enemies of the people (1 Chron. 28:3; Ps. 18:34; 78:72). However, after King David, no king could live up to this ideal. Ultimately, as prophesied by the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek. 34:12-15, 23-24), God sent a divine shepherd to the Davidic lineage, and this promised new shepherd is none other than the Good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus, mentioned in John 10. What's astonishing is that in John 10, when Jesus introduces Himself as the Good Shepherd, He reveals a new fact that has never been seen in the history of Old Testament Israel. That is, in the Old Testament, there was never an example of a king dying in battle for the salvation and life of His people (us). Yet, Jesus declares that He will willingly die for His people (us), not because He is powerless and unjustly condemned, but because He voluntarily chooses to do so according to the authority given to Him by God. Why did Jesus willingly die on the cross? It was to save you and me. Those of us who have received the grace of this salvation, what should we do? We should, with a willing heart, offer everything we have to fulfill God's will.

# Worshippers of the dedication ceremony

**[Nehemiah 12:27-30, 43]**

Do you know the origins of the dedication ceremony and the consecration ceremony? The early church didn't have church buildings because whether it was a tent, a palace, or wherever the Lord Jesus was present, it was heaven. The early church congregated freely in homes, in fields, and on mountains. The word "church" comes from 'Ekklesia,' meaning "called-out assembly." The building is never a temple or a cathedral; it is the assembly of redeemed Christians that becomes the temple. After the church began to deviate in the 2nd century, church buildings started to emerge. When Constantine appeared, church buildings became more elaborate, and during the Roman Catholic heyday, so-called cathedrals began to appear. Corruption accelerated even further, culminating in the Dark Ages with the sale of indulgences for St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. Nowadays, every Protestant church in Korea imitates medieval cathedrals (Internet). What do you think? How do you feel about 'church dedication ceremonies'?

In the process of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, there were 'workers' and 'watchers,' but now, after the walls have been completed, 'worshippers' are being established, as we can see in today's passage. These worshippers were so devoted to the dedication ceremony that the sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away (Neh. 12:43). As we've already meditated, these Israelites, who experienced the revival of the Word at the Square of the Water Gate in Nehemiah 8-10, witnessed a people dedicated to God and His temple. Now, the dedicated ones only had one thing left to do: dedicate the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem, which God had accomplished through them. Isn't this the right order? It is only right for people to dedicate themselves before they dedicate the walls of Jerusalem. If the walls of Jerusalem are dedicated, but there are no dedicated people, what's the use? What good is a grand and splendid church building if there are no truly dedicated 'workers,' committed 'watchers,' and 'worshippers' who worship God in spirit and truth? So, based on today's passage in Nehemiah 12:27-30, 43, under the title "Worshippers of the dedication ceremony," I want to meditate on what the dedicated Israelites did in dedicating the walls of Jerusalem and receive the lessons that are given.

## **First, the dedicated Israelites first purified themselves.**

Look at Nehemiah 12:30 - " When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall." When the walls of Jerusalem were completed (v. 27), Levites gathered from all around. The first thing they did was to purify their bodies, the people, and the gates. Why did the Levites gather to perform the act of purification first? The reason is that since all humans are sinners, whenever they seek to do anything for the Lord God, they must first go through the process of purification (Park). While it is not explicitly stated how the Levites performed the ritual of purification, scholar Fensham speculates that the priests and Levites fasted, abstained from sexual relations, offered sin offerings, and the people washed their clothes and bathed, among other practices. However, he also mentions that it is not clear what is meant by purifying the gates and the wall (Fensham, Park).

Are we, in today's world, purifying ourselves like the Israelites did during the time of Nehemiah? If we are, what does it mean to be purifying ourselves? I believe we should emulate the "purification of worship" pursued by Calvin, a figure of the Reformation era. Professor Jeong-seok Lee, who wrote the article, said, 'Religious reform is church reform, and worship reform.' Calvin staked his life on the restoration of God's glory through the restoration of worship, based on the simple and clear principle that worship, which glorifies God, is corrupted and defiled when it deviates. He distinguished true worship from non-scriptural, erroneous worship taught by the Bible, and criticized Roman Catholic idolatry as a typical example of false worship. He introduced three types of false worship (Internet):

### (1) It is worship that teaches human thoughts.

Worship that teaches human commandments, worships that teach human traditions and elementary knowledge of the world, and worships that teach human thoughts through the Word of God. It distorts worship by teaching the thoughts of the time, the spiritual and national traditions, or denominational traditions, and the like, which are distortions of human thoughts. In particular, he designated the 'self-willed worship' in Colossians 2 as the most typical false worship. They practice rigorous asceticism, showing religious rigor in practicing rigorous asceticism, but it is not a commandment of the Lord at all, but self-made religiosity. Religious efforts and worship acts pursued to satisfy one's own religiosity and spirituality, though they may be thorough and admirable in human terms, are false worship before God. It satisfies the religious and emotional needs of the time, reflects the religious traditions of that nation, and fulfills their cultural desires, but it is not true worship, but self-centered self-worship.

### (2) It is the worship of the Pharisees.

Calvin reminds us of Jesus' warning to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. He defines worship led by those who sit in Moses' seat as the false worship led by those who, as interpreters of the law, assert authority, impose excessive practices, and sell knowledge without showing real

transformation. This is because, in the aspect of being the one who guides worship, the worship leader plays a crucial role. This category includes formal, intellectual, cold, and lifeless traditional worship that does not fear or worship God.

(3) It is theatrical worship.

The atmosphere and ceremonies are elegant and splendid, with majestic music and sermons. However, the leader performs like an actor, leading a worship devoid of true consciousness and a genuine sense of the divine. The congregation enjoys the worship, but there is no genuine encounter with God. Though it is passionate and emotional, it is not much different from attending a play, a concert, watching an emotional movie or drama, or listening to a lecture. There may be moments of ecstasy, but it doesn't impact life in any way. People cherish the experience itself, and it is merely a pseudo-experience manipulated by religious psychology to intensify emotional fervor. Calvin made every effort to glorify God by purifying false worship in the church. This involved removing religious images, abolishing superstitious practices, returning to simple biblical worship, emphasizing the Word, and using plain language that worshipers could understand.

What kind of worship should we offer to God? We need to consider the areas in which our worship needs restoration. As a significant event in our church, we have a 'Church Foundation Thanksgiving Worship.' The church's founding day carries the meaning of its birth and is akin to a birthday. Therefore, we dedicate the Sunday worship to God in thanksgiving for the church's founding. The worship format follows the usual Sunday service, but we may invite pastors from sister churches for a special sermon. Additionally, we may arrange for a choir from another church to come and sing in celebration of the church's founding. After the worship, there will be a second part with a shared meal, similar to how the founding church broke bread together, where we'll enjoy food prepared by the church and have a time of fellowship (Internet). Our church will also be holding a Church Foundation Commemorative Thanksgiving Worship next Sunday (July 10) at 4 PM, where we aim to offer abundant praise and worship to the great God who has bestowed immense grace (Ps. 145). We will sing praises and worship in three languages, and after the worship, we will have a fellowship meal with Korean, American, and Latin American cuisines. However, when we consider today's passage, we cannot help but ask whether this is all that matters. The challenge I pose to myself and to all of you is, like the dedicated Israelites in today's passage, to strive to purify ourselves, our homes, and our studies/work/business, as well as the church, until the Church Foundation Commemorative Thanksgiving Worship next Sunday. In other words, let us remember God's immense grace, but also pray that He would make us aware of any unrepented sins before the Holy God. When we come to realize these sins, let us confess and repent, relying on the atonement of the cross. This is the challenge.

**Second, the dedicated Israelites praised the dedication ceremony.**

Look at Nehemiah 12:27 – “At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres.” Praising the dedication means praising the God who sanctified the dedication. So, how did they praise God? We can consider it in three ways:

(1) They praised with great joy (v. 27).

This was possible because, as mentioned in verse 43, "God had given them great joy." We, too, must offer praise to God with great joy during worship. The reason for this is that it should be because the Lord makes us rejoice greatly.

(2) They praised with songs of thanksgiving (v. 27).

They offered praise with songs of thanksgiving because God's gracious hand enabled them to dedicate the walls of Jerusalem. If it weren't for God's help, Nehemiah, Ezra, and all the Israelites would not have been able to offer the dedication ceremony. We, too, should remember God's gracious hand and offer praise and worship to God with a thankful heart during worship. We should offer not just any praise, but simply praise and thanksgiving.

(3) They praised with various musical instruments (v. 27).

The Israelites praised God with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. As the psalmist also says in Psalms 150:3-5, “Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.” Let us also praise the exalted and great Lord in our church by employing all musical instruments during worship.

Regarding the passage from Psalms 150:3-5, the website "Gospel and Light" states, "Worship in this Psalms is filled with elements of joy and celebration. True worship should be offered in a bright and festive atmosphere rather than in a heavy mood. This is because Christian worship is the worship of the risen and victorious Lord. Jesus said, 'The kingdom of God is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for His son.' Christian worship should be a joyful feast, like a banquet of a victorious king or a banquet where the king appoints a prince. In this sense, we need to restore festive elements in worship. Worship offered in a somber atmosphere with sad faces is not suitable for the victorious Lord." Worship is a festival of thanksgiving offered by redeemed saints to the Creator and Savior. Therefore, worship should restore festive elements. Today, our worship is lacking in many festive elements. We need to restore these elements in our worship.

**Third and last, the dedicated Israelites offered the dedication worship in a unique order.**

Looking at Nehemiah 12:31-42, we can see that the Israelites, who were dedicating the walls of Jerusalem, were divided into two groups: one led by Ezra and the other led by Nehemiah. The group led by Ezra went to the right on the wall towards the Dung Gate (v. 31) and proceeded on the wall to the Gate of the Fountain and went straight up the steps toward the City of David. The ascent to the wall continued above the Palace of David to the Water Gate (v. 37). The group led by Nehemiah went above the Horse Gate, past the Prison Gate, and on to the Sheep Gate (v. 39). Afterward, these two groups met at the house of God (v. 40) and offered a dedication worship to the Lord. Why did Ezra and Nehemiah offer the dedication worship in this way? Why didn't they just meet within the confines of the Jerusalem temple, instruct the Levites to offer praise and sacrifices to the Lord, and then send everyone home? It seems there were three reasons:

- (1) The first reason is that the Israelites personally inspected the rebuilt walls and gates. By doing so, they dedicated these walls and gates to God in a proper manner.
- (2) The second reason is because God, through His gracious guidance, used Nehemiah and the Israelites in the reconstruction of the walls and gates of Jerusalem, they wanted to give all the glory to God by personally inspecting and dedicating them.
- (3) The third reason may be that they wanted to commemorate and celebrate the completion of this great work in a grand procession, glorifying God for His faithfulness and provision throughout the process.

This act of dedication was a testimony to God's goodness and a celebration of their collective efforts in accomplishing His work.

In summary, the Israelites' unique approach to the dedication worship allowed them to personally engage with and offer gratitude for the reconstructed walls and gates of Jerusalem. It also served as a powerful expression of their dedication to God and a public testimony to His faithfulness.

Is our church's worship in the process of restoring these festive elements? Over the past year, we have focused on the first purpose of our church: "A Church Devoted to Worship and Witnessing to the Lord." In the midst of this, we have sought to proclaim to even unbelievers, "God is truly among you" (1 Cor. 14:25), as we worship and praise God's presence. Are we indeed praising God's presence in our worship? Are we hearing confessions like "God is truly among you" from those who are new to the church or those who have come after a long time? Even if the worship service next Sunday may not be a dedication ceremony, like in the time of Nehemiah, we should, like the Israelites of that era, dedicate ourselves to God and celebrate His presence in our worship.

In Nehemiah 4:3, one of the adversaries, Tobiah, mocked the Israelites, saying that even if a fox were to climb on their wall, it would break down their feeble construction. However, in today's passage,

the Israelites are confidently marching around the well-built walls of Jerusalem, witnessing firsthand the solid work they have accomplished. This serves as a testimony for the surrounding unbelievers. It was a great opportunity for the foreigners to witness both the power of God and the reality of faith. As the Israelites marched around the reconstructed walls of Jerusalem, they once again realized that this was not the work of a single individual, but the result of the people having a mind to work (4:6). Therefore, no one could claim ownership over the specific section of the wall they had worked on. It reminded them that the wall belonged to God. Everything, including the wall of Jerusalem, belonged to God and should only be used for His glory. The Israelites, by marching around the walls of Jerusalem, symbolically declared, 'Yes, we have all worked diligently as part of God's work, but now we dedicate this to the Lord, for His glory alone!' Another reason was to symbolically proclaim God's blessing through an act of faith. Walking around and illuminating a portion of the building at that time was a declaration of ownership. For example, in Genesis 13:17, when God said to Abraham, "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee." Another example is in Joshua 1:3, when God said to Joshua, " I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses." The joy with which the Israelites marched around the walls of Jerusalem declared, 'Just as our forefathers declared this land in faith, we too declare everything God has done for us.'

Is the dedication service of a church the beginning or the end of ministry? Many times, dedication services mark not the beginning, but the end of a ministry. After many church members have labored to build, there are instances where, once the dedication service is concluded, they heave a sigh of relief, settling back into their routines. Vance Havner once shared his impression of a dedication service during one church's ceremony, saying: 'The church people thought the new building was a milestone, but I thought it was a millstone.' If we lose sight of the vision ahead and cease to move forward in faith, God's intended purpose can indeed become a heavy burden in our lives, even causing us to stumble. As we prepare for our church worship services, we should hold on to the dreams that God gives us. Let us dream of building God's temple and offering a dedication service for His glory as we move forward towards the future of our church, just like Nehemiah. However, let's not think that once the temple is built and the dedication service is held, God's work is done. We must not turn the construction of the temple and the dedication service into a heavy burden. Instead, it should be a milestone that propels us to attempt even greater things within the realm of our great God. To do this, we must first dedicate ourselves, our homes, our workplaces, and our businesses entirely to the Lord. This is because a dedication service in a church without dedicated individuals is meaningless.

The San-jeong-hyeon Church in Pyongyang, which resisted shrine worship to the end, welcomed Pastor Gi-cheol Joo upon his appointment to the church. In the following year, on September 5, 1937, Pastor Joo completed a new 250-pyeong church building and conducted an inaugural service. During his sermon, he declared that the church would never participate in shrine worship to Japanese idols. At that time, the situation was such that the Japanese flag was being hung inside the church, and they began to force the placement of a kamidana, a Shinto household altar, on the walls. Pastor Joo emphasized the absolute sanctity of the church, stating that no signboard would be hung on this pulpit, and not a single

mark would be left. In February 8, 1938, shortly after the dedication service of the San-jeong-hyeon Church, Pastor Joo was arrested by the police. At the time, the Pyeongbuk Conference had passed a resolution to participate in shrine worship, leading to an incident where 1,000 fervent Pyongyang Theological Seminary students vandalized the memorial service for the Pyeongbuk Conference Chairman. Pastor Joo's arrest was related to this incident. After some time, Pastor Joo was released and arrived at the Pyongyang Station on the first Sunday in February 1940. The welcoming of the congregation was enthusiastic, and he immediately entered the San-jeong-hyeon Church, still wearing the same clothes, and prostrated himself before the pulpit in prayer. When it was time for worship, the congregants, eager to see their pastor after a long time, crowded in, filling the church without any room to spare. Japanese police surrounded the church, with some even entering inside. Pastor Joo finished his prayer and stood at the pulpit. With a straight posture, dressed in a white robe and with black hair, he pressed the sounding board of the pulpit two or three times and proclaimed, "Let us worship." After singing the hymn 'A Mighty Fortress Is Our God' and beginning the worship, he read the passages from Matthew 5:11-12 ("Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you") and Romans 8:31-39 ("What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ...Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.") He then delivered a sermon titled 'My Five Prayers':

(1) Grant victory over the power of death, Lord!

'If it is for the Lord, I am willing to die a hundred times, but what kind of life would it be if I were to live for a hundred years forsaking the Lord? Oh, Lord! Please hold onto this life, so that it may not bring disgrace to You. Even if this body shatters into dust, grant me the strength to uphold Your commandments, Lord. My beloved fellow Christians, let us live as Christians even in life, and die as Christians even in death. Let us not fear death and forsake Jesus ... Do not grieve that this pastor is passing away. I cannot kneel before any other god besides my Lord. I would rather die, even die again and again, than to not remain steadfast in my devotion to the Lord.'

(2) Grant endurance through long-lasting trials, Lord!

'We can endure suffering that comes suddenly, but the prolonged, enduring suffering is incredibly difficult to bear. Even if it is punishment through being cut with a sword or burned by fire, if one were to die in an instant, they could still overcome it. However, suffering that continues for a month, two months, a year, two years, ten years, is simply unbearable. If it were absolutely



unchanging, it might be another story, but it is said that even if one were to take a step back, the pain would be alleviated, and, in fact, they might receive a generous reward. That is why many people stumble. Moreover, how can a feeble person like me endure long-lasting trials? Therefore, I rely only on the Lord.'

(3) I entrust my mother, my wife, and my fellow believers to the Lord.

'I am over 80 years old, and I have a sickly wife and young children. Where can you find parents who do not cherish their children, or children who do not care for their parents? When I think about my mother, who raised me with great sacrifice, how painful must it be for her to see me suffer and be injured at the hands of others. I have shed many tears and offered numerous prayers thinking of my mother. However, I cannot disobey God's command under the pretext of taking care of my mother. Who in the world doesn't look after their own children, and where can you find children who don't rely on their father? I also have four young sons. How can these children survive if their father dies at the hands of the enemy? My heart aches endlessly at the thought of leaving behind young children and going down the path of death. I entrust my motherless children to the Lord. I have dear fellow believers whom the Lord has entrusted to me. However, I cannot leave them behind and go down the path of death. In the midst of this harsh world, I cannot bear to leave my flock. I entrust these sheep to Jesus, the Chief Shepherd. And now, I will leave this pulpit of San-jeong-jae and follow the Lord. Everyone! It is not uncommon for a person, while enduring the pain of their body, to have a heart as firm as iron when thinking about their parents and wife. Many have turned away from the path of martyrdom upon hearing the cries of their young children. Human attachments entangle me and prevent me from loving my parents and wife more than Jesus. Please grant me the strength to overcome this.'

(4) Grant me to live and die in righteousness.

'From the moment a person is born into this world, there is a righteousness they must uphold as a human being. As a citizen of a nation, there is a righteousness of loyalty; as a woman, there is a righteousness of integrity; and as a Christian, there is a righteousness of being true to Christ. Oh! The name of my Lord Jesus is echoing on this land. Pyongyang, Pyongyang, the Jerusalem of the East, the glory has departed from you. Oh, Morán Peak, stand tall and weep. Daedong River, Daedong River, let us weep together. I offer this humble life of mine as a sacrifice for the Lord. Is the sword waiting for me? Life is as short as a breath, but righteousness is eternal. My beloved fellow believers, let us die in righteousness and live in righteousness. To forsake righteousness and forsake righteousness towards Jesus is even lower than a wild beast. I die with Jesus, and I live with Jesus.

(5) I entrust my soul to the Lord.

Oh, Lord Jesus! I entrust my soul to You. When I grasp the cross and fall, Lord, receive my soul. Whether in prison or at the place of execution, wherever my life is cut short, please, receive my soul. The house of God is my home, and the kingdom of God is my eternal homeland. Wash my feet that have trodden upon dirty ground, and allow me to walk on the golden path of heaven. Cleanse my soul, tainted by sin in this wicked world, so that I may stand before the glory of God without shame. Oh Lord, I entrust my soul to You. 'Receive my soul, amen. Pastor Gi-cheol Joo passionately delivered this fiery sermon, and in the end, overcome with emotion, he raised both hands high and vigorously stomped the platform floor, singing the hymn with great fervor: 'Though this world is harsh and I may be weak, if I pray with all my might, I will gain great power.' The worshippers at Mandang all wept together, their hearts moved by the sermon. The fervor of faith burning within Pastor Choo spread to the hearts of all the parishioners at San-jeong-hyeon Church, igniting an even greater fire (Internet).

# Devout Christians

## [Nehemiah 12:44-47]

Do you not dream of a church built on love, where pastors embrace saints, holding them dear, and where pastors' hidden pains are held close to their hearts? However, the reality for pastors is that 80 percent of adults believe they should meet higher standards of life than ordinary people. Ironically, people think there are few pastors who can meet such expectations (Rubietta). What are the expectations you have for your pastor? They may vary. But one thing is clear: We all must strive to build a church with understanding and love. To do this, we must devote ourselves to each other. We need to open our hearts to one another, engage in conversation, get to know each other, and pray for one another, sharing the love of the Lord. Let us all show our devotion in this work.

Today, I would like to consider two things under the title of 'Devout Christians' based on Nehemiah 12:44-47: (1) 'Devout pastors,' (2) 'Devout saints.' It is my hope and pray that as pastors and saints, we will make efforts to listen carefully to the words given by the Lord and strive for obedience, so that our church can be well established in understanding and love.

### **First, "Devout Christians" are devoted pastors.**

Look at Nehemiah 12:45 - "They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did also the singers and gatekeepers, according to the commands of David and his son Solomon." Here, the word "performed" means to "watch, guard, keep, observe." The underlying basic idea is to 'exercise great care over.' (1) The first meaning, when used as a verb or compound, is 'to do something carefully or diligently.' (2) The second meaning expresses taking great care and being diligent in handling responsibilities, whether it was the covenant or the law. (3) The third meaning is 'to tend to, protect.' (4) The fourth meaning is 'to regard as important, pay attention to.' So, what did the priests and Levites who served in the temple after the reconstruction of the Jerusalem wall take great care over? How did they show even greater devotion in their duties?

(1) They put great effort into worshipping God.

Look at Nehemiah 12:45 again: " They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did also the singers and gatekeepers, according to the commands of David and his son Solomon.." If a pastor forgets the importance of worshipping God and does not put effort into leading worship, what will happen to the church? If a pastor leads worship without devotion, what do you think? We must remember that our pastors should realize the importance of worship and diligently guard and protect the worship offered to God.

(2) They diligently performed the service of purification.

Look at Nehemiah 12:45 again today: "And they performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did the singers and the gatekeepers, according to the command of David and his son Solomon." The term "the service of purification" is mentioned in Nehemiah 12:30: "The priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall." We must put effort into our own purity and the purity of our households, extending to the purity of the church. Especially, pastors should ensure the purification of worship concerning the church.

The growth of the Korean church, which had experienced remarkable growth for a while, began to stagnate in the 1980s. "There may be various factors, but one of them is that pastors are facing challenges to their preaching authority. Experts point out that pastors' complacency and ethical issues in delivering sermons are causing a growing attitude of not recognizing pastors' sermons as the word of God. It's about who delivers the message. Therefore, experts suggest that only through pastors' thorough self-renewal and repentance can the crumbling pulpit be revived. Based on the correct ministry of pastors, emphasizing correct worship to the congregation, and planning for the restoration of worship is essential. The thirst for pastors' renewal is not just about removing the longing for the church's quantitative revival, but it requires the attention of pastors who set ministry plans that can change the lives of believers by examining the current situation and adapting it to the times. Ultimately, the authority of a pastor is not external but spiritual and moral, manifested through a pastor's devout life and preaching. We must not forget that a pastor who speaks only what God has spoken on behalf of God is worthy of respect" (Internet). However, it seems that we are now entering an era where pastors are not being respected. One of the reasons is that our pastors are not setting an example for the saints.

From today's passage, we must learn from the priests and Levites who set an example for the Israelites in their worship and purification duties. Among their examples, there are a couple of principles that can be applied:

(1) The first principle is teamwork.

Look at Nehemiah 12:45 - "... as did also the singers and gatekeepers. ...." In modern terms, this means the head pastor, associate ministers, choir/worship team, and ushers worked together to worship God and maintain the temple's purity.

(2) The second, even more important principle, is obedience to God's word.

Look at Nehemiah 12:45 - "... according to the command of David and his son Solomon." In today's terms, this means that the pastors and other servants in the church worked as a team, worshipping God and keeping themselves and the temple pure according to God's word (v. 30, 45). Like the priests, Levites, singers, and gatekeepers of Israel, we didn't offer our worship according to our own thoughts and desires, but as commanded by David and his son Solomon.

Rev. A. W. Tozer stated in his book "on Worship and Entertainment": "Today, we have everything but no worship. Some participate in the church operations committee only to calculate how much to spend from the church budget, without attending prayer meetings. Such people can't be made to attend prayer meetings because they are not worshipers. It is a truly frightening contradiction that those who do not pray or worship lead and govern the church" (Tozer). We must become pastors who are devoted, church leaders who are devoted, and saints who are devoted. Like the Israelites, we must put effort into worshipping God and keeping things pure. We must establish ourselves, our homes, and the serving church as a community of worshipers. We must strive to be worshipers sanctified by the blood of Jesus' cross.

**Second and last, "Devout Christians" are devout saints.**

Look at Nehemiah 12:44 – "At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits and tithes. From the fields around the towns they were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites, for Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites." What was the devotion that the people of Judah showed to the priests and Levites?

(1) The people of Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who ministered.

Look at Nehemiah 12:44 again: "... for Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered." In today's terms, this means that the saints knew how much effort the pastor put into his service, and they appreciated him for it. Do the congregants nowadays truly appreciate their pastors? Can it be said that the congregants are satisfied with the pastor's service? One of the things that must be approached with great caution in the relationship between pastors and saints within a community like a church is "resentment." If a pastor harbors resentment towards the saints, and the saints resent the pastor in return, the community is like a living organism with dying cells. For example, let's imagine that one saint harbors resentment towards their pastor. Then, when they find out that another saint, much like them, also harbors resentment towards the pastor, the two dying cells come together, leading both down a path of spiritual decline. Our

church should not be like this. Instead, our church should regard the members not with resentment, but as objects of love and joy. Likewise, the members should also strive to regard the pastor not as an object of resentment, but as an object of love and joy. The seriousness lies in the relationship between the pastor and the members, where perhaps the pastor's own feelings of discouragement and despondency may be even more severe.

In the book "Burnout in Church Leaders" (Peter Kaldor/Rod Bullpitt), it is mentioned that pastors often experience exhaustion and discouragement, looking at themselves and feeling unable to rejoice. Why do they feel despondent in disappointment? Some of the highest average figures for exhaustion include feeling tired and emotionally drained in daily life, as well as feeling disappointed in oneself while attempting to achieve something they deem important. They feel guilty about the lack of spiritual transformation or growth in the church or among the members. We must bear in mind that God is a God who rejoices over us. Therefore, while pastors demonstrate devotion in their pastoral ministry, leading worship in accordance with God's word, and living a pure life as an example, we should rejoice in them.

(2) The people of Judah supported the temple workers.

Look at Nehemiah 12:44 today: "At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits and tithes. From the fields around the towns they were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites, ...." Why did the people of Judah offer the contributions, firstfruits, and tithes to the temple workers, as recorded in the Law of Moses? The Israelites supported the priests and Levites, who were temple workers, as a way to assist them in serving God well. Some Levites took responsibility for properly storing what the people had offered to the temple. One important point we need to understand here is that the Israelites offered tithes and offerings to the temple because they wanted to support the temple workers in serving God effectively. As Hudson Taylor, a well-known missionary, stated, 'When God's work is done in God's way for God's glory, it will not lack God's supply.' If our pastors are wholeheartedly doing God's work in God's way for God's glory, then God's support will not be lacking. Ultimately, the members will support such a ministry, as stated in 2 Corinthians 9:7, "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." They will give with joyful hearts. As a result, there will be blessing on the house and everything in it (Ezek. 44:30).

There was a deacon serving in a certain church. He was known to be very stingy when it came to church service and giving offerings. One Sunday, the pastor's sermon was titled 'Christians and Money.' The deacon was listening to the sermon with great interest. The pastor's sermon had three main points. The first point was about earning a lot of money. As the sermon went on, the deacon kept saying 'Amen!' The second point was about saving a lot, and again, he responded with 'Amen!' His face lit up, and throughout the sermon, his 'Amen' echoed loudly. However, when it came to the third point, which was about giving generously to

God, the deacon's 'Amen' suddenly disappeared. After the worship service, the deacon turned to his friend and said, 'Wasn't the pastor's sermon title great today? The first and second points were truly enlightening. But when it came to the third point, he stopped showering grace. In short, he ruined the entire sermon because of the third point' (Internet).

# Conclusion

The church must be rebuilt. It needs to be rebuilt not only morally and ethically but especially according to biblical principles. To be rebuilt, the church must weep and repent while looking at the broken church. The church must turn back to God, the merciful One, with the heart of the Lord who is the head of the church. The church must return to the Word of God. The church must experience a revival of the Word and the power of the Word. The church must return to the gospel of Christ. And the church must live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

The Lord is rebuilding His church. He is raising up His servants and rebuilding His church. The Lord is making His servants pray, return to His Word, and be faithful to His Word and prayer to rebuild His church. The Lord is boldly proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ through them and also showing the power of the gospel, rebuilding the church. Furthermore, the Lord is using them to bring about a revival in the hearts of the saints who hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, causing them to separate from the world and live in purity, rebuilding the church with one heart and one mind with the servants of the Lord. The Lord is enabling the entire church family to serve His church, which is His body, with a willing and devoted heart, rebuilding His church. Even though the church of the Lord faces challenges in the strategic plan of Satan, and even though crises come upon the church when it is being rebuilt, the Lord, with His gracious touch, will be with us, rebuilding His church. Therefore, we all must rise with the assurance of victory, and with a heart of dedication, we must serve the Lord's church to rebuild it. No matter what adversity and crisis may come, we must dedicate ourselves wholeheartedly to rebuilding the Lord's church, considering it an opportunity to experience the Lord's gracious touch. Our Lord will indeed establish His church as a glorious church (Eph. 5:27).