

Good morning! How are you doing? I'm so glad you guys are here with us. If this is your first time at The Village Church, I am not Matt Chandler. He's like two feet taller than I am. My name is Hunter Hall. I'm one of the pastors here at the church. I'm so excited to be here to open the Word of God together as a family and to see what he might want to speak to us about today.

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and take them. Turn to Nehemiah, chapter 5. Nehemiah, chapter 5, is where we will be for pretty much the entire day. If you don't have a Bible, there should be a black hardback one around you somewhere. Feel free to use that, and if you don't own a Bible, that's our gift to you. Take that home. It's yours.

We've been going through the book of Nehemiah here at the church, both in our weekend services as well as in our home groups. We're right in the middle of this series. It has been an incredible series for us to go through together. I know personally in my own life the Lord has been raising an awareness more and more of a lost and hurting world around me. He is growing within me greater compassion for the hurting and the struggling.

We saw even in the first week that our boy Nehemiah was a man who was marked by empathy. He was moved. He wept over the destruction of the walls. Then we saw just a few weeks ago in chapter 4 that opposition was introduced. It came from the outside. It came from a guy named Sanballat. Sanballat and his boy Tobiah came mocking the Jews. It wasn't just a poking fun at. They weren't just giving them noogies or anything like that. They had anger in their hearts toward the Israelites. They wanted to discourage them. They wanted them to stop the work. They wanted to bring them down.

Then we saw that mocking quickly shifted to an attack. I love the response of Nehemiah and the faithfulness of the Lord in this text, in chapter 4. Keep working, shovel in one hand, but hold spear in the other and defend where you need to defend. The Lord will fight for his people. Amen? I was reminded we have a King who never abandons us. Even though we have active enemies in this world still today who oppose the work of the gospel, who don't believe what we believe and every day are growing in more and more opposition to the name Jesus, our God is with us every step of the way.

So as we look here in Nehemiah, chapter 5, this morning, we're going to see this idea still continuing on: opposition, persecution, oppression. It's going to change forms a little bit, but it's still there. We have a big

work to do today. It's not just the amount of text we have to get through, although there's a lot there. It's this idea. Oppression, injustice...it's everywhere. It's worldwide. Every time we turn on the TV there are news stories about how these innocent people were murdered or these parents abandoned their children.

It's a weighty, sobering reality that we live in a world where the blades of injustice are sharpened every day. But hear me. Our God is a God of justice. He looks after his people. He takes care of his people. I love what Nehemiah 5 is going to speak to us about today. I pray and trust the Holy Spirit would do a work amongst us in this room this morning. Let me pray for us, and then we'll get started.

Father, I confess my words will be limited; my rhetoric will be inadequate to change hearts today. So I trust you, God, who is sovereign over all. I trust you in this room to do a work. Even right now, Spirit, would you begin stirring in the hearts and in the lives of your men and your women. Father, I know you are near to the brokenhearted, so I ask you would be near. We love you. In Jesus' name, amen.

Several years ago, my daughter wanted a little kitchenette set for her birthday, so my wife and I got online and researched. We found one we could afford at IKEA. I have a love/hate relationship with IKEA. I love it because you can basically furnish and decorate your entire house for like \$300, but I struggle with it because it takes like nine hours to set up a side table. Right? I went and got these boxes for this kitchenette set, got them home, and blocked out my entire evening to set this thing up.

I pull out all of the pieces of wood and the 15,000 screws, and I'm looking at the instruction booklet, and I'm trying to put together this little kitchen toy set. I'm going along. Everything is looking pretty good. Everything is all right. I go to put the top piece on, which is really what makes it a kitchen set. Before that it's just a shelf. This top piece has a sink and a little play stove. I go to put that piece on, and it doesn't fit, no matter which way I turn it, no matter how hard I press. I mean, I'm jumping on this thing trying to get it to fit, and it's just not happening.

At this point I have two options. One option would be I could just give it to my daughter as is, and maybe she won't realize it's not a kitchen set. "Oh, go play with that shelf." Or I can take it apart piece by piece, wood piece by wood piece, screw by screw, until I figure out what the problem is, fix the problem, and then rebuild it. I love my daughter. I don't want to give her a broken birthday gift. So that's what I did. I took apart this kitchen set, this shelf, until I figured out what was wrong.

I realized about halfway through I put on a board that was supposed to go *this* way, but I put it on *that* way. One mistake, one problem, and the rest of the project was ruined; it could never be what it was intended to be. In that moment of my frustration, several thoughts crossed my mind. First, "Praise the Lord that my salvation is not dependent upon how perfect I am." Amen? Because one mess-up, one issue, disqualifies

me from righteousness, but in Jesus Christ, our perfect Savior, our Redeemer, we have a righteousness that's not of our own but his righteousness. I praised the Lord in that moment.

Secondly, this thought of unity came into my mind. When there is division, when there is conflict, when there is a problem within a structure or a church or between two believers, when there's not unity, what is intended to be will never be because there's an issue that needs to be fixed. As I was thinking about where we're going today, this just kept coming up in my mind, this idea of unity, this idea of fixing what's wrong. We're going to see here in the first few verses there's a big problem going on inside the walls with the Israelites. Let's begin reading, beginning in verse 1 of Nehemiah 5.

**"Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers."** Let me paint a picture as to what's going on here. Just as things were starting to settle down from the outside threats, things *inside* the walls were starting to heat up. There was a big problem, a concern. These weren't just a few disgruntled members who were complaining about the color stone they were putting up. It wasn't a preference game. They weren't complaining about how hot it was or where their position was working on the wall. No, this is a legitimate distress call. A great outcry arose.

Notice their wives are mentioned here as well. "With their wives." Because the Israelites were so busy building the wall, they just didn't have time to handle all the business back at home, so the weight of the things on the farm and on their land were falling on their wives and their families. So you see the seriousness of this problem. It doesn't just affect the workers. This problem affects the entire clan of Israel: the wives, the families. It's a serious problem that's going on. So what are they crying out about? What are they in distress about? Let's keep reading in verse 2.

**"For there were those who said, 'With our sons and our daughters, we are many. So let us get grain, that we may eat and keep alive.' There were also those who said, 'We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine.' And there were those who said, 'We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards.'"**

You see in these few verses there are several things going on. They're hungry. They have these big families, and they are hungry. In this day and age, they ate what they grew. They're farmers. They eat what they grow on their farms. But because the men were away from their houses working on the wall in Jerusalem, they slipped into a famine, because they weren't producing enough crops. So these people are hungry. "Let us get grain so we can feed our families."

One way they had to get grain was they had to mortgage off their fields. That probably doesn't resonate too much with us in this room. Most of us in this room aren't relying on eating the food we grow in our

house. If you're hungry you go get a Baconator. Right? You don't have to grow your own food here. But this is what was taking place. There was a famine. They were hungry, but they had no money, so they mortgaged their fields off just to buy grain.

Not only that, they then had to borrow money to pay the tax on the fields they had just mortgaged off. So they're borrowing money to pay for these taxes they have to pay on the fields they no longer own. Do you see the problem there? They don't have food. They have to borrow money to eat. They can't afford to eat, so they mortgage their fields. They borrow the money just to try to pay for the fields. Just more and more debt accumulated. It's a problem. If that was all that was happening it would be bad. Right? But look at verse 5. It gets worse.

**"Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, 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 is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards."**

I mean, how bad is this? They're going, "Listen, we can't afford to eat, so we're selling our sons and daughters into slavery. We can't do anything about that, because we don't even own the land we had. Someone else does." Just downward spiral into more debt and more debt, more desperation, more desperation. These people are crying out. There is a big problem.

Perhaps the worst part about it is look at who it was against. Look at who was behind all of this. Verse 1:

**"Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers."**

Opposition, persecution, oppression...these things shouldn't have surprised the Israelites. Deuteronomy, chapter 28, verse 32, alerts the Israelites that their sons and daughters would be given to a foreign nation, a nation they did not know.

But it wasn't coming from the outside. It wasn't coming from the Sanballats. It was coming from within the household of Israel. Certain wealthy nobles and officials were oppressing and abusing and taking advantage of these impoverished Israelites. They were basically setting up and running these payday advance-type companies. Do you know what I'm talking about? Where they would lend them money and then charge an incredible amount of interest.

It would be like some of us in this room, members of the same church, loaning money to another brother or sister in this room and charging so much interest you basically own them as slaves. That's a problem. They were taking advantage of their brothers and their sisters, charging an incredible amount of interest. It wasn't just morally wrong. It was sinful. They were disobeying the Word of the Lord. Listen to a couple of

these texts. Deuteronomy, chapter 23, verse 19: **"You shall not charge interest on loans to your brother, interest on money, interest on food, interest on anything that is lent for interest."**

Then again in Leviticus, chapter 25, verses 35-37: **"If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit."**

At its very core, oppression leads to the exploitation of the weak and the vulnerable by the strong. Rather than walking in generosity toward their brothers, rather than walking in unity and helping them out and lending them a hand, these wealthy nobles and officials inside the walls were taking advantage of their brothers. I want you to hear me. If you're wealthy in this room, I'm not saying you're in sin. I'm not saying you're a bad person. Money is not the problem here. Money is not the issue.

What is the issue? The *love* of money. First Timothy 6:10 says, **"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils."** It was their love of money that was the problem. There is a holy way and an unholy way to handle your finances, on both sides of the coin. Rich or poor in this room, are you walking in a godly manner with what you've been given?

For the wealthy in this room, are you open-handed with what you have, giving generously, helping brothers and sisters out, or are you using your status to take advantage of those who don't have as much as you do? If maybe you don't have a ton of earthly possessions in this room, are you wise with what you *do* have, or are you taking your paycheck each week and going and blowing it on something silly?

A right and proper view of money will always lead to godliness, but an improper view always leads to idolatry, and that's what was taking place here. These guys were walking in the idols of power and pride and greed. They were taking advantage of their own people. As their brothers were becoming more and more impoverished, they were becoming wealthier and wealthier. It's a classic textbook example of the rich oppressing the poor. So you have God's chosen people oppressing God's chosen people who were doing God's work.

What do we do with that this morning? How do these verses transpire into our hearts? It's not enough just to go, "Oh man, poor Israelites. Shame on those wealthy guys. I'm glad we don't have to deal with that." To some degree, you're right. We're probably not walking through a famine in this room. No one in this room is probably selling their kids off into slavery. At least I hope not. But there are cries amongst us in this room today. There are some of us in this room who are crying out about certain things. We have a work to

do in here. Before we can look at oppression and injustice outside in our world, we have a work to do in this room.

My wife and I have been married nearly seven years now. About a month before we got married, she was in a car accident. It wasn't anything serious. She walked away from the accident. The car was totaled, but she was fine. She was just a little sore in her shoulder. The doctor just said, "That's whiplash. It'll go away. Here's some medicine." We got married. We went on our honeymoon. When we came back from our honeymoon, she noticed the pain was still there. It wasn't just still there in her shoulder; it was actually getting worse. It was starting to move into her arm.

Every day that passed, the pain got more and more intense. Every day that passed, it became more difficult for her to function. She started to have to walk around with her arm up near her chest. Now burning was introduced to her pain. Around the clock, 24 hours a day, incredible burning, incredible pain, and we had no answers. We would go see the doctor to see if maybe it was a sprain, and it wasn't. Or she'd go get adjusted by a chiropractor, and it didn't work. Every day the pain got worse and worse.

So our first year of marriage we didn't deal with, "Hey, you left your toothbrush out." I couldn't hug my wife. She was growing every day more and more in pain, yet more and more in desperation. Finally we went and saw a pain specialist, and he diagnosed her with a disease called RSD, Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy. My guess is if you're in this room and you either don't have RSD or don't know someone who has it, you've probably never heard of it. It's a very rare disease. Basically, what RSD is... During the healing process of something, like an accident, a sprained ankle, a surgery, the brain stops recognizing that part of the body as existing.

For my wife, the wreck wasn't the problem. As her body was healing from the pain in her shoulder, the brain stopped sending signals to her shoulder and arm, so her arm started to change colors. It's a horrible disease. It's chronic, nonstop pain, around the clock. On the little pain scale, I want to say childbirth is around a 25 or 30. This is like a 42. It's a horrible disease. In fact, they call it the "suicide disease," because so many people have it and don't know about it. They don't know this is what's going on, so they just think, "If I just take my life I'll be out of this pain."

There was one part of my wife's body, her brain, that was inflicting pain on another part of her body. We researched, and we asked the Lord to heal. We finally found this treatment called a spinal cord stimulator. There's no cure for RSD; there's just pain management. She got this little device that was implanted into her hip with leads that ran up her spine. She's kind of a bionic woman, actually. She would charge once a month. It was just crazy.

Through childbirth of our son, this disease spread to her other arm. So she got a remote control and moved the current over to her other arm. This device didn't take the pain away; it just masked the pain. It was basically like her hands were asleep always, that tingling feeling. She couldn't feel anything. She was numb to all touches, hot or cold. She couldn't feel anything. She just resolved that's how she would live for the rest of her life.

Just like internally something was wrong in her body, there are some of us in this room today who are inflicting pain on other brothers or sisters in this room, and it needs to stop. There are some husbands in this room who are abusing their wives and their families. You are taking advantage of the spiritual authority you have over your home in Christ. You're speaking harshly with your wife. You are exasperating your children. You might not be physically abusing them, but emotionally and verbally you are.

Hear me. It needs to stop. You need to repent. Lead them in a godly way. Don't think that just because you have a sweet gig that brings home a lot of bacon you're leading your families. Some of you need to repent for making your jobs more important than your families. I could speak the same to some wives in here. You might just label your aggression as a type of personality, but hear me. Your words to your husbands and your kids sting. You need to repent. There's too much division in our homes in this church. So men, step up and be a man.

Some of you in this room own your own business, and you might employ other members of our church in that business. In the way you treat them, you are abusing your power over them as their boss and oppressing them, maybe in the way you pay them unfairly, or the sinful expectations you put on them to advance your own business. Hear me. You need to repent. Don't act like an unbeliever would act in the business world. We are to walk uprightly with integrity, not just in this room, but in your jobs, in your homes.

There are some of you in this room maybe who have been walking with the Lord a long time. Over the years gradually you've grown more arrogant in your step. There's too much pride in your swag. Hear me. You need to repent from your elitist disposition, because you're looking at people who maybe don't know as much as you, your younger brothers who may not be as good as you, and that creates an us/them mentality. You need to repent. We're all sinners who need a Savior. No one is better than another person in this room.

I'm not saying every single man or woman or business owner or mature believer in this room is doing this. I can look around the room and see godly examples of men leading their families and wives loving their families and business owners who handle their business right and godly. I'm not saying that's everybody, but if it's you in this room, you need to humble yourself at the foot of the cross today and repent.

In Philippians, chapter 1, verse 27, Paul writes these words: **"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel..."**

The gospel unites all of us...old, young, criminals, murderers, enemies. We are united under the banner of the gospel. The cross of Christ is the strongest bond between two believers. It's stronger than any adhesive. Until we become a people who are marked by unity inside these walls, we won't have on the right prescription lenses to see the hurt and the oppression going on outside the walls. Unity *inside* the walls strengthens the work *outside* the walls.

A true response to injustice in the world is right and only right when we are a people standing side by side, striving for unity in the faith of the gospel. So pray for unity. Fight for unity. Strive for unity, church. We must put to death division amongst us. If you're in sin, repent. Think of a church split. Some of you may have even been involved with a church split in your past.

Did that church split because of an outside, external attack? No. It happened inside. Sin that wasn't dealt with between two members, abuse, oppression... It all happened from the inside. Hear me. This division will not just stop the work of ministry; it will cripple us. We have to fight for unity, church. The oppression in this room needs to stop.

Two quick things. If you are the offender in this room, the one who is oppressing, know that grace abounds. In Christ, God has lavished grace upon grace upon grace. So don't be too proud to confess and repent where you're wrong. Then also, if you're the one who is being oppressed, who is hurting, who is in pain, God hears your cries. This word is for us in this room. Are we listening to those cries? It doesn't have to be this way. Let's look at what our boy Nehemiah does in response to all of this, starting in verse 6 of Nehemiah 5.

**"I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words. I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. 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!' They were silent and could not find a word to say.**

**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.'**

**Then they said, '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 as 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' and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised."**

Right off the bat in these verses we get an even greater glimpse into the character of Nehemiah. He sets a great example for us in this room today, very much a practical, step-by-step response to oppression, if you will. We see it right in the beginning from verse 1. "I was angry when I heard their outcries." Nehemiah was a man who listened to the voice of the people. He listened to the cries of those around him. He didn't just post a suggestion box and then disregard all of the comments. No, he heard their cries. He listened. Just as we have a God in heaven who hears us, Nehemiah heard the cries of the people.

My question to us this morning is...*Are you listening to the cries around you?* Are your ears attentive to the voices of the cries? In this room, at your house, at your job, on the way to your job, on the way to the restaurant, are you so walking with intentionality that you are noticing the cries of the oppressed around you? It's everywhere. If you do, and if you *are* listening to those cries, how is it affecting you? We see how it affected Nehemiah, right? "I was very angry when I heard these cries." He was angry. He wasn't just a little bit agitated. He was angry, very angry.

In Scripture we see two kinds of anger. Most of the time when we think of the word *anger* or *angry* we think sin. Right? And that's absolutely true. In Psalm 37 there's a call to refrain from anger. Jesus, in chapter 5 of Matthew, equates anger in our hearts to murder. I think for most of us we probably walk too much in this type of anger. Our spouse does something we don't like, or our Internet connection speed isn't as fast as we want it to be. We get angry. This anger is birthed out of an idolatrous heart. You are not getting what you deserve.

There's also another type of anger we see in Scripture. It's a righteous anger. Paul, in Ephesians, chapter 5, says, "Be angry and do not sin." Somehow there's a way to be angry yet not be in sin. We see it in Mark, chapter 3, when Jesus is with the Pharisees, and they're trying to catch him breaking one of their laws. He looks at them with anger. It's wrong. They were in sin. When Jesus went to the temple and drove out the money changers because the temple was not being regarded as a house of prayer, he drove them out in anger. There's a righteous anger here.

That's what Nehemiah is walking in. That's what he is experiencing. It's an appropriate response to the injustices and iniquities in the world. We *should* feel something bubble up within us when we see oppression, when we hear stories of prostitution or sex trafficking or poverty. That *should* push our buttons, because what is supposed to be, isn't. Something is broken. Something is fractured. That should move us to a righteous anger.

Notice Nehemiah didn't get angry and then just start going postal on those guys. He didn't turn into The Hulk, flipping over chariots and busting down walls. He listened, and then he took counsel. Verse 7: "**I took counsel with myself...**" In his anger he didn't just blow up to a reactionary, emotive response. He took counsel first. That's a good word for us today. He pondered. He stopped. He let the emotion of it that was wrong get out of his system so he could appropriately, in anger, respond and act to the injustices. First he had to take counsel. Do we walk in that enough, church? Or are we just reacting to things? Before we even fully get the story, are we just reacting to it? It's a good word for us. Take counsel.

Then you notice what he does. "**I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials.**" He listened, he took counsel, and then he acted. He confronted the problem. He went straight to the source and confronted the sin. Oftentimes, I'll receive emails or phone calls from men and women in the church who say they've been sinned against by another man or woman in our church, and my first question is always, "Have you gone to that brother? Have you gone to that sister and told them?"

I don't do that because I don't want to deal with the problem. I do that because Scripture directs me to do that. Matthew, chapter 18, is probably one of the most horrifying texts in Scripture for those who don't like confrontation. What are we called to do? Jesus says, "If your brother sins against you, go to him and tell him his fault. If he listens, you've won a brother." Your first step, if someone sins against you, is not to go gossip about them, to slander their name. Don't jump on Twitter and post an aggressive response. You go to that brother, you go to that sister, and confront them on the sin.

We have to be careful with this, because so easily it can turn into a preference game, where someone does something you don't necessarily like, so you think you need to go to them and tell them they're wrong. Someone in your home group doesn't like the cookies you've made for home group. That doesn't mean you go to that person and tell them they're wrong. It may just mean you made nasty cookies. It's not a preference game; it's a sin issue. Now if a brother says his favorite TV show is *The Bachelor*, you confront that brother. He needs to repent. I'm joking...sort of. No, this is what Nehemiah does. He listened to their cries, he took counsel, and then he confronted.

Then I love what he did next. Verse 10. Let's look at this. **"Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest."** Do you see what he did? He included himself in the charges. He admitted where he was wrong. I don't think he was guilty to the extent these other guys were, but there was something he was doing that was not right, so he admitted where he was wrong. It's such a convicting word for me. I don't want to do that. My pride wants to step in. No one likes to admit they're wrong, but it's a good word from a great leader.

Humble yourself. Don't walk around with your fingers pointed at everyone else, pointing out the sin in everyone else. Don't go walking around blowing your justice whistle, all the while the plank in your eye continues to grow more and more every day. Humble yourself. Admit where you're wrong. Nehemiah was a man who listened to the cries, he took counsel with himself, he confronted directly, and then he admitted where he was wrong.

Then look at verse 12 one more time. **"Then they said, 'We will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say.'"** It worked. Do you see that? They listened. They heard. At first they were silent. They didn't have a word to say. It was like deer in headlights. But they said, "Okay, you're right. We will give them back everything." It is such a great testimony of the Lord's healing work in putting an end to oppression, using Nehemiah, using you and me, walking in faithfulness to his people.

This past week, as I've been chewing on this idea of oppression and thinking about all of the injustices in the world, my heart was just heavy. It was just weighty. Then thinking about how even some of you in here today are being oppressed by a brother or a sister or a coworker or a spouse or a friend. I was thinking about Nehemiah's example in all of this and asking the Lord to grow a greater awareness of these things through that.

Then the Lord convicted me, because how much greater is Christ's example to us? How much greater, how much better, does he hear our cries when we call out to him? How much better does he walk in wisdom? He is the exact definition of wisdom. You want to talk about humility; Jesus humbled himself to be obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Jesus enters into the pains of the oppressed. He hears our cries.

So going back to this story, my wife had this disease. Again, she was resolved she was going to live with it. She fully believed the Lord would heal her, just in heaven. She believed he would heal her in heaven. But we never stopped asking for the Lord to intervene and to fix what was wrong and to heal. We had men and women, friends and family members, praying with us and over us and for us for five years. Five years.

Then two years ago on Memorial Day in our home, surrounded by our friends on an unassuming night, a friend of ours started praying, and the Lord healed her. In an instant he shut off her stimulator. No more pain. No more loss of feeling. She couldn't even hold a cube of ice because it was so cold. Christ entered into the pain and set her free.

Church, hear me. Christ hears the cries of the oppressed today in this room. Isaiah, chapter 53, says Jesus was bruised. He was beaten. He was afflicted. He was pierced. Then in verse 7 it says he himself was oppressed. Jesus knows the pain and the cries of the oppressed. As he's standing before Pilate in Matthew, chapter 27, a crown of thorns smashed on his head... He has been beaten senseless. Jesus, an innocent man, perfect, without sin, was charged as a guilty man. He went to the cross as a criminal and a lawbreaker. Even in his humiliation, justice was denied our Savior.

He hears the cries of the oppressed. He knows the calling of the injustices of the world. He is our great example. As you encounter oppression inside these walls and outside, listen to the cries all around. Be a person who takes these things, oppression and injustice, seriously, and when you're able, step in and help. Enter into the work. Financially, if you're able, give to ministries. Give to efforts that seek to put an end to poverty or prostitution or sex trafficking.

We just heard about Pastor Isaac's work in Kenya, Rift Valley Fellowship. One of their main ministries is to minister to the women who were born into prostitution. They feed them every night, and they're seeing the Lord do a mighty work. But until we walk in unity in here, all that work outside is just social work. Until we are people who have been changed by the power of the gospel, it'll be social work. When we *are* changed, when we *are* walking in unity, it then becomes a kingdom work. The Lord is at work in our world. He's doing mighty things. He is healing. He is setting free. Oh, may we be a people who love the unlovable, who fight for those who cannot defend themselves.

Here's what I want to do as we close out. Here in a minute I'm going to pray, and then I want to give you an opportunity to make things right. I want to give you an opportunity to put to death division or the oppression or the abuse. Maybe a husband in this room needs to go to their wife or to their kids, or a boss needs to go to their employee, and make things right. You have freedom to do that, however you need to do that. If you need to go into the halls, if you need to go to the prayer room, you have freedom to do that.

Maybe some of you need to just gather where you're at and pray for the Lord to heal, to intervene, and to stop the oppression. Maybe you need to pray and ask him to raise a greater awareness of what's going on in the world. Maybe after this service you go talk to Pastor Isaac about what the Lord is doing, and maybe you need to go on a trip. Maybe you need to go over there and see it. Maybe you need to join that work. I don't know how it's going to look in here, but I'm just trusting the Lord's movement and his direction in

this. I'll pray, we'll respond, and then I'll come back up and we will take Communion together as a family.  
Let me pray.

Father, thank you for our time together this morning. God, I ask you would be near to the brokenhearted right now. Spirit, would you stir within us right now? For the oppressor in this room, God, for the offender in this room, God, I pray you would remind them that grace abounds, that grace has been extended to them and there is nothing they can do to be outside the reach of that grace in Jesus Christ. Father, give us great boldness this morning, yet much humility. We trust you, and we thank you for the cross. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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