

Building Unity Through Generosity

by Ben Wikner

Nehemiah's sermon teaches us about the importance of living with integrity and generosity, and being outraged by injustice and oppression, in order to build unity and promote redemption amongst God's people.

Duration: 46:17

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Luke 4:18, Luke 4:21

Topics: "Unity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of unity and working together in the church. He emphasizes that everyone, regardless of their background or status, has a valuable role to play in the work of God. However, the speaker acknowledges that there are times when the work of the church can be hindered by external factors such as famine and drought. Despite these challenges, the speaker encourages the congregation to pray and engage with the pastors in finding ways to serve and meet the needs of the poor and disadvantaged. Additionally, the speaker highlights the responsibility of believers to proclaim the good news of freedom in Jesus Christ both in word and in action, particularly within the church community.

Transcript

As Josh has led us through the book of Nehemiah, things have been going pretty well, haven't they? Yes, there's been opposition. Yes, there's been those who, you know, Sanballat, Tobiah, these guys, they're trying to cause trouble. They're trying to stop the work.

But actually, God has used that opposition to strengthen the work. The people of God have taken their shovel, they've taken their sword, and so they're ready. And it's really brought God's people together, has strengthened their hands for the work, and it's just, it's going well.

And it seems like it's going to finish in no time. Well, I mean, it's going to take some time, but it's just, it's going very, very well, praise the Lord. What could deter, what could halt this glorious work? Well, that's what we come to in Nehemiah chapter 5. God reveals a problem that is so serious as to actually halt the work of building the wall.

What could be that serious, so destructive? What would be so important so as to have Nehemiah pull people off of the work and off the wall, call them to a congregational meeting, essentially, for a discussion and for resolution before work can continue? Well, that's what we're going to find out here in our text in

Nehemiah 5. So let's turn our attention to that right now. Verse 1, now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers. For there were those who said, with our sons and our daughters, we are many.

And so let us get grain that we may eat and keep alive. There were those also who said, we're mortgaging our fields and our vineyards and our houses to get grain because of the famine. And there were those who said, we've borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and on our vineyards.

Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers and our children are as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves. And some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but it's not in our power to help it.

For other men have our fields and our vineyards. Verse 6, now I, Nehemiah, was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. And I took counsel with myself and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials.

And I said to them, you are exacting interest each from his brother. And I held a great assembly against them and said to them, we, as far as we are able, have bought back our Jewish brothers who have been sold to the nations, but you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us. And they were silent and could not find a word to say.

And so I said, the thing that you are doing is not good. Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God 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.

Return to them this very day, their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards and their houses and the percentage of money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them. And they replied, we will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say.

And I called the priests and made them swear to do all that they had promised. I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, so may God shake out every man from his house and from his labor who does not keep this promise. So may he be shaken out and emptied.

And all the assembly said, amen. It's a good response. And they praised the Lord.

And the people did as they had promised. Now I'm gonna stop there. The problem in Israel amongst God's people is division and oppression amongst God's people.

It's division and oppression. Now this Nehemiah 5 is put to us in basically three different sections here. And so I'm gonna just start here with verses one through five, the outcry of the poor.

And what we see here in this outcry is that as God's people have been laboring hard at the work of the wall, we recognize it's an all-consuming, it's an all-hands-on-deck project. And as oftentimes is the case when it takes that kind of a strenuous effort, that type of a comprehensive effort, with that kind of tension and exhaustion that comes from building the wall, the cracks begin to show. And they begin to become open fissures.

The disgruntled murmuring that has probably been there underlying the surface come up and it breaks forth into a great outcry. Even by the way the women are speaking up. And in that society and culture, the

women are gonna be silent.

They're not gonna have really a voice here. But in our text, this is so significant. This is so problematic that the women are saying, help! Well, a little bit of background here may be useful.

In this massive effort of trying to rebuild the wall, remember that all are working. Josh talked about the singing of music, you know. And if you're talking in a movie, this is the interlude where all the work is being done.

The wall is being built. Well, here's where the music stops. Okay.

Chapter five. Music stops. The work that was being done with such unity now is stopped.

And it's interesting because the working itself, just part of the beauty of it was that it included everyone. The uneducated, the educated, the rich, the poor. Those who had been generational Jews for centuries and those who became or just like recent converts, proselytes to Judaism.

They were all working. They were all useful. They were all valuable.

But when you have that kind of a comprehensive effort, there's other work that's not getting done. There's things that are gonna be omitted. And that means the normal work.

The fields, the vineyards, the olive groves, because this is an agrarian society. And try to imagine that. Not working in what's gonna provide you bread and substance in order to be able to do this work.

Well, on top of that, we find out from our text that this is just a tough time in general. There's been a famine in the land. There's been drought.

The taxation is heavy that Artaxerxes is putting upon the people. Life is hard. Well, it's hard in agrarian society, but it's even more difficult on account of the situation.

And there are no grocery stores. There's no corner markets. There's no Walmarts or Costcos.

There's no online shopping. I mean, it almost seems silly to say that. But you understand, if you want food, you gotta grow it.

You gotta pick it. You gotta harvest it. And the people are overstretched.

They're exhausted. Their resources are exhausted. And as so often is the case, it's the poor and the disadvantaged who suffer the most in such times as this.

They can't feed their families. And they are on the brink of ruin with many having already crossed over that line. We see here that the situation has caused the needy to mortgage their land.

And the land is very significant in Old Testament Israel because the land was, it was an inheritance that God Himself had given to the Jews, each family given a portion. And so here we see that they're mortgaging the land on account of their need. And then even more troubling, on account of the loan repayments, the principal and the interest, many have given themselves over to enslavement, to economic enslavement.

Some, even as verse five says, because if you look at that, it almost seems like it's just repeating itself, but it's not. It says, we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves. And some of our daughters have already been enslaved.

In other words, we're even having to give some of our daughters over to marry in marriage in order to be able to feed our families because that's one of the things that you did. Dads, try to imagine that for your daughters, forcing your daughter to get married to some person, not out of love, but because you were impoverished, out of need. Just let that sink in for a minute, the difficulty, the emotion, the distress of the situation.

And this was the legal and customary way of handling such things because there was no foreclosure of loans in those days. There was no loan default. There was no bankruptcy and bankruptcy courts.

There were no social services. There was no section eight housing or Medicare or WIC or student loan programs. These didn't exist.

If you were in economic distress, you had to sell yourself into economic slavery to indenture yourself. And as so often is the case, the poor are powerless in this situation. And the situation is only getting more desperate for them.

Greed, oppression, and indifference have prevailed amongst the people of God. And what we see here is that Nehemiah responds with righteous indignation. That's section number two there, verses six through 13.

If you look at verse six, I was big time bent out of shape, hot under the collar, however you want to put it, when I heard their outcry in these words. Now, some have argued that Nehemiah was wrong to get angry like that, that this was possibly even sinful. I don't think so.

I think it was righteous indignation. The Christian faith is not dignified stoicism. I know we're in scripture.

Do we see that we ought to just be emotionless or stayed? First service, I kind of poked at the Brits for their reputation, you know, and found out that they were Brits in the audience. But they said that my representation was fairly accurate, however, okay. Well, that's not how God calls us to be.

God calls us to weep and to rejoice. Jesus himself, we see clearly as a man of full emotion, joy, sorrow, weeping, and anger. Think about the temple.

Think about how his response to the death of his friend Lazarus and the indignation that sin causes in this earth. In Ephesians chapter four, we read, be angry. The apostle Paul says, be angry, but do not sin.

Be angry, but do not sin. What informs Nehemiah's anger here is God. God is why he is angry.

Because for the zeal of the Lord, his anger is over the injustice, the oppression, the disunity that exists in the body. He's outraged by the abuse of the poor and the needy amongst God's people. And this at the hands of God's people, no less, as well.

Now, I think in order to better understand some of the background for the vehemence of Nehemiah's reaction here, his response, it's helpful for us to see some of the Old Testament's teaching that kind of underlies it. And so, first of all, the Old Testament makes clear, God forbids usury. Now, usury is not a word that we typically use.

No pun intended there. It's, usury is just, it means interest. The forbidding of charging interest.

And some believe that it's exorbitant interest and others believe it's just interest. But God makes clear in Leviticus chapter 25 that Jews were not to charge interest to Jews, especially to those in need. So let me just read this in Leviticus chapter 25.

If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident. An alien is not somebody from Mars, somebody from out of the country. So he can continue to live among you.

Do not take interest of any kind from him, but fear your God so that your countrymen can live among you. You must not lend him money at interest or sell him food at a profit. If one of your countrymen becomes poor among you and sells himself to you, do not make him work as a slave.

He is to be treated as a hired worker or a temporary resident among you. He is to work for you until the year of jubilee. Now that's gonna be an important concept here, the year of jubilee, okay? But God's word makes very clear, do not charge interest in such a way as it would worsen the plight of the poor.

Do not take advantage of others, especially those in distress. Now even worse than neglecting or forgetting or just even simply rejecting God's word in this is the enslavement that comes as a result of the poverty. This enslavement which is so contrary to God's heart and his plan, his desires.

You see, God is a God who redeems. He redeems his people. God is the God who redeemed his people, the Jews out of Egypt.

Remember that, out of bondage, out of the oppression, out of slavery that they suffered in Egypt. And God is in the business of setting free captives and in liberating those who are oppressed. And yet here we see in chapter five, what brings the work of the wall, building the wall to a screeching halt is that the well-off Jews or those who, the haves, enslaving their brothers, likely enriching themselves in the process.

It's a direct contradiction to God's heart for redemption as well as his plan for redemption. And so what we see Nehemiah doing as a response to this in order to rectify the situation is verse 11. So take a look at verse 11.

Basically what he does in verse 11 is he institutes an impromptu jubilee. Okay, now let's just read this here, verse 11. Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the percentage of money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them.

So the answer to the problem, his solution is to say, give it back. Well, that's the year of jubilee. In the year of jubilee, which is Leviticus chapter 25, verse 10, we read this.

And you shall consecrate the 50th year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all of its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan. Now, we don't oftentimes talk about jubilee, but I think we should more.

It's just a great word, first of all, but it's also a great concept. And just jubilee, it's joyful, it's exuberant, it's fun, and it's also wonderful. Because in this time, every 50 years, what we see is that all the indebtedness, all the property that had been moved around and manipulated because of impoverishment or debt is returned.

Everybody gets a fresh start. Now, part of this concept comes from just the whole Sabbath concept here, which is another thing that we don't necessarily talk a lot about, but I think we should. The Sabbath was instituted by God at creation.

Six days, God created the heavens and the earth. On the seventh day, he rested. It was a model for us, lest we become too enamored, too focused on the things of this earth.

And the Sabbath is a picture of a heavenly rest that God has for all of us in Christ Jesus, okay? And so our work week, our week, is sabbatical in nature. So God instituted that at creation, but then he instituted a Mosaic Sabbath under the law of Moses with the covenant he made with Moses. And in that, he added to the law significantly and part of that Mosaic administration was that you're going to have a Sabbath every seven years, too.

So basically, not only do you have a Sabbath every week, but then every seven years, you don't plant. You don't harvest. Instead, you entrust yourself to God that he's going to provide so abundantly in years four, five, and six that you're going to have plenty for the seventh year.

It's the same thing that he did, remember, with the manna in the wilderness? Don't try to get extra manna on the sixth day because you're going to have plenty. And on the seventh day, rest. That would be like for all of us here, every seven years, you don't go to work.

You don't go to your employer, right? Because God has so blessed your business. God has so blessed your work that you're going to be provided for in the seventh year. Well, that's the kind of thinking and you can see why it's a jubilee.

Well, what's happening here is in moving forward is every seven sevens, which is every 49 years, there would be this fullness of sabotaging, if you will. This is sort of the, well, even as the black slaves did with the Emancipation Proclamation, this was their year of jubilee. This was their freedom proclamation.

I mean, that's how wonderful it is. The Sabbath, friends, was established as a means of rest. For us, we need rest.

It was a means of trust, recognizing that God was the one that we need to look to to provide. It was a means of a witness to the nations that Israel was holy unto the Lord. And it was a means to point to the true rest, which is found in the Lord of the Sabbath, Jesus Christ.

And the year of jubilee was the pinnacle of that earthly Sabbath. Now, here's the thing. The exile, because remember, Nehemiah, the book of Nehemiah, set in redemptive history right after the exile.

Israel has been exiled. Now they've been brought back from the exile, okay? And so that exile, those 70 years in which the Israelites, the Jews have been taken to Babylon, okay, now they're returned. Well, the exile was God's means of giving the land a Sabbath rest.

It was essentially a forced Sabbath rest for the holy land. Now, why did it need a Sabbath rest? Well, because God's people had rebelled. God's people had worshipped vain idols.

God's people had shed innocent blood and forsaken the Sabbath. And therefore, God kicked the people out of the land and gave the land a forced Sabbath rest. It was a holy land after all.

This is what we read in 2 Chronicles, the very end of 2 Chronicles, when it speaks to Nebuchadnezzar coming and taking away the people of God, destroying the temple and the whole bit there. We read there, therefore, God brought up the king of the Chaldeans, Nebuchadnezzar, to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate, it kept Sabbath to fulfill 70 years.

And so when we come to Nehemiah chapter 5, we see, here's the thing, the Jews are once again heading down a path so quickly. I mean, the older folks could have remembered what happened in the exile. They just recently came back.

And here we see the Jews once again heading down the path that led to their exile in the first place. And Nehemiah is seriously ticked off about it. Righteous indignation.

And so I think one of the things we see here is that in the midst of rebuilding, the Jews are rebuilding. In the midst of that rebuilding, God's people need renewal. We need renewal because we are weak.

We are, well, I tell you, we need regular reminders. Our memories are short. We need to remember what God is doing, what God has done.

We need to remember he's a God of redemption. And so division, oppression, and indifference, these things have risen up. They've halted the work.

And Nehemiah sees that clearly. He's outraged and he deals with it. But it does bring up the question, what about us? Do we see it? Is it in our midst? What should we do? But how should we respond? How should we think about it? And I want to just put that on pause for a second before we try to answer this.

I want to consider this third section, but I don't want to forget that for sure. This third section here, which begins with verse 14. Let me just read the first couple verses.

Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the 20th year to the 32nd year of Artaxerxes the king. This was 12 years. Neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor.

Okay? And he's going to go on here and talk about how he lived with integrity and generosity in the midst of this situation. And you might think to yourself, you know, wow, Nehemiah, you're kind of highlighting your good deeds there, right? But I think if we give him the benefit of the doubt, he wasn't expecting that this was going to be universally forever inscripturated for us to read. But so he wasn't, he's not boasting.

He's not bragging. He's just simply, it's like a journal entry that ends up becoming in God's providence, scripture for us. But here's the thing, because Nehemiah feared the Lord and was a man of integrity and grace, he did not conform to the cultural norms.

And that's important. He's not conforming to the cultural norms around him. You see, as a ruler, as a governor, as one in authority, all authorities in that day, well, they took advantage of their position.

They used it for self-aggrandizement to get rich themselves. That was totally, he would not in any way have been judged or thought less of. That's what you did.

But what he's saying is, I didn't do that. My life, my conduct was that of generosity and integrity. He was a man.

He feared the Lord. You see, Israel too, and this has been the problem, the Jews were so much like the culture around them, could hardly, you know, God called them to be a holy people, distinct and holy. And yet they were doing the very same things.

They were oppressive. They were abusive. They were charging interest.

They were abusing the poor and they were indifferent to their cries. Well, Nehemiah's example was certainly stellar, friends. But one thing we need to see is that it was also imperfect.

Some have said, thought that in verse 10 there, moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest. And it's a little contested.

Was he charging interest too? Was Nehemiah kind of on that same boat? Maybe. And that could be an evidence of his imperfection. Well, later on in chapter 13, we find him beating people up, pulling people's hair out.

That's odd. Yeah, he's not perfect. Nehemiah is not perfect.

But what he does do and what the book of Nehemiah does do is it points us to the perfect one, to the one who redeems, not Nehemiah, but the Redeemer. Even his name, friends, points us in this direction. His name, Nehemiah, means Yahweh comforts.

The Lord comforts. And friends, we do not find comfort in Nehemiah, do we? But only in Jesus Christ. No, Nehemiah might pull our hair out if we're not building correctly.

I don't think so. But, you know, I mean, when Josh gets there, that'll be a good fun sermon there. But Jesus is our comforter.

Now, I want to point us to another text which helps to explain what's going on here. OK, so if you would turn with me, if you got your Bibles open there. Otherwise, I think it's on the screen.

Luke chapter 4. OK, as we think about the comforter, as we think about Jesus, the Redeemer, and what he has accomplished, it ties in so wonderfully well with what we see here in Nehemiah chapter 5. This is Luke chapter 4. And here Jesus is in the synagogue and he's opening up the word of God, the book of Isaiah in particular, and he's reading it to the rabbis. He's reading it to the Jews here. And this is what we read.

Verse 18. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

And so he sets the scroll down and then in verse 21, he says this. And he began to say to them, Today, right in front of your eyes, friends, this scripture has been fulfilled. In your hearing, friends, you see Jesus is declaring that he is the Redeemer.

He is the one who proclaims good news to the poor. He's the one who proclaims liberty to the captives, the one who sets at liberty those who are oppressed. Jesus is the one who proclaims the year, who gives the year of the Lord's favor.

That right there, the year of the Lord's favor is a reference to the year of Jubilee. Jesus, in Christ, we enter into the year of Jubilee. Jesus sets us free from the bondage of sin and brings us to the year of Jubilee.

No longer are we slaves, friends, prior to Christ. If we're not in Christ, we are in bondage to our sin. We are debtors to our sin.

But because of our Savior, our debts are paid. We're no longer debtors. We're no longer enslaved to the devil.

We have been bought with a price, the blood of Jesus Christ. Isn't that good? God has done this work in the Savior. And because of this, the scripture says, so if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

Amen. Now, this is the truth of the gospel. And yet, I've no doubt that in this auditorium, there are gonna be some here today who believe, who just, who still feel, who believe that you're still in bondage to sin.

Now, there are two possibilities for you. One possibility is that you're wrong because you're in Christ. You are a new creation.

The old has gone and the new has come. You are now in the year of Jubilee. And by faith, you have been freed.

Now, you may still feel like you are in bondage. You may, again, we're gonna still struggle with sin. But in Christ, we have been set apart.

We have been liberated. And so you are not in Christ and in bondage to sin, but you have a new master, the Lord and Savior. And so what you need, the medicine for you is to dive into the gospel, into what Christ has accomplished for you.

Now, the second possibility is, for those who are still to believe that you are in bondage to sin, is that you're right. See, those who do not know Christ, those who do not have a relationship with God and Jesus Christ, yes, you are still in your sin and under the wrath and the curse of God because you have not come and received his forgiveness and his mercy. And so, friends, if there are any of you here this morning that that would be true of, the answer for you is to repent and to put your faith and trust in Christ and be free, friends.

And that would be my plea to you is to flee to Christ, to be free from bondage. Friends, all other masters, and there's all sorts of other masters on this earth that are vying for our attention, who want to put us in bondage, and all other masters will fail us, they'll disappoint us, and they will ultimately destroy us. There's one good master.

There's one good savior. He is the Redeemer, Jesus Christ. And flee to him, friends.

All those who have experienced that freedom in Christ and in the gospel, here's the second point that we should know. Because we have been freed, because we have experienced this, because of what God has done, then God calls us to be agents of his freedom. Because God is a redeeming God, we ought to be a redeeming people.

Because God has justified us, we ought to be involved in the work of justification. Well, because we have been justified, we ought to be doing justice. That's a better way of putting it.

And so this means two things, friends. It means one, proclaiming the good news of freedom in Jesus Christ in word, and two, proclaiming the good news of freedom in Jesus Christ in deed. The two go hand in hand.

Scripture makes it very plain. And so for us to say, for Christians to say, you know, Jesus loves you and died for your sins to free you from bondage, and yet not caring about or concerned about or involved in helping those who are in bondage to sin to be freed, well, this is the way Scripture would put it. It would be saying, it's like being a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal.

It is to say, be warm and well-fed, without improving one's condition. It is to use the language of James. It would be religion that is impure and defiled.

Friends, God is very concerned about justice. He's very concerned about the poor, about helping the weak and the vulnerable, which is why we read throughout in so many different places in Scripture. It's just throughout God's word.

Things like this, God is a father to the fatherless and a defender of widows. God calls us to speak up for those who cannot speak up for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge justly, defend the rights of the poor and needy.

That's one of the reasons why we want to encourage you to pray for and be involved in helping those in crisis pregnancy, why we want to pray that life is valued in the womb as well as outside. Friends, greed, oppression, and indifference to the needs of the weak and poor, these are heresies in the truest sense. It's false doctrine.

These things misrepresent God, misrepresent his heart. And this is true in general for the whole world, okay? And there could be an entire message given over to what does this look like? What does God's heart look like for us as we consider how to go out into our community, into our neighborhoods, and into the world at large and to reveal this heart? But there is a particular application for the church within the walls. Remember, this is happening in Nehemiah 5 amongst the people of God.

Brothers oppressing brothers, as we see there. Our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers. Our children are as their children.

And yet this is happening in the midst of God's people. Paul the apostle says in Galatians chapter six, we are to do good to all men, but especially to those of the household of faith. Oppression and division in the church halts the work of the church.

It halts the work of the church. And so what I wanna do is just transition a little bit here. Having looked at Nehemiah 5, having looked at Luke chapter four and the work of our Savior Jesus Christ, in the light of the gospel, in the light of Christ, what does it look like to repair the breaches in the wall? What does it look like to be building and repairing the walls here in our church? And even the things which have been caused by oppression and by disunity, what does that look like for us in our day? Because friends, we need to understand that when God saves the people, when God redeems the people, He calls us to be a people, a nation, a community, a body.

The church is a place of holy unity in Christ. And this unity is a precious thing before God. How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity, as Psalm 133 says.

And yet we're also a wonderful diversity, aren't we? Thank God for that. Each of us comes with different gifts, different backgrounds, as we heard even this morning from Angel. And this is why in order for there to be unity in the body, there needs to be a sharing of our diversity.

Even a generous sharing. So the mature, sharing their wisdom with the young, with the immature. Those with gifts in one area, sharing of those gifts and talents with those that don't have gifting.

The wealthy and the haves, be able to share with those who have not. The word the scripture uses for what I'm describing here, what I'm speaking about here, is koinonia in the New Testament. It's sharing, it's fellowship.

We interpret it as sharing and fellowship. It's koinonia. It is what we see in Acts chapter 2. So 3,000 people are saved through Peter's preaching there in Acts chapter 2. And then what do they do? They start sharing.

They start sharing wildly. We might even think irresponsibly. But that's what we see.

It's the impact, the overflow of the gospel, of the community that has been established through the gospel. It's the voluntary selling of the believer's possessions and redistribution to the poor, specifically there. And it's also what we see, this koinonia is what's breaking down in Acts chapter 6. It's four chapters later.

To use chapters anyway. In Acts chapter 6, we see another outcry in the church. In Acts chapter 6, we hear the outcry of the Gentile widows who are poor and they're not receiving from the distribution.

Somehow they got overlooked, likely because there was division and disunity there. And the Jews are getting preference, the poor amongst the Jews, and the Gentiles are getting shut out. Well friends, the church can experience the broken down walls of disunity in various ways.

There may be racial disunity, Jew, Gentile, black, white, Asian, Hispanic. There may be maturity disunity, the strong and the weak, those whose consciences are bound in more particular ways than those who aren't. The strong and the weak.

There may be generational unity, the young not understanding the old and the old saying, hey, we don't get these youngsters. There may be preference disunity, homeschooling, Christian schooling, public schooling, dating this way, relationships that way, whatever, sports allegiances, yes, can cause disunity in the body of Christ. And you think, is that possible? Yes, sadly.

It is silly, but sadly. Well, one of the most common and harmful divisions in the church is economic disunity. It is the disunity that is between rich and poor.

And here's the thing. In our day and culture, the area of, this area of disunity, I think we can kind of overlook it. Not that we're unaware, but that maybe we're not as convinced of its seriousness and its wrongness.

I've had to think about that with myself because I think that there's some truth even in my own heart. Maybe not as recognizing the seriousness, the gravity of it. Because after all, it just seems like, really, aren't all of our real needs met? There's food, there's clothing, there's shelter for the most part, right? And certainly they're available, right? For the diligent and the resourceful, the, you know, those who pull their bootstraps up.

You know, we can think like that. We can think things like, well, you know, salvation is by grace, but wealth is by works. And anyway, it's more important to be rich in grace.

Well, that's true. But the gospel calls us to build unity through generosity, friends. Now, if you hear anything this morning, I want you to hear that.

The gospel calls us to build unity through generosity. Now, and this doesn't just mean money. This means our time, our talents, our resources, our attention.

The gospel calls us to build unity through generosity. And generosity, if we're gonna be generous, it requires a certain limiting of wealth. This is not in any way a diatribe against a wealth or riches.

Those are blessings from God. But there is a sense that you have to limit wealth because simply put, what you give, you cannot keep. Unless you end up limiting yourself to a degree.

Even the institution of the year Jubilee does that very practically because every 50 years, you have to give back that which you've accumulated. Give it back to those who had lost out. That's why it's a once-in-a-lifetime kind of a restart, if you will.

Now, for us, we who are in Christ, there's no Jubilee law for us. We are in the Jubilee, okay? But because we have received the benefits of redemption in Christ Jesus, we live under a different law. We live under the law of Christ, which is even more compelling and even more generous than the law of Moses and the law of the Old Testament.

You see, we don't give out of obligation to a law. We get to give because we're redeemed people of God, which is a much better motivation to give. Friends, God has redeemed His church.

He has redeemed His church and He calls us to freedom. These are key concepts for us to understand. And unity through generosity means rethinking certain ways that we go about living, how we handle our finances, how we give of our time or don't give, how we, what we focus on and concentrate on.

It means rethinking some of these things, thinking in the light of the gospel, looking to free up those who are held in bondage and captivity. And I have no doubt that many of you here have been thinking about this for some time. You have been because God's word has been stirring within your heart and the Holy Spirit has been doing a work in you.

How can I, how can I do the work that God has given? How do I, how do I give? How do I share? How do I get involved in other people's lives? And many of you are doing that in a marvelous, wonderful way. It's such a privilege to be a part of a church community that is doing this so actively. And just some, I think, could be potentially frustrated.

You know, how do I, how do I, this is a big church. How do I connect with those in the church? I don't know who the poor are and I don't know who needs help. Well, friends, I wanted to share this.

We, as your pastors, are thinking through this just like you are. We're asking, how does the church serve God's people in order to encourage and unleash generosity? We're working on ways and means for effective benevolence, sharing with one another, meeting the needs of the poor and the disadvantaged in our midst. So I just want to invite you to pray for us, talk to us, engage with us in this because we feel the burden of God's word to serve in this way and to serve you in this way.

Now, I want to conclude. It's kind of a long conclusion here, but I want to conclude with just a little, something that stirred my heart recently. I was talking to a friend of mine here in the church.

We work out together. You know who you are if you're in there? Monday mornings, pump iron. I know it doesn't show, but I promise you I do.

And I was talking to him about the origins of this church. We, Covenant Life Church, have become a church that is rich in grace. From humble beginnings, God has blessed this church.

And this guy has been in this church for 30, I don't know how many years. And he was just talking about what it looked like many, many years ago. And of course, I've only been here three years, and so I see what it looks like today.

But we are a church rich in grace. So the question came up, who are the needy in our midst? You know, because of our riches, our need is ironically more likely than need to appreciate and understand our neediness, which is why it's so appropriate that we just went through a series of being desperate, of needing to know our neediness. See, our problem is likely self-sufficiency and self-preservation.

But how do you confront this? Certainly not by going back and becoming poor again. That's not the solution. The point and goal is not poverty and desperation as an end.

Rather, it's the pursuit of the glory of God, isn't it? And this means loving God and loving others. Now, I don't have time to get into this, but I didn't mention this to the bookstore people. So if you all go in there and buy this book, they're gonna be angry with me, okay? So just a couple of you buy it.

But it's a great book. And in this book, Timothy Keller talks about the concept of shalom, peace, and what that looks like in the body of Christ. And one of the things that that key part of that is doing justice.

It's being a part of the fabric of the body of Christ in such a way as that we're intertwined with one another. We're knit into each other because we're so sharing with one another's needs and successes and failures and joys and sorrows that we've created a tight fabric, strong shalom. You see, all around us are those who are needy, friends, desperate for a mentor, someone to disciple them, someone to help them with their faith, with their knowledge, their family, their marriage, their finances, their addictions.

You see, all around us are these folks. And surely one of the best ways to fight self-sufficiency and self-preservation is to get into the lives of those who are needy and desperate. Not only because we're reminded of God's grace in our own lives, of which we will be, but also because in order to serve those who are in need, we recognize how needy we are for God's help in order to serve others.

Friends, are you engaged? With the poor and the needy? Are you who are rich, willing and engaged in making deposits and loans to the poor? Now again, not just only financially, but spiritually. Or are you getting richer while the poor are getting poorer around you? Are you too busy getting ahead, preserving your assets, protecting your nest or your nest egg? I know this can be in my heart. I know that this is kind of the normal trajectory unless the gospel takes a hold and just stirs me.

Friends, if this is true though, if we're not doing this over the course of time, we, we as a church will get poorer as a people of God. If we're not investing and caring for the poor, either materially or spiritually, we will be the poorer in grace and in glory. And that will show up in the poverty of power in our midst, the growing absence of the power of the gospel to convert our children and to work wonders of grace in our

midst.

If we are not living authentic gospel-inspired Christian lives, but lives of self-sufficient self-preservation, we will not grow and we will not represent the gospel rightly to others. Brothers and sisters, I do want to say this. I believe and know this, this is a generous church in so many ways, so grateful for that.

And I'm, I'm aware of so many of you and I can think of how many are exemplifying a Nehemiah-like spirit and lifestyle, just even right now, in so many wonderful ways of giving and of fellowship. But, but I'm also convinced, brethren, that we can and we need to grow. As a church, this is a key part of what it is to be distinct from the world, to be separate and to be holy and to not be like the rest of humanity, but to be called by God to be distinct.

I believe this is a key part of the wall that needs to be repaired. And I believe the Lord is calling each of us to consider how to do our part in building unity through generosity.

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