



Home of the Brave

Part 1 – A Nation that Prioritizes Scripture and Confesses Sin

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If you were with us several weeks ago, you know we launched a series in the Book of Nehemiah and that was called *Hometown*. We did a *Hometown* series about being proud of your hometown. I don't know if you caught this last week, but we stuck with the home part with Mother's Day and it was called *Homemade*. And now, we're going back to the Book of Nehemiah, but we're changing the series a little bit and rather than looking locally, we're thinking nationally, and that's where *Home of the Brave* comes from. So, we're going to stay in the Book of Nehemiah, but our series for the next two weeks goes from *Hometown* to *Home of the Brave*.

As a matter of fact, we have someone in our hometown... I don't know if he's in this service. If Will Schaffer is in here, would you please stand up. He might come to the second service. The reason I'm asking is Will is a part of our church family and he is taking off this Tuesday to be a part of the Army National Guard and he's going to train in South Carolina. We are going to pray for him as we reflect on all that our soldiers and military personnel have done for this country to give me the opportunity to stand up here and freely preach from this Bible. Some countries don't have that freedom, amen? Hopefully, he'll be in the second service and we can pray over him as a church family.

We're looking at *Home of the Brave*. Ted has tasked me with grabbing Nehemiah 7, 8, 9. There are a lot of chapters and so this service this morning is going to look a lot like my sweet wife does in the mornings, and maybe your wife has this amazing gift too. I don't believe in evolution. I definitely believe in adaptation and I believe my wife, being married to me, has adapted to speaking in shorter terms.

It seems like every time that my hand is about to reach the doorknob, there are just all these questions, all these request, wanting to know what's going on with the day. I'm just sitting there like *we could have talked about this last night*. She's even gotten so good at it that it's like she speaks in Morris Code. It's like "Kids, three o'clock, school." She knows she's got to condense it as much as possible. Or, I'll be on the phone and I'll have to go but she wants to get as many questions in as she can before I go. Is anybody relating at all? It's an amazing gift.

People here used to be frustrated because I talk really fast up here sometimes. I just adapted that from my wife; that's all that was. I was just carrying over from the gift she had given me. I'll try to slow down today, but we are covering three chapters of Nehemiah. We have Nehemiah 7. Rather than going verse by verse from Nehemiah 7, I want to give you a bigger picture of what Nehemiah 7 is all about.

Yes, we can take a lot of leadership principles out of Nehemiah 7 and when we talk about *Home of the Brave* and we look at all the presidents of the past and those who stood by this and stood on this and followed these guidelines, it's amazing to see how well and blessed our country was.

Even in raising your kids. It's amazing when you follow the Word of God, you discipline your child. You do not spare the rod. I don't need any emails. I'm just saying that biblically, it is very clear that I'm allowed to spank Aiden and Anders. I'm telling you what, it works well in the house with discipline. I'm not going to be one of the parents that replaces discipline with medication for bad behavior. Why? It's not because I'm mean; it's because the Word of God leads me that way.

When you look at presidents of the past and military leaders of the past and we see they follow God's Word and they let that be their plumb line and that be their standard, it has seemed to go extremely well for us. When we divert from the Word of God and what we define as marriage and what we define as morality and what we define should be true for you and true for you... When we begin to divert from God's Word, that's when you see things start to decline, when you seem to get in trouble.

While Nehemiah is a great book on leadership, that's not what it's all about. Yes, you can grab a lot of leadership principles out of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is the amazing picture of God's faithfulness. As a matter of fact, the whole Bible is about one key, central figure, Jesus Christ. What we see in Nehemiah 7, as it goes through this long list of Hebrew names that there is no way I'm going to be able to pronounce for you today... In Nehemiah 7: 5 and all the way through, it starts giving all these lists of exiles that returned. What do we see in this returned exile? That was God's faithfulness. You remember that God promised Abraham, "Though your seed, I'm going to bring the Savior."

When they were in captivity in Babylon, they didn't see that happening. "What happened to God's promise? What happened to God's favor? What happened with the King would come through the line of Abraham and through the seed of David? What happened there?" What we see here in Nehemiah 7 is the faithfulness to fulfill what he promised us through Jesus Christ.

You can look at Nehemiah 7 and think it's boring, it's a list of exiles... You can read it like that or you can look at and be amazed. This is Abraham's seed we're talking about. This is God's faithfulness, this is his promise that he told us would come through the seed of Abraham. God is faithful and he's still going to fulfill this promised Messiah he told us he would. We're coming back to Nehemiah not only to build this wall, but God has promised them this is where the King would come through. It's an amazing picture of God's faithfulness.

Then we get into Nehemiah 8 where we're going to camp most of the time today. It's an amazing passage when you think about it. They just did what God told them to do. They're up on top. They built the wall; the wall has been established. They did what they came to do. They feel successful and they feel great. God's been faithful.

Nehemiah 8 - ***1 And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate.*** I love this word *gathered*. It's what we're doing this morning. We are a gathering people. They've been gathering long before there were soap operas and sitcoms, and sporting events and everything else to

gather at. This idea to gather... As a matter of fact, there's a Hebrew word there for *gather* and it's *aSof*. When you look it up in the text, what it means is sometime before you gathered, you would separate the wheat from the chaff, so you would remove to gather.

So, when we gather, sometimes you think, *What do I need to remove (distractions) so I can be more present in my gathering.* Even when we come to church. You guys drove to church this morning. You had your Sunday morning arguments and conflict like you always do as you drive. Then you show up with your Sunday best face on and you get here. But the idea to gather is that we would remove to fully be present.

We gather all over. As a matter of fact, here's a picture of a gathering that takes place every year on the 4th of July in Washington D.C. That is a gathering of people, a patriotic people for a country that is known as the Home of the Brave, Land of the Free. As a matter of fact, I was insane enough when I was 19 years old to gather in this place when they were redoing the Washington Monument. Yes, that is a younger version of myself. It was the hottest, most like hades day I ever had in my life.

Catholics also gather. This is The Vatican. They gather for the Pope. Look at how many people are gathering there. There is something innate within human beings whether it be in the wilderness or a sporting event or whatever... We always like to gather.

Look at this. How many of you remember the 1994 Olympics in Atlanta? This is Atlanta, Georgia. Did anybody in here attend the Atlanta Olympics? This isn't just our nation; this is international.

I'm curious how many in here would be honest and tell me you were at this gathering. Anybody? Some of you know what this and won't raise their hand. This is Woodstock. Some of you are like, "I maybe had my side Woodstock gathering because I couldn't make the trip to PA, but I definitely was gathering with those people at that time. The 70s were great; I'm just saying." I wouldn't know; I wasn't born yet.

And then every year, we have this gathering, which I've heard is miserable. I've had friends that have gone to this gathering and say, "Don't plan on going to the bathroom if you want to go to this gathering in NYC at Times Square every year." I hate the idea of being like that. That freaks my wife and I out. The idea of not being able to move... We're claustrophobic; get off of me. The idea that you couldn't get to the bathroom within 10 minutes is frightening to me. Some of you experience that every day, but for me, that would be frightening. That was a joke. I love all you older people here dearly, okay? I know it's coming for me too and you can say, "It serves you right."

Here's a picture of what we're actually looking at in Nehemiah 8. These are all of God's chosen people, this line that he has brought back together. He's brought all these people back together and now they are going to read the Book of the Law. They're going back to God's word. Now, when we hear the Book of the Law, sometimes people think the law is just the Ten Commandments. The law is much more than that. They have this law from Moses that constitutes a lot more than just the Ten Commandments.

They didn't have an entire book full of 66 books like you and I do. They just had the law. He gets these scrolls and he stands up there – just to give you a visual of what we're about to look at – and he begins

reading the Law of the Lord to all these people. They're gathered and they're anticipating and they're excited to hear from God's Word. They are excited to hear the reading because they all didn't have access to the Bible like you and I do, so they were excited, they were zealous. They wanted to hear the Word of the Lord.

And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. He brings them this book and they're excited. I think in our culture... And I fight this. I think sometimes, because of all our other distractions – social media, cell phones, etc. – that fervor, that excitement, that zeal for the Word of God can dissipate quickly. Sometimes people say, "Man, it would be so much easier to be with Ezra back in the day when they didn't have all those distractions." They still had their idols. The enemy has been around for thousands of years and he still knows how to distract us from reading the Bible. What I love about this is they understand now because God literally led them out of slavery to rebuild this wall in Babylon.

There's a psalm in 119: 105 that says, ***Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*** I love the illustration of the Word of God being a lamp to your feet and a light to your path. Have you ever thought about a lamp? Some of you have never even had to go through this, but... Hold on, we'll be alright. Some of you have never even had to have a lamp or experience a lamp because you would use a iPhone flashlight, but when you think about a lamp or a lantern... It talks about the Word of God being a lamp or a lantern to your path. A lamp or a lantern doesn't illuminate the next 20 feet in front of you. A lamp or a lantern doesn't show you what four weeks from now holds. A lamp or a lantern doesn't tell you where you'll be in five years. The Word of God being a lamp to my path or a light to my feet just shows me one day at a time, one step at a time. So, when you talk about God's Word being a lamp to your path, there's a trust there. Sometimes the Word of God will just get you through one day.

If we were lost in the woods, the reality is we probably wouldn't use a lamp or a lantern. We would be more millennial, and we would use our iPhone flashlight, which illuminates far more than a lamp or a lantern would. So, with this idea of God's Word being a lamp to our path, there's a sense of trust there in his word. But here's the crazy thing about a lamp and a light... As a matter of fact, in scripture, it says that Jesus is the light of the world. It says Jesus is the light of the world and in him there is no darkness. John 8, it says, ***"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*** In John 1, it says, ***1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God.*** Jesus is the word. Jesus is the life, he is the light.

There's something powerful about this. I was talking about it in the staff meeting with Woodland Hills. Ted was doing a great job last week with the songs that Mom sang to us and how mom would just go in and fling open the curtains and sing, "Rise and shine and give God the glory..." With every teenager, if you go and flip on the lights or open up the curtains, they give the same response you just did when Ryan put the spotlights on you. You guys have to remember for those walking in darkness, when you just flip on the lights, when you just throw this in their face, it's hard to take. We're going to look at confession of sin here in just a second. It's hard, so there's a gentleness, as Peters said in 1 Peter 3: 15-16. There's a gentleness, there's a respect when you hit people with this. It says Jesus is the light of the world and he is the Word.

Jesus didn't come to make bad people good, he came to make dead people alive. There are no good people. There is only one who is good and that is Jesus. There is nobody in here better than anyone else. Just because someone in here might struggle with alcohol and somebody else in here might struggle with pride, that doesn't make the person that struggles with pride is any better. Jesus didn't make bad people good. He came to make dead people alive. We were dead in our transgressions. He came to make us alive. That's amazing! And his Word is alive. In 2 Timothy 3, it says, **16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.** I love where it says, "God breathed." The Greek there is Theo Nustas. Theo meaning God and Nustas the breath. It literally means God's breath is in the Bible.

You talk about what you're inhaling from Facebook or social media or whatever else... It's what's going to come out. Matthew 12: 34 – ***For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.*** I love Ted's illustration of the love jugs and the love glasses. You pour out and you pour out, but what are you pouring out. I think there could be another point of that illustration. What is pouring into that as it pours out because what you're pouring into yourself is going to come out. And God breathes life, he breathes light in the darkness, he breaths light into our life. That's what Theo Nustas means. The only time in all of scripture we see this Greek phrase is in 2 Timothy 3: 16.

Here's the crazy thing. That same breath that breathes scripture to life is the same breath we see in Genesis 2: 7 – ***then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.*** This is crazy. This is the same breath that God is breathing into a man to create man and bring to that life. He wants to breathe into your life every single day. That's why Ezra is so passionate about it. "Hey, we just rebuilt the wall. Let's all get together and read God's word. Let him breathe life into us now."

I'm going to show you a really cool video. There's another passage in Ezekiel 37. It's this prophecy of these dead people, these people that aren't being filled by the breath of God. They act like they know God, but they don't have hearts for God and they're not living for God. It talks about this prophecy where God will breathe life into them.

1 The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2 He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. 3 He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

I said, "Sovereign Lord, you alone know."

4 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!5 This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. 6 I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.'"

7 So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. 8 I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

9 Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.' " 10 So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

Isn't this crazy? The same breath we see God breathe into Adam in the Garden, the same breath we see him prophecy in Ezekiel is the same breath he is breathing into your life everyday if you choose to spend time in the word.

You that know me, know that I run a gap year program. I'm with 19 – 22-year-olds year around. Then I do work with teenagers. Here's the crazy thing. I've been saying this for four years. Social media is going to drive anxiety, depression, and suicide and suicide attempts. This last week, CBS, CNN, and Bloomberg have all come out with articles stating that there is a direct correlation between social media use and suicides and anxiety and depression among teenagers and millennials. I've been saying it for four years. They just put any research to what I already knew to be true because I was spending time with these kids all the time.

It's because rather than getting the truth, they're choosing to listen to lies all day. So, rather than having life breathed into them, death is being breathed into them. If they can't combat that... Forget young people. If older people can't combat their Facebook use and their social media use and their worldly input of what they are receiving and what is being breathed into them, they too will struggle with missing out and anxiety and depression. But the Word of God breathes life. This helps you walk in the light. This brings joy. That's what Ezra knows here in Nehemiah when he says, "Hold on! Yes, we just did what we were supposed to accomplish, but let's stop and give all the glory to God and let's stop and read from his Word, his powerful Word."

It goes on to say, ***For the Word of God is living an active...*** You guys, the Word of God is living and active. It's not dead; it is alive. Let me give you some power of this scripture. It's 66 books, 39 in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament. The Old Testament is made up of 17 historical, 5 poetical, 17 prophetic. The New Testament is made up of 4 gospels or 5 historical books that Acts can be coupled with, 13 Pauline epistles, 9 general epistles, and sometimes they say 8 general epistles. Epistles is a Greek word for letter. And then Revelation, which is a prophetic book. There are three different languages: Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. It was written over a span of about 10,000 years with 40 plus authors and no contradictions.

Let me give you an illustration. If Ted Cunningham and I went out in the parking lot and decided to wrestle and get after it because I offended him, or he offended me, and you guys went out there and witnessed it, and we came back in, and we asked you who won the wrestling match, everybody would have a different opinion. When you watch fights or you watch games or you critique athletes, everybody has a different opinion because we see things differently. We perceive things differently.

So, how is it possible that 40 plus different authors from a span of 10,000 years can tell the exact same story? There is only one probable explanation: Theo Nustas. Living and active. It is God's breath. He's orchestrating the pen and the hands of these men.

It's ***sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intention of the heart.*** This is telling me that the Bible will sharpen, the Bible will strengthen, and the Bible will steer. The Bible is not Nerf; it's going to sharpen you. It's going to make your walk strong, it's going to lead you, it's going to guide you, it's going to give you strength when you don't feel like you can go any more. You will mount up like eagles. The Word of the Lord will give you strength.

I'm memorizing chapters of scripture with my five-year-old because I know it will strengthen him. And it will most importantly steer him to do the right thing even when it's hard. So, **the Bible is going to sharpen you, it's going to strengthen you, and it's going to steer you.**

Getting back to Nehemiah 8. ***2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. 3 And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday...*** You should never complain about a long Ted or Donyes sermon again for as long as you live. From early morning until midday, they just read this book of the Law. You guys should get excited whenever Ted and I or Shay or Travis open the Bible and just read from the Word of God. That's more powerful than anything any of us up here will ever say.

...in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. Let me tell you why this is important here. Some people didn't understand the law. Some people didn't understand what was going on. As a matter of fact, 1 Corinthians 1: 18 says the message of the cross is foolish to those who are perishing. As matter of fact, some of you are so frustrated that a different political party doesn't see things the way you do or a different denomination doesn't see things the way you do. Not everybody understands the same way and not everyone is in the same place or the same journey you are in at this point in your relationship with Jesus. It's important to see this here. They are at a different stage in life and it's important for us to understand that not everybody understands at the same rate. So, we're patient, we're loving, and we're caring.

That brings me to this point in the culture we're in today: **Loving people doesn't mean we always agree with them and disagreeing with people doesn't mean we always hate them.** Why is it that when we disagree with somebody, they automatically assume that we hate them? I don't hate people just because they think differently than I do with politics. I don't hate people just because they think differently than I do denominationally. We automatically assume that just because someone disagrees with us, we hate them, or if we disagree with them, we need to hate them. Do you realize Jesus loved the people that disagreed with him just as much as he loved the people that were following him? We've got to stop thinking that just because people disagree with us or respond to something on our social media or send us a text that disagrees with us or our co-workers that aren't believers and they disagree with us that doesn't mean they hate us.

Sometimes it means that they might be intimidated by us or feel judged by us. Even though you might not even be judging them, they automatically project that onto themselves. But we've got to remember this.

And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. They were attentive. They were excited. They came to this ready and excited to learn. How many Sundays do you walk in here attentive and excited? "God, what are you going to teach me?" Not, "Who's speaking today on the teaching team?" "What songs are they going to sing in worship?" Rather, you come to Woodland Hills like the people in Nehemiah 7. They come and they're like, "God, we're attentive. What do you have to teach us today?" How many of you walk into Woodland Hills with that attitude and that mindset? I mean you came in here this morning and said, "God, regardless of who is teaching, what do you have to teach me this morning? I want to be attentive."

God is to be sought when times are tough AND good. It's easy when we're in a tough spot financially or going through marital problems or our kids are acting the fool... We get to our knees at that point and we are really crying out to God. Then sometimes when things are going great and bills are being paid and things seem to be going well, we don't seem to reach out to him as much. With Nehemiah, they just did everything; they built the wall. That's pretty awesome. They just accomplished this huge feat while being attacked and they were still praising and worshipping God and reading his word. They were seeking him when times were good and when times were tough.

4 And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. Think about that. Think about what you guys just did for the video intro into the message. You all stood in reverence to a flag. And I'm patriotic. My grandfather, who mostly raised me, served in World War II. But, I'm telling you God's Word is much more important than the American flag to me. While I'm going to honor, as we approach Memorial Day, those who have fought for me to be able to read this freely for you guys up here and those who have served this country and those who are buried now because they fought for us, the Bible is much more powerful than the American flag.

I had this really sobering thought this morning while I was driving to church. It wasn't a part of my sermon and then I thought about this. There are people that have gone and served and fought and died that we will celebrate on Memorial Day. Even though they were military soldiers for this country and fought for our freedom, if they didn't know Jesus, they fought for a flag that would never give them ultimate eternal freedom. That was sobering for me to think about.

Here is another sobering thought. As much as I love America and what this country does for me and has done for me and the freedoms it gives me, there will be no American flag waving in heaven. It's not going to be there. There is one nation when we get to be with Jesus. There is one God, one nation, and it's not America; it's the nation of God's people and the people he's redeeming. They go all the way back to the book of Nehemiah. It says they stood because they were in reverence. They cherished this, they valued this, they loved this.

That's the question you have to ask. Do you value the American flag more than you value the Word of God? Do you love singing the National Anthem more than you do spending time in the Word? That's something I have to wrestle with. Do I get more excited about sports than I do what God's Word had to teach me in a moment? God's kicked me on my rear a little bit this week as I've been thinking about this and processing this.

6 And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. 7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law... I love this. The Levites and the priests knew this really well. That was their job. So, you had all these tribes of Israel. The Levites were their leaders and they were the ones responsible for the Law, the Arc of the Covenant, the Atoning of sins. They did all of this. What's really cool is the Levites helped the people to understand the law. They helped those that didn't understand.

That's why we're so passionate about home groups here at Woodland Hills. We want to help those that don't understand or may be infants in their faith, which is okay. We're all at different parts of our journey. If you just walked in here today and this is your first time at Woodland Hills or you happen to be listening online or you're over at the Chapel, don't disappear. We're okay that you have no idea what Jesus means or what this Bible means or you think I'm crazy. That's okay; I am crazy, but just listen to me. We have home groups for you and we have people that love you and they care about you.

My neighbors are the Rooks and they are amazing people. They help people in their marriages. They are in my neighborhood and they have an avenue where they love people and they help people understand how marriages can be more successful. We have those people. R.G. is one of those people. Stephanie Watson can help you to be a better parent in things that she's learning. There are people in this church that will help you understand. It's not just show up on Sunday and you're on your own. No, Woodland Hills has people that want to help you understand what the Bible is all about, what this church is about, and why we love you so much.

...while the people remained in their places. (Obviously, they didn't have kids.) ***8 They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.***

So now we jumped over to Nehemiah 9: 1-8. Chapter 9 is all about confession. So, they just read the Book of the Law and what they realize is now they need to shine light on some sins in their life because the law is don't do this and don't do that, do this this way. So, what just happened in Nehemiah 8 is they read from the law and now in Nehemiah 9, rather than them justifying their sin, it compels them to confess their sin, so they can be right with God.

I've said this frequently. The only thing conceivably worse than our sin is justifying it. If we justify our sin, we never get to a place of confessing our sin, and if we never get to a place of confessing our sin, we never get to a place of intimacy with God.

1 John 1 says, **9** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* For the older crowd, this idea of community and group and gathering and confessing sin is just weird. It's become a much more millennial thought that you get together in community. We've got to have community coffee, we've got to have community playing Fortnite, which, all you teenagers, stop playing Fortnite. They're addicted to this game called Fortnite; it's driving me crazy. But, there is community everywhere.

8 *They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.* They understood that they needed to confess because it creates intimacy with God.

John Piper says it this way: *"Darkness comes. In the middle of it, the future looks blank. The temptation to quit is huge. (some of you in here might be in a really dark spot right now and the temptation to punt this whole thing and get out of here is huge) Don't. You are in good company... You will argue with your self that there is no way forward. But with God, nothing is impossible. He has more ropes and ladders and tunnels out of pits than you can conceive. Wait. Pray without ceasing. Hope."*

Nehemiah 9 says, **33** *Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly.* This gets back to the confession part I was telling you about. You see them confessing and the thing I love here in this confession towards the end of Chapter 9 is they don't point fingers at anybody.

True confession is never found in the presence of excuses. "I'm an alcoholic because my dad was an alcoholic." "I abuse my kid because my dad abused me." True confession is never found in blaming someone or something else. True confession is inward. I'm not escaping the fact that you could be product of a bad situation. I'll pray out of that, but there's still our own hearts that we have to deal with. There is still confession of our own impurity, our own desires, our own lusts, our own wants, our own selfishness.

I just did a wedding last night in Miami, Oklahoma, just outside of Neosho, Missouri. I told them, "The first thing you're going to experience being married is how deeply selfish you are. You may not think you're selfish, but you've never had to ask her if you can go play golf. You've never had to ask her if she's okay with watching the NBA Finals. You've never had to put his toilet seat down. You've never had to decide whether you're going to Chick-fil-A or Cantina Laredo. You're going to realize quickly how selfish you are, and you don't even realize that for 27 years, you've gotten to do whatever whenever you wanted. All of the sudden now there is this sin that shows up and you realize." Regardless, true confession is never found in the presence excuses. That's what we see in Nehemiah 9 after they go through the law.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer says it this way: *"Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ."*

That leads me right into communion. So, we are going to take communion today here at Woodland Hills. Woodland Hills theologically believes that communion is reserved for the believer. It's reserved for those who have made a profession in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. They believe that he lived on this earth sinlessly, died a death he didn't deserve to die, was crucified, buried, and resurrected, and sits on the right hand of the throne of God. They believe that, and they trust their life to him. They have surrendered to him as the Lord of their life. They believe that he will come back, a second coming, and redeem all and rescue all those that are his.

If you don't believe that and you have never made that profession, we believe we shouldn't invite you to take communion, not because we think we're better than you, but because scripture goes on to say in 1 Corinthians 11 that those who partake in communion without receiving the Lord eat and drink judgment upon themselves. We don't want you to do that.

If you are a believer, before you take communion, you know it's important to reflect, to confess, as they did in Nehemiah 9. Psalm 139 says, ***23 Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*** So, before we take the bread, let's just take a second to have God search our hearts.

In 1 Corinthians 11, it says, ***The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.***

Father God, we want to thank you for all the military personnel that have served and fought for this country. We want to thank you for leaders you are rising up in this country that are getting back to your Word.

We want to thank you for this place called Woodland Hills that not only honors veterans so well, but honors the widow, the orphan, the struggling marriage... everyone. Thank you for this place called Woodland Hills.

Thank you for Ted and his leadership. Thank you for the team behind the scenes: the Katies and the Mesas and the Coreys and the Chads. God, we pray for your hand to be upon us. May we never depart from your word and may that word breathe life into so many people sitting here today. I pray they leave today receiving your breath into their lungs as they inhale your word.

It's in the matchless and mighty name of Jesus we pray, and all God's people said... Amen