

Michael Bleecker, come here, brother. Yeah, I want you over here now, man. I didn't want you back there. I had him back there leading worship earlier at the 11:00. I love you. Thank you, man. Guys, praise be the name of the Lord for our brother and this team. The leprechauns are here today. On this special day, the little people are leading.

Big Jared, where are you, brother? Put your Bible down. Jared, stand up real quick. Come on, Jared. You're in this service. You're going to get called out. This is our twin brother right there. Thank you, Jared. We love you. I love you, man. I'm so thankful for Michael, so encouraged by the ministry God has given him and the work the Lord has really planted in his heart to be about here at The Village.

It's good to see you tonight. It's really good to see you, and you need to hear this. I can say it over and over again on behalf of the leaders, of the elders, of the church, of the pastors, of your home group leaders, but I want you to hear from me again that I love you. I'm always eager for the opportunity when the Lord stirs in my heart to be among you and preach.

In fact, when we were coming to this passage, as we looked at the Nehemiah study, and we were thinking through and praying through... In the 30-plus years the Lord has enabled me to be about gospel ministry, making disciples and preaching, I've always loved the opportunity and wanted to be committed to allowing younger guys, guys who were called and set apart by the Lord, to preach in my stead at times. When there was opportunity, I wanted to share. I wanted to give that opportunity. I love that. I like that rhythm.

Yet on this night, for this day, looking at this passage, as heavy as this was and as much as the Lord had stirred in my heart about this particular word and this thing I know is in the heart of God, fighting injustice and fighting sin within our own hearts and the hearts within the community... God stirred in my own heart as we thought about and think about being the city of God within the city of Dallas and being faithful to that call to build the wall, that is, being enabled by the Holy Spirit day by day to seeing these bricks being placed in the wall, which, for us today, translates into souls being literally transformed by the gospel.

I wanted and was stirred by the Lord to stand in this place today. It's a heavy word. It's always a liberating word, because wherever the gospel is there's liberation. Amen? I'm thankful for that. But this is a hard word. It's a heavy word, because it really opens our eyes and keeps us open to what is really happening, possibly within our own hearts, but I know at least within the city God has called us to minister in.

Let me pray for you, let me pray for my own heart, and let's open up our hearts to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Let's do this. Let's gather up in groups of two or three, and we're going to pray together. We're just going to call upon the Lord to move mightily. I never want us to blow through a Sunday. I know many of you have been on spring break. Some of you are going back. I love the fact that my nephew is here. He plays baseball over at DBU. I have another nephew here tonight, and my daughter who's 23 is here tonight. I love that my family is in the church I get to pastor. I just love that. I'm so thankful.

I know many of you are going back after spring break. It's going to be a hard thing to think about that transition back, but I want to ask the Lord to get your hearts on him and to be very receptive to this word tonight and to ask the Lord to move in you in ways I cannot prompt and cannot initiate. So let's ask for the Lord to move among us. All right? Let's do that. Groups of two or three real quick and pray. Let's call upon the Lord to move in our midst.

Father, unite our hearts to fear your name. I pray that as a result of the Holy Spirit being present in us, among us, through the preached Word, in the songs that are being sung tonight, in the intercession that is being made, in the confession of sin and repentance tonight, in just the joyful reception of your Word, I pray you would be glorified much. I just pray Christ would be exalted.

I pray you, O God, by the work of your Holy Spirit would continue to do such a transforming, Christ-conforming work in us that enables us to continue to see the plight of the city, our call to rebuild this city, to be the city of God within the city of Dallas, and to be faithful, empowered by your Holy Spirit to that end of seeing your kingdom come on the earth as well as it is in heaven.

I praise you, bless you, and I thank you that you ahead of time have already ordained this night to be a night where you'll heal, where you'll save, where you will transform, where you will encourage, where you will lift up, where you will call out. Lord, for some there will be given a new vision of ministry, for others a renewed vision. Where we've gotten fat, "gluttoning" ourselves on being comfortable in the religious Dallas scene, I pray you would make us desperate again. I pray for the really weary, that you would lift them up, really lift them up. In Jesus' name, amen.

We're going to jump into Nehemiah, chapter 5, verse 1. Remember, cities are God's strategic plan for reaching the world. He loves cities. He has a strategy for cities. We are a very large city, the city of Dallas. The thing I love about this study, as we begin to embark on this study of Nehemiah, is it's about building the kingdom of God. Here in the Old Testament it's about rebuilding this urban center that had fallen apart. It had fallen to disrepair, was absolutely obliterated. Jerusalem, that is. God was calling out a normal

guy, Nehemiah, to leave where he was in captivity and go over to Jerusalem and help rebuild this urban center. It's an incredible call, and it's a crazy work God has called him to.

He has also given him this missional call on his life, not only to rebuild the city, but rebuilding the city was also rebuilding the community of God that had fallen in disrepair. In other words, this is, if you will, the Old Testament church that had fallen in disrepair. God was gathering it back together, giving them their mission again, and rebuilding that old community, that community of God. Jerusalem is so important. I want you to hear this. I think we talked about this before, but I want you to hear this again.

Jerusalem is so important to the scheme of things when it comes to God's economy in this world. God literally, in the Old Testament, set apart Jerusalem to be a literal representation of his glory on the earth. He raised up that city, called that city apart, and was using Jerusalem to reveal to the world how marvelous and wonderful he is. That city was to be a model city of all of the other cities on the face of the earth. Do you remember that? Maybe not.

That city was set apart by God. It's a picture of what John the Revelator writes in Revelation, chapter 21, where he talks about how he had this vision God gave him of a new heaven and a new earth, and a new what coming out of the new heaven and the new earth coming down? Come on. The new city, the New Jerusalem, coming down. It's a picture of what the new city of God in the eschaton will look like and be like, this city of Jerusalem, this new city.

Until that time, in these days, the city of Jerusalem was to be a commercial, literally, of God's reign and rule and beauty and wonder and majesty on the earth unlike any other city. It had fallen in disrepair. God was rebuilding it through this dude named Nehemiah and through others who were called out by God, delivered from captivity, sent back over to Jerusalem. They were literally rebuilding the temple and the city and the community of God. It is a major work. We've been there for the last three or four weeks. It's an unbelievable work.

Now hear this. We now are the city of God. I've said it. I'll say it again. I keep driving it. We who are in Christ Jesus are the gathered church in Christ and the scattered church. Wherever you are, wherever I go, wherever the Lord sends us, we are the gathered and then the scattered church of Jesus Christ who are now the representatives of Christ's reign on the earth. That's how huge this is, and that's how significant Christ's work is in you. Amen? Are you with me? It's huge.

This work God has called us about, this rebuilding these cities? It's not just going into an urban context and just doing some good things. That is a part of it. What we are doing now is serving as Christ's representation in this city that is broken, that has the same kind of challenges and injustices and greed and

slavery like we find Nehemiah dealing with. What can halt this work of God in places like this doesn't just come from opposition on the outside.

This is why the Lord stirred in my heart and bothered me to the point of really having to preach this, because God had to confront some things in my own heart and in The Village's life and in the life of this little campus right here before we move off track and don't even know it. We have the opportunity to really look at the challenges and the injustices and the greed and the things that are happening not just outside of our church... Which, by the way, in this city, it's huge.

My son Hill Hardin, who's in the seventh grade now at Forest Meadow Junior High right down the road over here... If you remember at prayer meeting back in November we talked about how we buried one of his friends, Deaudray, who was a precious boy, a seventh-grade kid who got wrapped up in a gang. He was messing around in Southwest Dallas and was shot and killed at 2:00 a.m. We buried that young man.

Let me tell you something. The war that is raging is not just over in Iraq, over in Afghanistan, over in Israel, over in some other place of the world. There *are* wars that are raging, but there are wars raging here. Our streets are war. Hello! It is unbelievable. I'm driving Chris White home (he's a young man who's in school with Hill as well, runs track with Hill), picking him up on a Tuesday and driving him home just a month ago, and Chris starts telling me about a girl over at another junior high in that area of Dallas, how she had been molested and raped by her uncle and became pregnant and then gave birth.

This is the city we're living in. This is the city I was born and raised in. We have oppression right underneath our noses throughout this city. You know it, and I know it. I just read that Dallas is one of the most dangerous places to live. When I think of dangerous, I think of Philadelphia. When I think of dangerous, I think of parts of New York City. I'm not trying to knock those cities. I'm really not. When I think of dangerous, I think of other cities. I don't necessarily think of Dallas, but it's said to be one of the most dangerous cities.

In fact, we were just voted as one of the top five cities that led the nation in domestic violence: wife abuse, woman abuse, spousal abuse, and child abuse. Guys, the oppression that is here... We have the opportunity to either see just how horrible things are (I just continue to pray God would open up our eyes), or we have the opportunity to see God has sent you here, that God has left you here, placed you here, sovereignly sent you to this city for this season, living in different places of the city, East Dallas, North Dallas, West Dallas, South Dallas.

I don't know where it is, but wherever you are, he has sent you here as a sovereign-designed mission from him to be his representation for the sake of the gospel in this city and to be able to be sovereignly used of

God to fight oppression, to uncover what is wrong in this city, to speak against it, and then to let the gospel come to bear on those things. Amen? That's what we're doing.

So Nehemiah, chapter 5, verse 1. Here we are. **"Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers."** You have to bear with me, because we're just going to run through this. All right? So hang in there tonight. He says there was a great outcry. This word *outcry*, this Hebraic phrase that's used throughout the corpus of Scripture, is literally translated like a 9-1-1 cry of somebody's heart when they're in a desperate situation.

It usually indicates there is the absence of righteousness or that there is judgment pending. In this case, there is the absence of righteousness. It's the same phrase used when the Old Testament church, the people of God, God's community, were in bondage in Egypt and there was this great crying out. It's also used when Moses was on Mount Sinai and the people are running from the very freedom God had granted them, and Moses is found to be crying out. It's David in his despair, crying out to God.

Have you ever just cried out? Let me tell you, man. Every time you cry out, there is a response from the God of the heavens. That's why I like to gather in small groups and call us to cry out. That's why I love elder-led prayer, to cry out. This was a crying out. It was the 9-1-1 call from a heart saying, "I can't take this anymore." Their circumstances were so devastating they could not take it. It's unbelievable. By the way, these were babies' mamas crying out. Usually it was the men. This was so desperate, in this culture, where you had the women coming to the gate of the city crying out. That's how desperate they are.

He goes on in verse 2, and we just get an insight. I want you to feel this, church. Do you hear me? I know some of you are tired, you're worn out, but I want us to feel this. I want us to hear this. I've been carrying this for the last month, so I get it, where I am down the road a little bit from where you are in terms of feeling this. Some of us have been there. You walk well in this. But tonight I'm asking the Lord to expedite this sense of these people's desperation in your own hearts. I want you to see it. I want you to feel it. I want you to really hear this.

"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.'" In other words, this is an overpopulated center. Usually in the Old Testament, and even today, there are times where famine occurs because of discipline, but in this case famine occurred because there was overpopulation. These people were busy building the wall of God, the temple of God, the new Jerusalem, the city of God. They were rebuilding this urban center, obeying the Lord in this, and because of that, they had left many of their jobs in obedience to honor the Lord, and what they came against in their obedience was a famine, this incredible famine.

He goes on in verse 3: **"There were also those who said, 'We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine.'"** Do you see this? These are people who are selling their homes, selling their fields, selling their businesses, so they may have food to be able to provide for their families. They are giving these things up, selling them to these nobles, to other brothers within the community of God.

These aren't just people who are buying these things and taking these things from these who are impoverished and struggling and wrestling. These aren't men and women *outside* of the kingdom of God. These are men and women *inside* the kingdom of God who are exploiting those who are in a very desperate way. Do you hear what I'm saying? Do you get the picture?

It goes on and says in verse 4, **"And there were those who said, 'We have borrowed money for the king's tax on our fields and our vineyards.'"** In other words, now they're having to pay tax. Not only are they being exploited by this exorbitant amount of interest charged on their loans... They're just being ripped off. Now they're being taxed. I think about what the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 13:3, and I pray we could continue to be this kind of people. He says, **"Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body."**

Even though we may not feel this kind of desperation, we may not be that destitute, there are brothers and sisters around the world who are obeying the call of God on their lives, and it is costing them dearly. There are brothers and sisters in this city who are obeying the Lord's voice, and it is costing them dearly. You may not necessarily be facing that. Some of you are. But many are outside of our scope sometimes of sight, and they are struggling. The writer says, the Spirit of God says, "I want you to feel what they feel, be where they are."

He goes on, and this is really the horror of chapter 5. Verse 5: **"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..."** When I was reading through this in my study, this is where I just had to get up and walk. **"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."**

The travesty of this story, this reality, that is happening here among God's people is not just the famine, that's desperate, and it's not just the taxation, which is crazy. It's not the exploitation only of unbelievable charge of interest. Now we have... And this goes outside the realm of indentured servitude that we studied. This goes outside of what is even normal or right or godly.

Now you have those who are so full of greed they are now buying and taking the sons and daughters of their own brothers and sisters into their homes and not helping them, but using them as slaves to pay off the debt of their own brothers and sisters' parents. They're not letting these kids go after five or six years. They're keeping them. They're not honoring the Year of Jubilee. They're not honoring the call of God on their lives to bring them into their home and not use them as slaves. They're bringing them in and using them as slaves.

In fact, God made this very clear. Look at this. Deuteronomy 23:19: **"You shall not charge interest on loans to your brother, interest on money, interest on food, interest on anything that is lent for interest."** In other words, what good is it going to do a brother who is in need if you loan him money...? I'm talking about a righteous brother. I'm talking about a brother who is pursuing the Lord. I'm talking about our brothers here. What good is it going to do a brother who is struggling in debt if you say, "Hey, I'm going to loan you \$500. By the way, I'm going to charge you 50 percent interest"? That's one little example.

Leviticus 25 says, **"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."**

In other words, they are seizing upon their very brothers' desperate estate to satisfy their own greed. Then he goes on and writes in Leviticus 25:38, "Likewise the Lord warns the people of Israel, 'These are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt. I have delivered them. They shall not be sold as slaves. Even if your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave. He shall be with you as a hired servant and as a sojourner. You bring him in like a brother.'"

The great outcry of these people is the cry of those who are saying, "Our brothers and sisters just don't see it." Hear me when I say this. Please hear this. Here was an incredible opportunity for these brothers and sisters in Jerusalem to say, "I see the providence of God at work. While he has given me plenty, while he has given me much, while he has afforded me blessing, while I am just overflowing to the nth degree with blessing..."

God has prospered my hand. He has placed cash in the bank. He has given me a home. He has provided me a vehicle. God has done these things, and he has done these things in a season where there are many of our brothers and sisters who are in want. The reason God has sovereignly placed me here is to provide a point of blessing for my brothers and my sisters who are struggling." In this case, these men and these

women in the family of God were exploiting their brothers and sisters' need, abusing them. That was the great outcry.

I want our ministry to continue to be about justice. Don't you? Hello! I mean, I continue to ask the Lord to enable this work, this campus, this church, The Village Church, to continue to be about justice. Justice is one of those many attributes that rests in the heart of God. God is a God who's just. He is a God who fights against injustice. He is a God who is absolutely, totally, perfectly just.

Now, praise the Lord, he is also absolutely perfectly compassionate, perfectly full of grace. His perfect justice met with his perfect compassion and love in the person of Jesus Christ on the cross so you and I could be delivered from what we did and do deserve for sinning against a perfect, awesome, holy God. God has done this thing of satisfying his justice by his grace on the cross. Amen? That's why it gets me so worked up when we can come in at times... My own heart can come in here so frivolously. You know, just kind of walk in, "Hey, what's up?"

I love loving each other in here, but when there is very little intensity about understanding Christ has saved us, and from what he has saved us, and to whom he has saved us, and that the result of that is praise and worship... When we are so lax in that, when I am so lax in that, it just reveals that my heart has gotten fat on being comfortable in living in this city. That's me I'm talking about. This is an outcry of justice. When I was sitting around thinking about this day, the Lord just asked me, "Ask them, 'What are the outcries of us here?'"

It's one thing to consider Israel and our people and our brothers and sisters in those days, to really consider, "Oh my goodness, I can't believe they were doing that," but what are the little things happening right here among us? Let me tell you. The work of God came to a halt in chapter 5. This establishing the work, rebuilding the kingdom, doing this work of the gospel even there in the Old Testament, came to a halt because of oppression that became a cancer in the life of the community of God.

The question is (and I just want to use the phrase from the text)... *What are the great outcries on this campus?* What are the great outcries in your own life, really? What are the great outcries in your home group? Please hear this. I'm talking to *you*. This isn't just going out on podcast. We're talking to one another. We're encouraging one another in this. What are the potential areas of injustice and disunity here among us? What's happening even here? What about in your own heart?

When I think about what the Lord is doing here... He's building, slowly but surely, a multiethnic church. I want it to be...good night. I just want more of the nations represented right here. Don't you? Come on, church. I just want to see more of that. The Lord is doing that slowly and surely right here on this campus.

We're becoming more of a multiethnic church, a multigenerational church. I love that the Lord has brought us some old heads, some old gray heads, some bald heads, some old people. I love that.

I'm thankful the Lord has left some folks here from the Northway days. I'm so thankful for that. I'm thankful for the fact that we're becoming a multigenerational church. I'm thankful we're becoming a multi-socioeconomic church. Not everybody is in the same category. Right? I just love that. Not everybody looks like you. As I think about oppression, I wonder... In what ways right now are the privileged among us exploiting the less privileged here?

I wonder how we might be using one another, what the Lord might be saying to my *own* heart. I think about generational oppression that might spring up here, and we don't even know it, or an oppression against those who are single, an oppression against those who are married. One of the things I told the crowd this morning was I think there are some of our singles... We're 55-plus percent single on this campus between the ages of 22 and 29. That's unbelievable. I love it.

I think there are times there is an oppression, where parents don't understand when they are... (This made our parents so excited. They were so encouraged to hear this this morning.) When at times we oppress even our single brethren. I want to have a high, godly view of marriage. I do. I want us to have that. I want us to honor that. I want us to see marriage as a picture of the gospel. But marriage is not the end-all. Marriage is not your savior. Marriage is not your ultimate hope.

I think there are times where we are oppressing one another even with marriage, pushing one another as parents, going, "Why aren't you married? Where's that man? Where's that woman? Where's that wife?" It just brings me to a point, not of boiling necessarily, but just of frustration. Then I think about those on the other side. There are multiple forms of oppression that might be present. I'm just asking the Lord.

I think about this city that is so oppressive when it comes to image casting. There are so many \$30,000 millionaires here. Do you know what I'm saying? Everybody has a lot. Everybody has to drive the right thing, look the right way, dress the right way. That can become oppressive, and you can begin to build this image in the sense of trying to say, "This is how I want you to receive me." It creates a false identity about who you are in Jesus Christ. You spend your energies spending your will trying to create this image so you can be accepted.

Let's die to that. Amen? Let's just stinkin' die to that. That's why Paul said, "Let's put to death these deeds of the flesh, these attitudes in our hearts of greed. Let's put these things to death, these covetous deeds in our hearts." I think about that single girl who could come to our church, who comes, like all of us, out of

the world, who is living a life outside of Christ, living with her boyfriend and playing the game of anything goes, where she's having sex with her boyfriend.

Then the Lord brings the gospel to her heart, she's saved, and she starts hanging out here, coming here. She gets involved in a home group, and some dude who calls himself a Christian exploits her, this girl who is coming to a place where she has found liberty in Christ Jesus, a place where there is to be an example of what it means to be the city of God within the city of Dallas, not mirroring the world, and she is exploited by a guy who claims to love Jesus. And vice versa. That happens on both sides, I'm sure.

Those are the things that are the great outcries among us. I wonder what else. I wonder about the sons who are being oppressed by fathers, and I wonder about parents who are being oppressed by children, and I wonder about husbands who are being oppressed by wives and wives by husbands, neighbors and friends. I want us to fight against that. I want you to get it. I want you to hear this.

Here's what Nehemiah's response is. Chapter 5, verse 6: **"I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words."** Getting angry over righteous things, over the right things, is okay. Eight hundred times the Bible talks about how God gets angry. He's slow to anger, he's not quick to anger, but he will demonstrate his anger. He is a just God. I am so thankful he is slow in that, but anger is a response of a righteous heart when it's done with a righteous motive, demonstrated and led by the work of the Holy Spirit in you.

In fact, there ought to be times before the Lord, because anger, as it comes from the Lord, is a righteous reflection of the heart of God. It ought to concern us when we see oppression and when there is *not* a sense of anger in our hearts. It ought to concern us. Now as Paul says, "Be angry, yet do not sin." There are things we get angry about that are sinful. /do. There are things all of us respond to in anger, and it's an unrighteous anger.

If that's how we respond, let's repent. If it's unrighteous anger and indignation and pride that well up from the flesh, let's be quick to repent. When I'm driving on these highways in the city of Dallas, I have to be so stinkin' prayed up. When I go to my son's games (this is ridiculous), I have to go in so stinkin' prayed up. "O God, use me. Take my heart. Help me. Enable me to trust you. If they lose, or if Hill plays horrible, or if it's unjust or if it's a bad call, I just want to be cool, O God." That's how weak my heart is. Do you understand what I'm saying?

There are things and times when we are unjust in our anger, but there are also times when there is a righteous anger to be demonstrated with grace and compassion and love. That's what we see in Nehemiah. His anger here is a righteous anger, and he cries out. Hear this. Verse 7. He took counsel with

himself. Notice he stops, he assesses the situation, he listens, he thinks it over, and then he confronts the sin directly.

Because of time, I just have to run through this. Hear me. I love verses 7-9. This is church discipline in Jerusalem. This is where Nehemiah, full of courage, full of the power of the Holy Spirit, stands and says, like in verse 9 (which is a pivotal verse), "This thing that is happening is not good." He calls those who are in question, those who are in sin, his own brothers, his own sisters, his own heart, to repentance. That's what we do when we love one another. We take the log out of our eye, and we admonish.

When we see sin and we see exploitation and we see a brother or a sister going down the road of disobedience, we don't do the talk around with them. We go to them in love. Hello, church! You go *to* them. You speak with love and grace *to* them. That's what he did. What motivates that in verse 9 is this fear of God and also this desire for the renown of God, for the fame of God, to not be quenched or squelched by the actions of these who claim to be followers of God. There was a call to repentance.

I love the response of the people you find in verses 12-14. We won't read this, but you have this confession among the people of God. There is confession, and then you have repentance. *Repentance* is when (and this is practiced daily; we talk about this often), by the grace of God, we stop our act of sinning. I confess it. I agree with God. "God, I was unrighteous in that. Lord, my heart was wicked in that. I confess it. I see you. I see your Word, that which I have strayed from. Lord, I repent from that, and I want to walk in the light in that. Then when I'm able and where I'm able, I want to go make that thing right."

That's what you see here. You see these people, who were exploiting their own brothers and sisters... They took their fields back. They took their money back. They gave their children back. Everything they took, they gave back. That's what true repentance looks like. It's beautiful. Then they closed out with this worship it talks about in verses 13-14. It's awesome.

The hero of this chapter is Nehemiah, but it doesn't end with Nehemiah. The ultimate hero here is that Nehemiah is a type of Christ in verses 14-19, where Nehemiah repents, and then he shows incredible gospel hospitality and begins to invite everyone who has had an offense into his home. For the next 12 years, he gives up his divine prerogatives and his divine rights, he gives up his comfort, he gives up his estate, he gives up his pleasure, he gives up his life, and he lays his life down for his brothers and sisters there in Jerusalem.

This is what I love about the gospel. He is a type of Christ here. Jesus Christ, as Paul writes in Philippians 2, gave up his divine prerogative. Right? He set aside his divine rights to come to this earth, and he took upon himself what you and I deserved. What is so beautiful is that, by Christ's resurrection, Christ invites us into

the banqueting table of his grace, and we get to eat freely, and we get to eat of our full, just like this picture of Nehemiah.

I want to say this to you. Please hear this. There are some of you tonight who have been an oppressor. We've all been that. You've oppressed in one way or the other. There are some of you who have believed the lie that your oppression, your sin, is outside of the scope of God's ability to forgive. That is a lie, if you believe it. There is nothing... Trust me when I say this. Hear me when I say this. Your sin is not greater than the grace of God. No one's sin is.

That's why I love what we get to do. That's why I love what we get to be about in this city. That's why I love being tethered by God to himself through his Son, demonstrating his grace all over this city. That's what I love. So you know what? There are ministries of justice, ministries of fighting oppression you can continue to be involved in right here. Some of you are.

I think of Jesus Said Love. I think of that ministry to those ladies who have been exploited by greedy, sinful hearts. I pray for those men to have their hearts changed by the grace of God, and I pray for these young ladies to be delivered from the enslavement they are enslaved to right now. I pray to that end. I think about the amount of abortions that happen in this city and those young ladies, those mothers, those young girls, older girls, who are oppressed by this culture that says having a child in your estate is not wise. I think about them, and I want us to continue to fight on their behalf.

I think about the ministry we have, Rift Valley, over in Kenya. I think about that work God is doing for his glory over there, Rift Valley Fellowship, working among those young women, those girls, who have been sold into sex slavery there in that industry. I think about that work you're providing for, that work you are giving to. I think about some who have gone from our church to serve in that ministry. I think about Champions of Hope in South Dallas, where there are many of you who have migrated down to take on a young guy or a young girl and pour your life into them.

I think about the ministries right across the street from our campus of junior-high guys and girls at Cary Middle School and T.J. High School that home groups are embracing now and getting involved in. I think about fighting the injustice under our noses right across the street with such a difficult path of education, where kids by the ninth grade are saying, "What good is an education really going to get me?" I think about how broken the people are right around us. I think about the multiple, myriad venues we have in this city to continue to serve. I'm just grateful for the fact that I get to continue to see, as a pastor, lives being transformed by the gospel. He came to set the oppressed free.

So tonight, if you're an oppressor, let's repent. I mean, literally, let's repent. Let's confess that before the Lord and our brothers. Let's go make right what we need to make right by the power of Christ. Let's continue to ask the Lord to enable us to capitalize on our circumstance in this city as being a blessed people, and let's be faithful to cry out if we're being oppressed.

If there are any of you who are being oppressed in this room and you don't feel like your cry is being heard, we need to hear that. Home group leaders need to hear that. Our staff needs to hear that. Praise be the name of the Lord for the gospel that redeems and saves and changes and frees. Amen? That's what I want us to continue to be about in this city. I love you. Let's pray to that end.

We're going to close out and get after the Lord in song. Before we do that, Michael is going to come. We're running to the Table. There's no better place for us to run than to the Table, the Table of the Lord's Supper, considering his grace and his mercy that paid the price for people just like me, just like you. Guys, I want us to be faithful to that end of what the Lord has left us on this planet Earth to be about.

Where we need to literally confess tonight, let's confess. Where we need to cry out, let's cry out. Where we need to say, "Pray for me," let's say it. We can turn these next few moments before we're dismissed into a prayer meeting, into a healing meeting, into a salvation meeting, into a confession meeting, into a "praise God" worship meeting. Let's do that. Let's close out strong before him.

Father, I thank you for your mercies that are new every day. I thank you for your Word, your call in this chapter to your people in 2013, your people at The Village Church on this little site, this piece of real estate. I thank you for this call to us to fight against oppression and to be open and honest where we are the oppressors and where we have been oppressed.

O God, I pray for liberty in this house, as you grant that so often here. I pray for freedom in this house. Lord, I pray for a passion in this house for your name. I pray for courage where we are weak. I pray for love where we are so broken. Thank you that you've been good to us, that you *are* good to us. I thank you for what you're about in this room this evening for your glory and for the building of your kingdom through your bride, a bride you love dearly. In Jesus' name, amen. Praise be the name of the Lord.