

A Spirit of Belonging

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[0 : 00] Yeah, it's an absolute joy for us to be here with you. We love Jesse and Hayley and your leadership. We believe in what God is doing.

And I hope I don't cry too much. So yeah, we are One Harbor, Moorhead, and as we were told, we're in a series in the book of Nehemiah, which is an Old Testament book.

And it's very pertinent to us because in Scripture, the church is called the New Jerusalem, and this book is all about the restoration of the city of Jerusalem, the temple, and the people of God back then.

So it speaks loudly to us. So I'm going to have my beautiful bride of 38 years this weekend. She's stuck with me for 38 years.

So we're going to have her read our text, and then we'll jump straight in. So we're reading from Nehemiah 6, starting at verse 15.

[1 : 18] So the war was finished on the 25th day of the month Elul in 52 days. And when all our enemies heard of it, all the nations around us were afraid and fell greatly in their own esteem, for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.

Moreover, in those days, the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. For many in Judah were bound by oath to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shekeniah, the son of Arar.

And his son, Jehoanan, had taken the daughter of Meshulam, the son of Berechiah, as his wife. Also, they spoke of his good deeds in my presence and reported my words to him.

And Tobiah sent letters to make me afraid. Stick with me. I know it's a lot of names. Nehemiah chapter 7. Now, when the wall had been built, and I had set up the doors and the gatekeepers, the singers and the Levites had been appointed, I gave my brother Hananiah and Hananiah, the governor of the castle, charge over Jerusalem, for he was a more faithful and God-fearing man than many.

And I said, Let not the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. And while they are still standing guard, let them shut and bar the doors. Appoint guards from among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, some at their guard posts, and some in front of their own homes.

[2 : 44] The city was wide and large, but the people within it were few, and no houses had been rebuilt. Then my guard put it into my heart to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy.

And I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first, and I found written in it. These were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had carried into exile.

They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his town. They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Ramiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Misperez, Bigvi, Nehem, and Bona.

Bona, the number of the people of Israel, that's it, right? Stop at Bona. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you. Thank you, Liesl. Let's pray. Lord, we have heard of your greatness.

And we've heard of your faithfulness. We ask you to reveal yourself again to our children and to our children's children.

[4 : 03] Amen. We pray for renewal in your church. We pray for our country.

would you rebuild the walls of our cities, of the church, of our families.

Would you do again what you did then? For your glory and our joy, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. thank you Lord sometimes when we speak about renewal and we haven't heard or read church history thank you my wife knows me well we can kind of go what's wrong I think things are going pretty good at least they are in my life but when we start reading and looking at what God has done and some of the promises that he has given we have to come to terms with the fact that there is more and a simple way there for us is and I love I've watched it twice now the movie about the move of God in California in the 60s and 70s called the Jesus Revolution with Chuck Smith and the Calvary Chapel churches and that movement reached South Africa when I was a teenager and when I was watching that movie

I recognized the songs I don't you know we live in an age where we believe we have it the worst some of us some of us aren't like that but sometimes I feel like we're this is the worst like we the end times and they are the end times are definitely closer today than they were yesterday but we feel like we're on the edge but read back a little sin has been sin since the garden and we've been in trouble since the garden and God in almost every generation does amazing things but the big question is will we be part of what he does that's where I get nervous not God's ability to do what he does but my ability to want and hunger and recognize what he's doing and so that's the heart with which I speak today and so our little sermon is called a spirit of hope and anticipation you see the chapter we end is actually quite a boring if I can say that without sounding sacrilegious sort of a slow quiet boring part

[7 : 29] I mean all we hear about is this irritating guy Tobiah sending these irritating letters and lists of names of the church register and the leaders and the priests and the I mean they finished the wall that was exciting we were all outside and we were working 52 days and the wall was done and in the next chapter next week we're going to see the book of the law found Ezra gets up he starts reading it and for a half a day the whole nation sits listening to the word of God and they're weeping and they're crying and revival begins to come to the people but chapter 7 lists and letters and so we want to talk about hope and anticipation because we often find ourselves in chapters of our lives or in history where they're just lists and letters and if we don't know and understand hope and how to cultivate hope we will miss what God is doing and we grow bitter and we grow sour so let's let's jump in and look at this now this is the challenge we face and I think it rears its head in chapter 7 verse 4 the city was wide and large but the people within it were few and no houses had been rebuilt have you ever heard of the saying a mile wide but an inch deep now we can sit and look at the church not us but every other church as a mile wide and an inch deep and we can get all gnarly about it but we are the church and sometimes we feel in our own lives that mile wide inch deep feeling and that is a dilemma that is sad and so we are going to address this mile wide inch deep what does it look like well for the children of Israel in those days they would come to the city or to church to trade and barter and buy some groceries and everything and then they would leave and they would go back to their homes in the country but few people lived in the city they would come to the city to enjoy worship they didn't come to worship you know we find that deep and shallow thing you know where we just stand we find ourselves just standing in worship one hand in the pocket other with a coffee

I love the the guitarist man what a voice I enjoy this worship don't you sometimes feel that mile wide inch deep thing or does it grip you great is your faithfulness right we will give money as long as their walls being built and we can see it being used for good measure and it helps us but the faithfulness the sacrificial living the devotional living we go to church but we don't see ourselves as the church the other day I'm driving into a parking lot and there's this guy playing policeman he's being irritating and I pull in and I I want to be snarky I want to get up and go hey you know what's happening here and as I get out he goes hey freaky he recognizes me

I don't recognize him am I going to church or am I the church am I conscious of being the church in the parking lot and so we're talking about cultivating this hope that causes us to be and not just do so firstly let's talk about hope and I'll try to be quick in our culture and in our time hope is a wishful thinking oh hi hope my team wins next weekend but in the bible hope is a confident expectation of what God promised and its strength is in his faithfulness I want you to just look at Hebrews 6 verse 18 and 19 where we get a sense by the writer of the Hebrews letter what this hope looks like it says in verse 18 so that by two unchanging things in which it is impossible for God to lie we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us we have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain we have this anchor of the soul that we can hold on to that is anchored behind now that is imagery for the temple what happened behind the curtain that was where the very presence of God was so in essence hope is a rope hope is a rope that ties you to God even when you can't see him his glory and his presence behind the veil but you are tethered to him like an anchor to a boat wishful thinking is a boat without an anchor and you're just hoping you don't hit the rocks we're talking about something completely different here and so what is that rope how do we cultivate that rope that anchors itself in the very heart of God in the very essence of who he is great is your faithfulness your name is steadfast what is that especially in times of lists and letters nasty letters and just blah blah blah blah blah right well what is the first thing that Nehemiah does here in verse one he sets up leaders and systems he appoints leaders and systems now when the wall had been built and I had set up doors and the gatekeepers and the singers and the Levites had been appointed and then they set times when the gates were opened and closed there were systems and leaders that were appointed sometimes we feel that's a bureaucracy in the church

I'm free I'm led by the spirit yes you are more than you realize but God has set leaders and systems in place to anchor the church and to strengthen her most people come into a church with two questions you may not have but I think a lot do the first one is will I be loved and the second one is can I do whatever I want the answer is yes and no sometimes when I look at these lists I think of ministry teams partnership commitment to us these people's names are like blah blah blah blah blah but your name is beautiful before

God Nehemiah breaks out the book of genealogies and he says he starts going through the names of the families that had gone into exile and had come back and it was important that their names were in this book I couldn't help thinking about a book that I really hope my name is in I may not want to be on the serve team or the children's workers church team or whatever but man this is a place I want my name in Revelation 21 22 look at the parallels it's talking about the new heavens and the new earth and I saw no temple in the city for its temple is the Lord God the almighty the lamb and the city has no need of the sun of the moon to shine on it for the glory of God gives it light and its lamp is the lamb by its light will the nations walk and kingdoms of the earth will bring their glory into it and its gates will never be shut by day and there will be no night can you see the parallels of the church there and the church here they will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations but nothing unclean will ever enter it nor anyone who does what is detestable or false but only those who are written in the lamb's book of life let me tell you one thing that will anchor you and save you from mile wide inch deep is knowing your name is in the book a man came to

[18:03] Nicodemus educated a man came to Jesus name was Nicodemus educated John chapter 3 he knew the scriptures better than you and I said what must I do Jesus said you must be born again to enter the kingdom you must be born of the spirit let me just say this if there is anyone here this morning and you really want to come to Jesus but you've not been able to for whatever reason I would love to pray for you and if there's more than one of you possibly have someone help me and I say that because I have a personal conviction about that last night as I was praying for you I just sense there may be someone who is just facing a form of darkness that almost shuts their mouth and they can't cry out to

God the way they want to and God wants to set you free today so you can call on his name and receive him and so there are these leaders and systems that are put in place and then the genealogy books will come out but then the big question goes well what about those that are in the city but their names weren't found in the book well the Bible addresses that towards the end of this chapter in verse 64 it says so these sought their registration among those enrolled in the genealogies but it was not found there their names were not found there so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean and the governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food until a priest with Urim and Thummim could arise now let me explain that to you they were welcome in the city and I'm going to draw some parallels and if it's a little offensive please don't see my heart in that

I'm just trying to share what I think the scripture is saying welcome to come but some things are reserved for those with their name in the book for example the priesthood those that lead us in worship in small groups in prayer they need to be people who have their name in the book known by God and know God this isn't like a sort of a club where if you've been here the longest you get to lead or you know if you've given the most money or you whatever we are called by God to do what we do all are welcome but there is a priesthood and then what's this thing about holy food I mean I couldn't help seeing a parallel with communion you may have heard this if you've come a few times we're now going to have communion if you're not a follower of Christ yet maybe hold off on this

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 11 many have brought harm upon themselves not taking part in this in a worthy manner that doesn't mean you've got to be worthy that means you've got to understand how worthy that is how worth that is and so when we come to our time of communion if you're not sure about your name in the book you belong to him rather read and pray the prayer on the screen and come and speak to us we want to help you and that's where this Urim and Thummim come in now Urim and Thummim was the Old Testament way of hearing God's voice it was one of the ways the prophets was the other okay and the priests would have a breast plate and there would be 12 stones and as they would pray God would literally speak through the illumination of certain stones it was miraculous but what we have is even more miraculous as a believer every one of you have the spirit of

God in you and he resonates and speaks to you what God is saying every one of us in essence have an Urim and Thummim it's beautiful as priests before God it's absolutely wonderful and so how do you get in the book allow God to speak to you listen to his voice follow his voice alright and so moving right along we basically come to the end of this chapter but as I think about the cultivation of hope and our names being in the Lamb's book of life and us hearing the spirit of God how that builds hope I can't help thinking that actually throughout the story so far there have been a few keys to cultivating this kind of expectation and hope the first one I can think of and I want to name two and then we're done the first one is prayer do you remember in the first chapter if you were with us of this story

[23 : 45] Nehemiah hears news that has become common news no one is surprised by it anymore the city walls have been destroyed he had never been to Jerusalem he was born in Babylon it had been a hundred years since the first exiles had been sent back to Jerusalem from Babylon but when he hears that his heart opens and it breaks for God's people and he begins to weep and pray for four months with no end in sight praying I want to tell you prayer is the slender nerve that connects my impotence with God's omnipotence that is what Andrew Murray a famous Scottish missionary to South Africa said prayer is the slender nerve that connects my impotence to God's omnipotence and when that connection is made you start seeing the world differently you will weep when others are laughing and you will laugh when others are weeping because your nerves are connected into the very nerve center of God prayer is the most exciting thing we get to do prayer and worship and being with him

I'm not talking about gross realist prayer only I'm talking about being with him biblical hope grows in the fertile soil of prayer as he begins to pray before God God begins to prepare him when you pray there is prayer per ration prayer per ration God starts preparing you for what's happening next you don't know what's going to happen next how do I know because in the story of Nehemiah one day he's serving the wine and the king goes why are you sad now you were not allowed to be sad in front of the king and he wasn't pouting you know I hope the king notices no he he's starting to wear this thing called the burden of

God and the king goes what's going on and he goes how can I live normally when my people are in ruins and Jerusalem is in ruins and the Bible says he shoots up a prayer when the king goes well what do you need he already knows what he needs because he's prayed it not because he's this great strategist well what are we going to need here probably no he doesn't know what's going to happen but he's prayed it he's been there I want to ask you this and the Lord challenged me on this about three to six months ago he challenged me about praying things that I can do Lord please make sure I get a parking spot when we go down to the beach now there's nothing wrong with that prayer but my gosh is that the extent of what you're asking!

now that you're in front of him go big go big ask him for something you can't do and will never be able to do and if you think if you're struggling about what those things are think about things that you cannot go without ask God for things you cannot do and never will be able to do and ask him for things you cannot live without just do that exercise most of what we ask for we can do without and we can do but when you start thinking!

about things you cannot live without I cannot live with my kids being far from God I will fight for that but it's not something I can do when you go there with prayer prayer changes your prayer changes man and then the second thing I notice is actually in chapter five and it's called the fear of the Lord when the people start getting lethargic and lazy Nehemiah is motivated by the fear of the Lord now most of us go oh the fear of the Lord is just just a sort of a healthy respect for God well let me ask you this what do you do with the category of

[29 : 13] Isaiah is in the house of God and God reveals himself and he goes oh my I'm a man of unclean lips and I live in a nation of unclean lips woe is me oh God help me and God's train fills the temple and he hears God say who will I send who will go for me and he goes I will and a coal an angel takes a coal and puts it on his lips and changes the way he speaks and thinks and sees what about Daniel who sees God and he falls as if he's dead when last did you see someone in the presence of God fall as if they were dead we're not serving a Disney God here he is terrifying my friend he is awe inspiring

I look at Moses Moses tries to fulfill his calling by delivering his people through killing an Egyptian and he flees from Pharaoh spends 40 years in the wilderness he's 80 years old the Bible says to us in Exodus 3 he's watching his father-in-law sheep he's got nothing God had to reduce him down to nothing he was a general in Pharaoh's army history tells us and he walks along and he sees this burning bush and he goes isn't that strange every other bush I've ever seen is consumed that one isn't let me step a little closer and the Bible says as God saw him step closer God speaks to him and says take your shoes off you're on holy ground and God starts a conversation with him and he back pedals no not me no not now no

I think you've got it wrong and God gets angry and says I'm sending you and his life is no longer his own his plans have just been changed for him but God in his mercy will call you and I from our little thing into his thing at first you may not think it's a good thing it's just because you and I don't have a clue Bible says he covers his face because he knows he's seen God and he knows when you see God you die Elisha same thing fleeing from Jezebel ends up on a mountain very similar to this one in fact some people think it's the same mountain there's an earthquake there's lightning there's fire and then

God speaks to Elisha through a still small voice and he covers his face with his cloak and he says I've just seen God and his life is no longer his own my friend we need to have a new encounter with the fear of the Lord he is God and I am not and my life is not my own in chapter and I'll just touch on this in chapter six we see the fear of the Lord does the following thing it brings justice to the poor in verse nine of chapter five sorry Nehemiah chapter five look at what it says this is my last or second to last scripture so I said the thing that you are doing is not good what they were doing was they were building the wall and the rich were taking advantage of the poor they were renting out stuff instead of sharing stuff it wasn't good!

ought you not to walk in the fear of the Lord says Nehemiah to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies moreover I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain let us abandon this exacting of interest it is because of the fear of the Lord that justice comes to the poor think about this we look at someone who's got less than us or is in need and sometimes we go where's their work ethic now it may be true they may be poor because of a poor work ethic but you don't have what you have because of a work ethic you have what you have because that's what God's given you including the work ethic you see when you start there you see the poor man differently does that mean you just give him everything and anything no no no that's not what we're saying we're talking about the way you look at him or her and the way you see yourself when you have the fear of the

[34 : 46] Lord everyone in your life has dignity because he gave you your worth and dignity you never earned it can you see that the fear of the Lord where are we at we're at 10 o'clock thank you Jesus I won't keep driving these points away there's another two great fear of the Lord parts in that chapter you go look at them yourself but what I do want to say is I have found that the fear of the Lord is dealing with my fear of man and I have had a fear of man for many many years I want to be a nice guy I want to be loved and I am quite nice and I am loved by some but my fears have slowly begun to diminish as my fear of

God begins to grow I didn't say my love for God I have my love for God but my fear of God sometimes I stand in his presence and I tremble when I stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon I tremble why do I not when I stand in his presence he is bigger than the Grand Canyon so we come to communion and we're talking about a hope that tethers us to the eternal God and we're talking about renewal going from a mile wide and an inch deep to a mile wide and a mile deep it's interesting that the new

Jerusalem when it descends down from heaven in the book of revelation is 1500 miles wide and 1500 miles deep you should be as deep as you are wide wide that's God's will for you you may not be very wide I'm not talking about your weight but you may have one employee or maybe you're you are an employee maybe you earn one small check every month but are you as deep as that or deeper so we come to communion if you are not a believer yet I encourage you to read the prayer and if you have your heart if you have the heart to do it pray that prayer invite

God to come and mess with your life and get ready for change it'll be the best thing that ever happened to you if you aren't able to pray that prayer and you really want to I mean it I'd love to pray with you because sometimes darkness stops us from doing what we want to do but if you are a Christian come praying God I want to be deep and wide anchor me tether me to you I want to have holy food in your temple I want to be a priest in your house I want to be here when things are happening and when they're not I do not want to miss out on what you're doing I don't think you're finished yet amen thank you worship team as you come up let me pray for us and then the team will lead us and when you're ready receive communion is that right

Jesse Lord Jesus thank you you are so tangible here this morning you're with us in the hearing of the word you are with us in the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup you are with us in spirit you are here and we want more of you father thank you for meeting us wherever we're at in Jesus name amen amen