

## The Fruit of Repentance Part 2

*Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Nehemiah, Nehemiah 10. I do want to say a word about the parenting conference. It's a great opportunity. Tedd Tripp is one of the really outstanding teachers on parenting in the church today, has been for a number of years. His book, "Shepherding a Child's Heart," is an excellent resource, really deals with how parenting is not just getting children to obey and certainly motivation is not to get them to obey so that we have easier lives, but that we shepherd their hearts to love God, that we shepherd their hearts in the way that we discipline them, we are to discipline our children, we're to use the rod, spare the rod, spoil the child, but we're to use it in such a way that we're trying to affect their hearts, to remove foolishness and to show them their need of Christ. So he does a great job. He's going to be preaching here next Sunday, Tedd Tripp Sunday morning. We're delighted to have him here at Providence. So be praying for him this week and pray for the conference and hope that you'll be a part of that.

I also just want to ask your prayer for me this week as I will be spending a lot of time writing this week. The elders have basically agreed to let me sort of just take a working writing week and so that's why Dalton's teaching, and since Tedd's preaching next week, I won't be studying for that. So I'm going to be out of the office just writing for my project, my D. Min. project in biblical counseling. So please pray for me. It's really a joyful thing but it takes a lot of energy, and I was telling Patti not too long ago that it seems like it's so hard to get back into the writing phase. It's like start into it and I just can't do it, and because you're going back and forth so you really need focus. So pray for focus on that. Anyway, praise the Lord that he's given me an opportunity to study and a really fruitful time. I look forward to what God's doing.

All right, so we're in Nehemiah 10 again and the title of the message that we began last week as we began to look at this chapter is "The Fruit of Repentance." The fruit of repentance. So this is part 2 of the fruit of repentance. We've noted that in this passage, Nehemiah 8, 9, 10 and 11, really you have a revival, that is, revival is the return of the life of God to the people of God. The revivification of the people of God. So they're made alive again and you see this in these chapters, these four chapters, and what we've been looking at as we've been expositing Nehemiah 8-11, particularly we've been looking at the issue of repentance because one of the distinguishing marks of revival is repentance,

and repentance is, remember, a whole-personed turning. It's a key word in the Bible all the way through Scripture, repentance and the doctrine of repentance is essential. It's one of the most basic fundamental needs of every sinner is to repent. And so Jesus comes preaching repentance, the New Testament ends with Jesus still preaching repentance in Revelation as he talks directly to those churches saying, "Repent. Repent. Repent."

And so it's so important for us to understand what repentance is. What is it? It is a turning, a turning from sin to God. That's what the Old Testament word means and that's the understanding that we should have of this concept. When we look at it, this whole-personed turning means that there's not just, it's not just a mental turning, change of mind. It is that, it begins with our thinking changing about God and his word, about our sin, about our need of grace, it begins with that but it goes deeper than that. It doesn't merely stay in the mind, it also affects the emotions, the affections. Repentance always is marked by more than a mere change of mind, change of thinking. The affections are engaged and then the will is engaged so that there's a change of life. That's what repentance means, it means to be going one direction and to turn and go another direction and we've seen this played out before us on the pages of the book of Nehemiah. We see this happen in the lives of the people. They are confronted with the word of God in Nehemiah 8 because the word of God is that which produces repentance, they're confronted with the word of God and the word of God changes their thinking. They understand now, they see their sin against the backdrop of God's holy law, their minds are changed, their affections are engaged, remember they begin mourning. Remember, repentance comes through extensive preaching. They have long preaching services, four hours in one day, three hours in another day, and then daily preaching for a period of weeks. And this preaching of the word of God produces this whole-personed turning of the people of God en masse from sin back to God. We see after they hear the word of God, they were affected emotionally, their hearts were grieved over their sin, they mourned over their sin, they wailed over their sin. But it didn't stop there, it wasn't just mental and emotional, it also engaged the will. There was a turning of life and that's what we're seeing particularly unpacked in chapters 10 and 11. There was evidence of it in chapter 9 as well but it's really become the focus, this changing of the will, the changing of the person's direction into new action in chapters 10 and 11 because we see them basically entering into a renewed covenant with God and resolving, making resolutions and commitments to live differently.

So that's repentance, change of mind, change of heart, change of will, change of life, and we've called, previously we've talked about the grace of repentance because we need to remember that repentance is a gift. It's not something you can work up in your own heart, in your own energy. You are commanded to do it but you must have God's grace to enable you to do it. So it's one of those things as you're commanded to do, you cry out to God for help in obeying him, "Lord, grant me repentance." And that's what we see, it is something that God grants. It's especially clear in 2 Timothy 2:24-26 where Paul says to Timothy, "Be a man of God who is patient and continuing to speak, reprove those who are in opposition but do it with patience and kindness if perhaps God may grant them repentance." They're in opposition and you're supposed to do what you can to convince them from the word of God but if anything is going to happen, it must be a gift of God's

grace. You cannot reason people out of error without the grace of God granting repentance. You cannot reason people into the kingdom of God, out of sin, into the kingdom of God unless God grants the grace of repentance. And so we are called to do that, we're called to reason with people, we're called to exhort them to believe, to call them to, and to care deeply as we present Christ to them, but we must know underneath it all that our ultimate hope is in the gift of God's grace in giving repentance, in giving saving faith.

So now what we're talking about, then, is the fruit of that repentance. We've been looking at this subject of repentance and now we're looking at the fruit of repentance and the fruit of repentance, the real evidence, the apple on the tree, is seen in joyful obedience to God, or we talked about last time, if you wanted to put it into a word as what we're seeing here, renewed energy for God. A renewed sense of life, remember revival is the renewal of life, to revive, to make alive again, and when life is there, you see movement, you see growth. Something's alive, it grows, there's movement, it moves. Deadness is no movement, no growth.

And so in this passage particularly, we see them demonstrating great energy for the things of God and I want us to begin, we're going to read the first 31 verses and then we're going to pray and then we'll read the rest of the chapter subsequently, but we're going to read Nehemiah 10:1-31, the title, "The Fruit of Repentance," and this morning particularly focused on renewed energy for the work of God. Last time, we talked about renewed energy for the word of God, renewed energy for the worship of God, today, renewed energy for the work of God. Renewed energy for the work of God, that is the fruit of repentance. Nehemiah 10:1,

1 Now on the sealed document were the names of: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah, 2 Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, 3 Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, 4 Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, 5 Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, 6 Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, 7 Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, 8 Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah. These were the priests. 9 And the Levites: Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel; 10 also their brothers Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, 11 Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, 12 Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, 13 Hodiah, Bani, Beninu. 14 The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, 15 Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, 16 Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, 17 Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, 18 Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, 19 Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, 20 Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, 21 Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, 22 Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, 23 Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, 24 Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, 25 Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, 26 Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, 27 Malluch, Harim, Baanah. 28 Now the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants and all those who had separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, their wives, their sons and their daughters, all those who had knowledge and understanding, 29 are joining with their kinsmen, their nobles, and are taking on themselves a curse and

an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of GOD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes; 30 and that we will not give our daughters to the peoples of the land or take their daughters for our sons. 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.

I meant to also read verse 38 of chapter 9, the last verse of chapter 9 is actually the first verse of chapter 10 and it began, turn back over,

38 "Now because of all this We are making an agreement in writing; And on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests."

And then it led right into, "Now on the sealed document were the names." So it's an introduction to what we just read, this idea of making an agreement in writing, and what we see here is the making of a covenant, the cutting of a covenant which we talked about last time. They are reinstating and resubmitting themselves to the covenant of Abraham and the covenant of Abraham as clarified through the covenant of Moses.

So let's go to the Lord in prayer and ask his blessing on our time.

*Father, we thank You for Your word. Lord, we come acknowledging to You our great need of grace. We come praising You because You are true, You are the only God, there is no other. Before the mountains were born or You brought forth the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God. And we thank You, Lord, that though the grass withers and the flower fades, the word of God stands forever. Your word is eternal and we come asking that You would take this eternal word and that You would accomplish Your purposes in our hearts and in our lives. We pray that You would produce deeper repentance, that You would help us to hate sin more, that You would help us to love Your law more, that You would help us to love You more, that we would love You as You truly are revealed in Your word, a God of majesty and holiness, justice, righteousness, but also mercy and lovingkindness. Be glorified in Your people. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.*

The fruit of repentance is renewed energy for the work of God. This is the focus of our message this morning and I want us before we read the rest of that passage to talk about this idea of renewed energy for a moment. One of the things that happens when God brings repentance, the soul is awakened, the soul comes to life again. Remember, we talked about the law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul, returning the soul. You could translate it repenting the soul. The law of the Lord comes, it returns the soul to what it's intended to be and there's now life, and the soul responds to God as it should when the soul is granted repentance through the word of God and there is this renewed energy for the things of God.

One of the passages that illustrates this, and I'll just make mention of this and you can look at it... Well, we can turn there for a second. 2 Corinthians 11. Hold your place in Nehemiah 10 and turn to 2 Corinthians 7, I mean, it's verse 11 we're going to look at. We're going to look at verses 8 to 11 but 11 is the key verse. This is a passage, a wonderful passage on the nature of true repentance, the difference between true repentance and maybe a false repentance. The difference between true repentance is based in godly sorrow and false repentance is based in worldly sorrow. This is the distinction Paul is making in these verses, that a sorrow according to the will of God is a godly sorrow. There's sorrow that God works in the heart of his people is godly sorrow, and it is according to the will of God. It's sorrow that is rooted in God's word, God's truth, and who we are, how we grieve God. It's a God-ward sorrow. You know, you could be sorry for your sin because you got caught. You can be sorry for your sin because it's exposed you to, you know, to being embarrassed. You can be sorry for your sin because it's brought about great suffering and consequences. That all still is a kind of a surface sorrow that the Bible would call worldly sorrow. Godly sorrow is when you're sorry for your sin because it offends God and you see it now in its true light as an assault on his kindness and goodness. That's what we see in these verses but what godly sorrow does, he's going to say, is lead to true repentance and true repentance is marked by energy and action, and I want you to see how Paul works through this.

2 Corinthians 7:8-11. He's speaking about a letter he wrote to them previously dealing with an issue that they needed to be called out on. They were in pretty substantial error in the way they were handling a situation, the way they were listening to false teachers. He writes them a hard letter. He actually had come to them once and spoken to them sternly. They hadn't yet repented. He wrote them a letter again. The letter caused them sorrow and here he's talking about the sorrow that came from that letter, and the outcome was true repentance and restoration. In describing this, he shows us what true repentance is.

Verse 8, 2 Corinthians 7, "For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it - for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death. For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter." Paul works through seven things that were dealt with that came to light through the ministry of that letter he sent, seven different affects that were produced in the people. He says what earnestness. So what happened was godly sorrow came, they were overwhelmed with the sorrow of their sin, and when God does that, the heart is moved to action. And these seven words, nouns he uses in this passage describe intense action.

The first word actually, what earnestness. Actually the word in Greek is a word, *spoude*, which means speed. It means haste. What earnestness, what haste it produced. Godly

sorrow makes you want to hurry to address your sin. It gives you energy, movement. He goes on to say, the second thing, it produces vindication, that is the desire to right the wrong, the vindicate the reputation. We know we've been guilty of a charge, we want to now clear ourselves of this guilt and this charge. There's this desire for that. What indignation, that is what righteous anger at our sin. What fear, a sense of we can't continue in this. You see all these emotions that are produced in the heart that lead one to action. What longing, what yearning for a restored relationship. What zeal. The word for zeal is a word which its root means boiling, a pot boiling over. What zeal, and then what avenging of wrong, what a desire to make this right. He says, "The reason that you can see that you had godly sorrow is you had this earnestness, you had this vindication, you had this indignation, you had this fear, you had this longing, you had this zeal, you had this desire to avenge what was wrong."

So there's great energy when repentance comes and so when we find ourselves apathetic, listless spiritually, we need to pray for the grace of repentance. Repentance is something that is worked in us by God, by Christ directly himself, looking to him but we desperately need it so that we will be about his business. When we see, what happens is God shows you that in some area of your life where you are out of line with him, he brings clarity to show you, "This is just not what I want for your life." He brings that to light, he grants you repentance and there's the desire to change that, there's the desire to deal with that, there's the desire to follow through on that. That's what Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians 7 and that's what we see played out before us in Nehemiah 10. There is this desire to make things right and that's what they're doing when they cut this covenant. Again, they seal this commitment to this covenant and we see that, that they are zealous, they have a renewed energy, they have a desire to make themselves right with God and they have a renewed energy for the word of God, the worship of God, and now for the rest of this time today, the theme is renewed energy for the work of God.

The work of God. That's the key focus of verses 32 to 39 which we're going to read here in a second, that when God grants repentance, there is a renewed energy for the work to which he's called us. The Spirit of God working in the people of God, when he grants repentance there is a desire and a yearning and an earnestness for the work. What is the work? The work centers, as you're going to see as we read this, on the house of God. Nine times in eight verses, you're going to hear the word "house." Eight times it's going to say, "house of our God," one time "house of the Lord." And you're going to read here in the first verse or two about the work, the service of the house, the work of the house, and then we're going to see all the things that have to happen for that work to be facilitated. So then, in a sense, what you can see is that for them what God did in the hearts of the people was he put upon them such an earnest desire that the work of God would go forth, that is, the work of the house of God, and the work of the house of God takes a lot of provision, a lot of focus, a lot of energy.

And so let's read these verses together, verses 32 to 39. They're continuing to express their commitment, their resolve to follow God. Verse 32,

32 We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel for the service of the house of our God: 33 for the showbread, for the continual grain offering, for the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moon, for the appointed times, for the holy things and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God. 34 Likewise we cast lots for the supply of wood among the priests, the Levites and the people so that they might bring it to the house of our God, according to our fathers' households, at fixed times annually, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God, as it is written in the law; 35 and that they might bring the first fruits of our ground and the first fruits of all the fruit of every tree to the house of the LORD annually, 36 and bring to the house of our God the firstborn of our sons and of our cattle, and the firstborn of our herds and our flocks as it is written in the law, for the priests who are ministering in the house of our God. 37 We will also bring the first of our dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree, the new wine and the oil to the priests at the chambers of the house of our God, and the tithe of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in all the rural towns. 38 The priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes, and the Levites shall bring up the tenth of the tithes to the house of our God, to the chambers of the storehouse. 39 For the sons of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of the grain, the new wine and the oil to the chambers; there are the utensils of the sanctuary, the priests who are ministering, the gatekeepers and the singers. Thus we will not neglect the house of our God.

That's a lot of stuff there, a lot of detail that's very foreign to us because we don't live under this dispensation of God where we were called to actually do these things. This is very practical, earthy, hard stuff. They were committing to some significant sacrifice. They were committing to work and to work to facilitate the work. Their work was to facilitate the work and essentially the work of God, or the work that happens in the temple, if you think about this because the house of our God is the temple. You heard it nine times, right? The house. The house. The house of our God. The house of our God. The house of our God was the temple, the Old Testament temple that had been rebuilt in the book of Ezra we read about in that first return of the exiles from Babylon back to Judea, and now after they've rebuilt the wall around the city of Jerusalem, they're devoting themselves to now restoring the worship in the house of our God to what it should be. You see, they had been neglecting the house of God. These things weren't being done. They weren't making sure they had enough wood to keep the continual fire going. They weren't making sure they brought the firstfruits to the temple so that as God has that, that would be part of their worship to God to say, "You're the One who gives everything that we get." But also it provided for the priests and the Levites who were serving in the temple. They didn't have land. In God's plan, the Levites did not have farmland. They didn't have an inheritance. God was their inheritance and so the people were to provide for them because they were commissioned by God to lead the people in the worship of God.

So the people had been neglecting all these things and now they commit now to return to what they should have been doing all along. Repentance gives them this great energy now to come back and, "We're going to commit to these things." And what they're basically doing is, "We're going to put the work of God at the center of our life," and if the work of God is at the center of your life, then the worship of God will be at the center of your life. It's the work, it's the service of the house of God. They are trying to restore the proper functioning of God's house and if you think about this now, the house of God at that point in time was the temple, the place where people had to go to restore themselves to fellowship with God. In God's economy and the way he unfolds his revelation, at this point in history if you had sinned, the only way you could be made right with God would be to go to Jerusalem and to offer the appropriate sacrifice at the temple. There had to be priests there and Levites there so that you could do that, and until you did that, you were not right with God. You did not have a restored relationship with God. At that point in time, that was the only way you could do it. It was the place where people were restored to relationship and fellowship with the living God. It was the place of atonement, where they were put under the blood, as it were, in hopes of the one day the atonement of Christ.

True worship could only happen there when atonement had happened, and so all of these things were about restoring true worship, making people true worshipers of God, and what we're going to see is, for us, this is not about you bringing, you know, your first tomatoes to the church. Although that's perfectly fine with me if you would like to do that. No, but seriously, that's not this at all. A little late for that request anyway, isn't it? But anyway so it's not about that. This building is not the fulfillment. What this is saying is to you and me on this side of Calvary, on this side of the giving of the Holy Spirit, what we're supposed to see this as we're supposed to facilitate and do everything we can to facilitate the work and to be involved in the work of the house of God. The work in the house of God in the New Testament is the people of God. It's not the building, it's the people.

We're going to look at this a little bit later, 1 Peter 2, "You," Peter says, he's writing to Christians, he says, "You are living stones being built upon the foundation of Christ, the cornerstone, into a spiritual house to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God. You are the temple and you, the people of God, are the temple and you come together as the temple to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God." That is, your business is to come together and to help one another be in right fellowship with God, in restored fellowship with God, in active worship of God. That is the work. The work is not just for you to be worshiping God. Do you hear that? It's not just for you to be individually making sure that you're right with the Lord and you're walking with the Lord. It is the work of the temple of God today is for you to get busy helping other people do that. We can't be thinking atomistically, self-centeredly as Christians. This is calling us to the work. It's calling us to hard work. It's calling us to difficulty. It's calling us to discomfort. But it's calling us to the highest work to which we could ever be called, that is, to help other souls truly meet and love God and to continue to be restored in their love for God and their fellowship with God. You're doing this when you help another believer by showing them their sin. You're doing this



when you help another believer who's discouraged by encouraging them. You do it when you mourn with those who mourn.

But this is telling us something about what this work we're called to is, and we're going to look this morning at two points that I think flow out of this passage that are instructive for us and this, remember, is the fruit of repentance. We're talking about what needs to be in our life but we've got to have God's grace to help us do this. There are two points this morning. First, we're called to the work, repentance manifests itself in renewed energy for the work of God and there's two things about the work of God that this passage talks about. It is, first of all, a continual work. A continual work.

You see this particularly in verse 33 and 34. They commit in verse 32 to give a third of a shekel for each adult, a third of a shekel yearly for the service of the house of our God. They commit to give money to the temple but why is that? Verse 33, "for the showbread, for the continual grain offering, for the continual burnt offering, the sabbaths, the new moon, for the appointed times, for the holy things and for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, and all the work of the house of our God." This idea, the words "continual" there, showbread, the continual grain offering, the continual burnt offering, look, for the showbread to be where it's supposed to be on the table inside the holy place, there were to be 12 loaves representing each of the tribes of Israel, they were to be replaced every sabbath day. And then a continual grain offering, the continual burnt offering is speaking of the daily morning and evening sacrifices. Every morning, they were to begin, I talked about this before, at dawn, they were to sacrifice the morning offering and it was to be a burnt offering. They were to cut the animal and then place parts of it on the fire on the altar. The altar was always to be burning. The fire was to be continually burning. This was God's will.

I mean, we talk about, you know how the Olympics, you've got the, what do you call it, the perpetual flame? Some other term, but anyway, you know, they bring the torch in. You wonder has it really been burning since the last four years ago? I don't know but they act like it has, then they light the place that the new Olympics and stuff, and this is kind of something that you see in other cultures but they're basically taking it from God because, as they often do, they counterfeit. The Lord intended there to be a perpetual fire in the temple. Once the tabernacle, remember the tabernacle is the pre-temple, it is the temple that was a tent that was basically a portable temple that's replaced by the permanent temple, and both places, the tabernacle and the temple, were the one place in the world you could meet God in God's economy at that time. And the burnt offering was to be offered every morning and every evening, and when you look at particularly Exodus 29, you'll see this, that they weren't to let the fire go out. They were to be sure that when they offered the evening offering that there was enough fire there to continue to consume the offering all night. In the morning, they would take the ashes out but then they were to put more wood on the fire to keep the fire burning. They weren't to have to be kindling any new, they weren't supposed to be getting out the lighter fluid and starting a new fire like when you're cooking something on your grill. No, this was to be continual burning.

And what's really interesting, when the Lord gave the fire, when you read the story of the building of the tabernacle, construction of the tabernacle in Exodus and then the consecration of the priests and the offering instructions in Leviticus 1 to 9, Leviticus 9:24, when they offer that first offering to God, finally now they've done it, they've consecrated the priests, they offer this first offering, do you know what happens? Fire falls from heaven onto the altar. And now the message is, "Hey, keep that fire burning. God sent down fire, keep it burning." You see, it's grace, it's only something God can do. God gives life. God gives the power. God's presence, he has to make it known but we have a responsibility to be cooperating with him. He gives us a part. This is why they had to bring all that wood. I mean, this instruction in verse 34, "Likewise we cast lots for the supply of wood," they've got to make sure there's enough firewood to keep the fire burning.

This is the first time they've actually in all of Scripture that they really spell out a plan to keep this going. I mean, obviously they were doing it before now they're, "Hey, we've got to formalize this plan." Now think about it. Firewood burns up pretty quickly and they weren't in a place that was plentiful of firewood. There were places in Israel that had more wood than others but a lot of Israel, I've not been there, but I've been told that the climate is much like Southern California if you've been to Los Angeles. Very similar. Semi-arid. Seasonal rains. You can grow stuff there but you've got to make sure you do it at the right time. But there's not a lot of big trees, there's more shrubby trees. That's what I think about Los Angeles, it's a nice place to visit, I wouldn't want to live there for a lot of reasons but one of them is the trees. And it's brown, anyway, I don't mean to be saying too much about this, but the point is they had to go a distance outside of Jerusalem out into the areas where they did have oak trees. I mean, they had fruit trees, there was enough water and you could water stuff, you could keep it alive, olive trees but you don't want to burn the olive tree for firewood, you don't want to burn the fruit tree for firewood. You've got to go out and get the hardwood trees to burn for firewood and you've got to transport them a ways. So it wasn't an easy thing and they're committing to this. "We're going to buy lots. We're going to make...hey, this is your quarter to supply all the firewood for the next three months for the temple to keep that continual fire going."

So worship, that morning and evening they started with a sacrifice because the only way the people of God could be in fellowship with God is that there must be a continual offering of atonement going on continually, and the fire burning up that atoning offering must be ascending as smoke before a holy God continually. That's our only hope. And then all the other offerings that are made throughout the day, same way. So many of the offerings had a component of the burnt offering. So the fire is burning, they put part of the animal on the altar to burn and often with grain offerings, and there was a grain offering associated with those continual morning and evening offerings.

So the idea was daily worship. Every single day, every single morning, every single evening, every single morning, every single evening this had to be happening. But then he says the sabbaths. There was also a different regime for the sabbath. Weekly there was something different. There were more offerings that were done on that day. And he doesn't stop there, the new moon. Every single new moon, that is, new month, there was

another regime of offerings that had to happen. Then he says for the appointed times. He's talking about the feasts that they would travel to Jerusalem for three times a year. So you see daily, weekly, monthly, and triennially. You see, worship was, I mean, the work of God had to be going on in the temple of God all the time and it took great provision. It wasn't something that was easy to make that happen.

The entire encounter is built around worship of God. All of life is to be centered on the worship of God. Every phase of your life, every season of your life, continual worship of God. That's what you're called to as a Christian. What are you called to do today? Worship God. What are you called to do tomorrow? Worship God. What are you called to do next year? Worship God. Every day, that's your highest calling. Now we're to help one another to do that because we forget, and so our work is to be about facilitating this temple, this church, all of the other believers, all of the other living stones in this temple to worship God.

We're to help in every phase of life. Think about this for a moment. As a child, what's their calling? It's to worship God. So from the time there in the nursery and the time they're in the services, the time they're in Sunday school classes, what are they to do? They're to worship God. So we're trying to make sure we build into our children's program, we're really working on this right now even more and more focus on this. We've been improving our children's program for the last few years and we want to continue that development because we want to help our children worship God.

Teenager, what is the teenager's calling? So often we kind of take it easy on the teenagers because we remember how hard it is to be a teenager and it is, it's hard. If you don't think it's hard as a teenager, well, praise God for that. You may think that soon that it's harder than you thought. I don't know. But the good news is, hey, your calling is to worship God and we're supposed to help our teenagers worship God.

We're supposed to help our young adults worship God. Single people worship God. Married man, what's your calling? Worship God. Married woman, worship God. Divorcee, after you've been divorced what is your calling? Worship God. Widow, what is your calling? Worship God. Older person caring for an aging spouse, what is your calling? Worship God. The person who's declining who is having to be cared for, what is his calling? Worship God. Caring for aging parents. All of it. And I love this actually, Dr. Street in the marriage conference we had a couple of years ago, he shared a thing about the seasons of life in marriage and he talked about how it changes from the time that you get married until you end up, and he had a different word for each season. I can't remember all of them but essentially the last one was alone after the other spouse has died. The first was kind of like giddy-eyed, you know, everything's happy, everything's wonderful. Then there's kind of like sort of disillusionment or like franticness because you now have your first child and then you're just trying to make life work and all of that. All these different seasons of life. Then you're caring for your aging parents, and then eventually you're caring for your spouse, and eventually you're alone, and the point is, listen, God has laid out our lives, our lives change continually but our calling never

changes. The calling is to worship God in whatever stage you are, and if you remember that, it gives great clarity.

You know that verse, Psalm 34:3. I think this is a great theme for a married couple getting married. "Glorify the LORD with me. Let us exalt His name together." That's our calling. So as young, enthusiastic newly-marrieds, what's our calling? It's to glorify God. Life gets busy when you have children, more complicated as they grow up, more complicated and more difficult, more complex. You start dealing with aging. You change over time. We change over time. You're not the same person you were when you married your spouse. They're not the same person they were when you married them. And yet what is your calling? Glorify the Lord. Glorify the Lord with me. In this new phase we weren't planning, we didn't know this was going to happen, what's our calling? Let's glorify God in this. Let's help one another to walk as Jesus would walk in the circumstance by his grace, by his power.

So it's a continual work. That's what they're describing. It's something every day, every week, every month, every season for life. It's a continual work and that means that we're supposed to be helping one another to do that. So what happens is we go through, you know, we go into our lives and things happen that we don't understand and we get sidetracked and we're confused and we're trying to figure out why did this happen? Why did God let this happen to me? And there's a sense in which the work of the temple is to go get involved in that situation with somebody who's hurting and disoriented. It's like their life has just dealt them, it's a tremendous blow. They can't figure it out, what do you do? You go and you mourn with those that mourn, you rejoice with those who rejoice, you look at Jesus. You keep pointing to Christ and you remind them, "Hey, I'm here with you. I'm going to walk with you. I know this is so hard but we've got to keep our eyes on Jesus and the work hasn't changed." Let's let people see how worthy he is of worship, how faithful he is. He delights to show himself strong in our weakness and so this has dealt you a blow of weakness, he's going to show himself strong and I'm going to walk with you through it. And it's messy and it's difficult and sometimes it's like getting a bunch of firewood together and just like taking it a long way and it's going to require a lot of you but that's okay. You've got to do it. That's what you signed up for when you said you wanted to follow Christ.

It's a continual work and it leads into the second point: it's a costly work. This work that we have renewed energy for is a costly work. This is brought out a number of ways in the passage. First of all, just some of the key words repeated. You have verse 32, the word "contribute." I'm reading the New American Standard. It says we, verse 32, "We also placed ourselves under obligation to contribute yearly one third of a shekel." Verse 37, "We will also bring the first of our dough, our contributions." Verse 39, "For the sons of Israel and the sons of Levi shall bring the contribution of the grain." The word "tithe" occurs five times in verses 37 and 38. "We will also bring the first of our dough, our contributions, the fruit of every tree." He goes on down, "and the tithe of our ground to the Levites, for the Levites are they who receive the tithes in the rural towns. The priest, the son of Aaron, shall be with the Levites when the Levites receive tithes, and the Levites shall bring up," literally, "the tithe of the tithes to the house of our God." You get

to hear that word "tithe," don't you? So we're supposed to be giving a tenth, they said, in that time they were to give a tenth of all of these different things to the Lord, to the Levites. The Levites would live off of them and they would take a tenth of the tenths to Jerusalem.

So it was costly. They had to be thinking about the first apple that came, the first cow that was born to your heifer was taken and sacrificed. The first lamb that was born to a ewe lamb was taken and sacrificed. The first donkey born to a female donkey taken and sacrificed. I'm not sure about that, actually I'm not sure about the donkey. Forget that. The cow and the lamb. There may have been a provision, I think, anyway.... All right, so firstfruits though and the firstborn son, they were to bring their firstborn son to the temple and this is what Mary and Joseph were doing when they bring Jesus. Now, of course, the firstborn son is we bring them to give them to God and there's a sacrifice made in their place but there's the acknowledgment that the firstborn child belongs to God.

So it is costly to be involved in the work as the people of God. Contributions, tithes, firstfruits. The word "bring" occurs six times in the passage, verses 34 to 39, once in each verse. Bring it to the house of our God. Bring the firstfruits of our ground. Bring to the house of our God. Bring the first of our dough. Bring up the tithes. It is costly work. It is hard work to make worship the center of our lives. Our families, our community. And this tells us this. This tells us the expectations. Listen, it's not easy. The Christian life is not easy. Who said it was? Whoever said it was is just wrong. The Bible doesn't present that. Now the Bible tells you this: it is all of grace. And that there's this paradox of rest. I love that, one of my favorite passages, Matthew 11:28 and 29 where Jesus says, "Come unto me, ye who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest." Those are wonderful words, aren't they? When you're weary and heavy-laden, Jesus says, "Come unto me." You're worn out, discouraged, "Come unto me. I will give you rest." But what does he say next? "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls." But you can't miss "take my yoke on you." You'll find rest when you take his yoke upon you. His yoke, the yoke is not an implement normally associated with rest. The yoke is what you put on a team of oxen or a team of horses to help them pull the load together. You put the yoke on when they're about to go to work. You take the yoke off when they're resting. But Jesus says, no, it's different. There's a paradox in the Christian life. When you come to him to find rest, you put the yoke on and then in putting the yoke on, you find that his yoke is easy and his burden is light and you will find rest for your souls.

So it is costly work, though. That's the element that there's that self-denial where we deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Christ, as we talked about in Sunday morning Bible study this morning. And so you take his yoke upon you and you work, but in doing that, you rest in being yoked to Jesus. That's the reality. You're not taking a yoke upon you and yoking yourself to other people, you're yoking yourself to Christ. It's all about union with Christ. He's inviting you to pull alongside him. He's going to give you the power you need, the direction you need, and he's going to sustain your strength all along the way. But he invites you. Isn't it amazingly noble? He lets you pull the load with him. It's amazing. And that's the calling.

That's the work. You're to work with Christ. I'm to work with Christ every day to build his house and to keep his house functioning properly. It's hard work to keep worship at the center of our lives. It's hard work when you think about the enemies that we face: the world, the flesh, the devil. Everything opposed to us. The Christian life is basically a life on an incline, isn't it? If you're not engaged going forward, remember manual transmission cars? Some of you remember that, used to have those. I think there are a few around now. And most of us had to, they're older like I am, you had to drive one early on and you had to learn how to drive one because 2/3 of the cars were manual transmission, it seems like, back then. And do you remember being at a red light on a hill and there's a car behind you and you've got to when that light turns green, you've got to engage the clutch and the gas at the right, you take your foot off the brake, put it on the gas, push the clutch in and then out, and engage the clutch and take off. And what happens every time when you first start is there's a movement backwards. You take your foot off the brake and it goes backwards because you're on an incline. You must engage the engine or you're going backwards. If you don't engage the engine, you're going to hit the car behind you. You're going backwards into that. Some of you may have had that experience, I don't know. I feel like I came really close a few times.

If you're not engaged in movement, you're going backwards in the Christian life and so it is a hard place to walk in ways that are pleasing to God in this world and you have to be engaged, you have to be working, you have to be laboring with Christ to move forward or you're moving backward. And if you're not doing that for other people in the body, chances are they're being impacted negatively by your failure. By my failure they're being impacted negatively. They may be sliding backwards.

We're called to that. Turn with me to 1 Peter 2:4. We come "to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." We are to offer up sacrifices acceptable to God. Spiritual sacrifices. No longer sacrifices of animals. There needs be no more sacrifice. Jesus has offered himself once for all. There are no more sacrifices necessary. Christ has done everything. But now on this side of receiving the atoning work of Jesus Christ, his righteousness imputed to you, now you and I are called to offer up sacrifices of praise and worship to him.

We're to help one another to do that. In fact, if you turn over to Ephesians now, right after Galatians and before Philippians, Ephesians 2 uses the same image that we are the temple, 2:19-22. "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household." Just like he told, Peter told the folks he was writing to, "Listen, guys, you're no longer all these different nations. You are the temple of God." Paul is saying the same thing to believers in Ephesus. "You're no longer strangers and aliens, you are Gentiles, but you are no longer strangers and aliens, you're now a part of God's household." Verse 20, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you

also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." Do you see that imagery?

We're being built into a temple and we're growing up as a temple which is exactly what he also adds to in chapter 4. It's interesting, chapter 4, he talks about the growth of the body in Ephesians if you look over in chapter 4, and he uses the same key words: grow, build, built, growing. In chapter 2, what's being built is a temple and it's growing. In chapter 4, what's being built is a physical body and it's growing and being built up as we speak the truth to one another. Look with me at verse 15, "but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." You see growth, building again, being built up, growing.

So what we're called to do is to help one another to grow up and to be built up into a place where more and more worship is happening, and the way that that happens is essentially in verse 16, what he's talking about here is when you speak the truth to one another, when you do the hard work of getting involved with each other, in each other's lives, and you speak the truth to one another, essentially your message is this, no matter where somebody is, no matter what they're struggling with the message is this, "Be connected to Christ." The message is always, "Look at Jesus. Be united to him. Yoke yourself again to him."

That's what they're describing here. You see from whom the whole body being fitted and held together, that's the head. Who is the head? Even Christ, verse 15, and we're growing up into the head who is Christ from whom the whole body. The whole body grows as it is connected to Christ through all these ligaments and things. The whole body grows. As there's organic connection to Jesus, people are growing and they're becoming a more healthy physical body, they're becoming the temple where true worship happens. The answer is always more of Christ. That is the answer. That is the only remedy for any circumstance, it's more of Jesus. That's what you need. That's what I need. That's what your brother needs. That's what your sister needs. Every moment more of Jesus. And we are called to get involved with each other so that we can help one another to get more of Jesus, and it's not going to be easy to do that. It's not as easy as a bumper sticker kind of thing, "More of Jesus, that's all you need. God works all things together for good." No, you get involved. It's work. It's like going and cutting down wood. It's like tithing when you're giving away what you think you still need. It's giving your time, giving your energy, giving your money, giving everything that you are to help other people to look to Christ. And when you do that, that happens when true repentance is in your heart, that will be evidence in that kind of commitment. You see what really matters, what really matters in this world.

What really matters? Think of all the things that we stay occupied with that don't really matter. It's not that they can't have a place in our lives but we must always remember what really matters, and all that matters are the souls of men and their worship of God. That's all. And we forget and so we need each other to keep reminding us. If you don't

remind me, I will forget. And if I don't remind you, you'll forget. And it's going to involve sometimes getting involved in conversations that are unpleasant. It's going to be involved in being misunderstood but it's worth it because it pleases Jesus and because every time you go to do the work, what do you need to do? You need to yoke yourself to Christ as you go.

This is one of the things that I think we forget. We know what we need to do sometimes and we try to do it in our own strength and you're like a vine, you're like a branch that's disconnected from the vine, you're trying to bear fruit and you're straining to bear fruit but what's going to happen? Nothing good because you're not yoked to Jesus. But if you go and you say, "Lord, I don't know what, exactly what I need to say. I think Your word tells me to do this or to ask this question to try to be quick to listen and slow to speak, slow to anger. I'm memorizing and meditating on Your word as I go. I want to be gentle but I want to be firm and clear, to speak the truth in love. And as I go, though, Lord, I want You to love them through me. I want You to speak through me. I want You to equip me to do what only You can do. I want them to hear in my voice the echo of the Savior and to feel in my compassion His loving concern." And when you and I begin doing that, we are building the house and God is going to be glorified.

That's what we're called to. The fruit of repentance. And so how do we get there? We ask God for more repentance. We say, "Lord, this is what I'm supposed to be doing and I'm not. Lord, grant me repentance. Help me." And you stay in the word and you keep reading these things and you keep examining his word and you keep looking to Jesus because Jesus grants repentance. Jesus equips us with faith. You keep trusting that he is yours and you keep stepping out, believing that he's going to enable you to do what he's called you to do. You keep trusting in his finished work and he will grant you, by his grace, more and more that your life can be one like Martin Luther said, a life of continual penitence, continual repentance. There's no better way to live.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, we thank You for Your word. We thank You, Lord, for the high calling that You've given us in Christ. And Lord, we come confessing as we consider the weightiness of this calling, how much we fail, how easily distracted, how we squander time. We don't do the hard work. Help us, Lord. Change us. Make us like Christ. Thank You that as we even think about the next thing that You put on our hearts to do and we feel inadequate to do it, we can yoke ourselves to You by trusting in Your grace and we'll find out that Your yoke is easy and Your burden is light. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*