

How Is Our Worship up to God Also a Witness out to Others?

- Nehemiah 12. "These are the priests and the Levites who came up with Zerubbabel, the Son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua, Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, Sheceniah, Rehum, Meremoth, Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah, Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, Jedaiah. These were the chiefs of the priests and of their brothers in the days of Jeshua. And the Levites, Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who with his brothers, was in charge of the songs of Thanksgiving. And bakbukiah and Unni, and their brothers stood opposite them in the service. And Jeshua was the father of Joiakim. Joiakim, the father of Eliashib. Eliashib, the father of Joiada. Joiada, the father of Jonathan. And Jonathan, the father of Jaddua. And in the days of Joiakim, were priests, heads of Fathers' houses of Seraiah, Meraiah of Jeremiah, Hananiah of Ezra, Meshullam of Amariah, Jehohanan of Malluchi, Jonathan of Shebaniah, Joseph of Harim, Adna of Meraioth, Helkai of Iddo, Zechariah of Ginnethon, Meshullam of Abijah, Zichri of Miniamin of Moadiah, Piltai of Bilgah, Shammua of Shemaiah, Jehenothan of Joiarib, Mattenai of Jedaiah, Uzzi of Sallai, Kallai of Amok, Eber of Hilkiyah, Hashabiah of Jedaiah, Nethanel. In the days of Eliashib, Joiada, Nohanan, and Jaddua, the Levites were recorded as heads of Father's houses, so too were the priests in the reign of Darius, the Persian. As for the sons of Levi, their heads of Father's houses were written in the Book of the Chronicles until the days of Johanan, the son of Eliashib. And the chiefs of the Levites, Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua, the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers who stood opposite them to praise and to give thanks, according to the Commandment of David, the man of God watch by watch. Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, And Akkub were gatekeepers standing guard at the storehouses of the gates. These were in the days of Joiakim, the son of Jesua son of Jozadak, And in the days of Nehemiah, the Governor and of Ezra, the Priest and Scribe. And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with Thanksgiving and with singing, with cymbals, harps and lyres. And the sons of the singers gathered together from the district surrounding Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites. Also from Beth-Gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem. And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people, and the gates and the wall. Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks. One went on the south of the wall to the dung gate, and after them went Hoshaiah and half of the leaders of Judah, and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, and certain of the priests' sons with trumpets, Zechariah, the son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, son of asaph, and his relatives, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the Man of God. And Ezra the Scribe went before them. At the fountain gate, they went up straight before them by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the Watergate on the east. The other choir of those who gave thanks went to the north and I followed them with half of the people on the wall, above the tower of the ovens, to the broad wall and above the gate of Ephraim, and by the gate of Yeshanan, and by the Fish gate and the Tower of Hananel, and of the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate, and they came to a halt at the Gate of the Guard. Both choirs of those who gave thanks,

stood in the house of God, and I, and half of the officials with me, and the priests, Aliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets, and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, Ezer, and the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader. And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy. The women and children also rejoiced, and the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away. On that day, men were appointed over the storerooms, the contributions, the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them the portions required by the law for the priest and for the Levites, according to the fields of the towns, for Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites, who ministered. And they performed a service of their God and the service of purification, as did the singers and the gatekeepers, according to the command of David, and his son Solomon. For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there were directors of the singers, and there were songs of praise in thanksgiving to God, and all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel, and in the day of Nehemiah gave the daily portions for the singers and the gatekeepers, and they set apart that which was for the Levites, and the Levites set apart that which was for sons of Aaron.'

- All right, we're in an incredible Old Testament Book of the Bible. We're nearing the finish lines. It's the Old Testament Book of Nehemiah. If you've got a Bible, go to Nehemiah 12 and let me set it up. We're a Bible church. If you're new, can those of us that this is home, can we just give an amen? We're a Bible church. 1, 2, 3.

- Amen. We're a Bible church. We believe that this is the only perfect thing on Earth. This is the book or actually series of books that God wrote. It's a library of books. 66 books written over the course of a few thousand years by 40 some authors, but working behind all of those people was the divine spirit of God, giving us revelation and truth from God. As a result, we like to go through books of the Bible. We're in a Book of the Bible called Nehemiah, and our assumption is if God said it, it must be important, so when it comes to studying books of the Bible, we also begin with this assumption that the Bible is for us, but it's not primarily about us. The Bible opens by saying in the beginning, God. That means God is the hero. God is the sinner. God is the theme of the Bible, so from page one through the remaining pages of the Bible, we learn more and more about this God, until ultimately somebody shows up named Jesus Christ, and he tells us that he's the God we've been waiting for and been learning about through all the books of the Bible. Jesus is the only founder of any major world religion, who has declared himself to be God. And he tells us he's God. And he tells us that the whole Bible is about him. He's called a rabbi, which means teacher. In John 5, some religious people come to argue with him and he says, you study the Bible, which is good, but here's what's bad. You don't understand the entire point is to learn about me and have a relationship with me. After he rises from the dead, Jesus hosts a few Bible studies at the end of Luke's gospel, and it says that he took everything in the Old Testament and he showed how it pointed to him. This would've included the Book of Nehemiah, where we find ourselves. The Bible is perfect, and as I like to say, it's all about Jesus. What we like to do, we like to open the Bible, study it and try and figure out how it points us and leads us to Jesus Christ as God. That being said, here we are in a Book of the Bible that's about two and a half thousand years old. Long time ago, and what we're

gonna look at today is a worship service. God's people just like us, gathering together to do the very things that we're going to do. Hear the word of God preached, respond in song, pray and the like. And sometimes when we read the Bible, we may wonder what does this have to do with me. How does this apply to me? This was a long time ago. How does this apply to today? This was for another group of people. Does it apply to us as this group of people? And it does. I hope this is gonna be really encouraging for you. I believe for some of you, this will be the most important day of your entire life. I believe that as we're going through a Book of the Bible, God is going to use it to change your life and to alter your destiny. That being said, we'll jump right in. Here's some good news. You can be clean. Here's where we pick up the story as their worshiping in Nehemiah 12. "And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people, and the gates and the wall." What happens is we get defiled, unclean, because of sin. And as a general rule, we all feel this. We all have things in our life. You're like, that feels gross. That feels dirty. That feels wrong. There are always days that, if we could, we would do them over. There are words that we have said that we would like to take back. There are things that we have touched that we wish we would've kept our hands to ourselves. The Bible calls that sin and the Bible uses around a dozen different words to talk about the effects of sin, being uncleanness or defilement. Words in the Bible that are common are defiled, unclean, impure or filthy. And what we see here is that places, things and people will all become defiled and unclean. Let me deal with the first two. The place is the wall and the thing is the gate. To understand their context, they're living in a city. They're surrounded by a wall that they have just rebuilt. That's the thing. And they have hung doors, kind of like you've got a door on your home. These are the gates into the city. What they're doing, they are dedicating, consecrating, purifying this place and these things to the Lord. The same thing happens in our life. There are things in our life that, to us, seem filthy, dirty, unclean, and regrettable. There are physical places that we feel the same way about. The Bible talks about not just sin causing people to feel dirty, defiled and unclean, but places and things. I'll give you an example. In Hebrews 13:4, it says, "To keep the marriage bed pure." The marriage bed pure. What that means is your bedroom is a place that should be set apart, holy, kept for obedience to God and love for your spouse, and that in your bedroom should be a bed. That bed should be the marriage bed. If you're dating, there is no such thing as a dating bed. If you have one, go home and set it on fire. If you're here with your boyfriend, let's give you a moment to break up with him. I'm not even kidding. I don't know why anyone is laughing. I'm a father of two daughters. I'm as literal as can be. There is no dating bed, but there is a marriage bed, and the bedroom needs to be holy, or set apart, or special, or sacred, and the marriage bed is to be kept pure and undefiled. The place is the bedroom. The thing is the bed. Well, what happens is when places and things get defiled, we connect them with bad experiences. We connect them with sin or rebellion or folly. They make us feel dirty and/or unclean. The result is that those things in those places, they tend to affect our life in a negative way. Let me explain this in modern terms. For counselors, they will say that certain places or things are a trauma trigger. Something bad has happened somewhere, and that place for you becomes defiled or unclean. You can't go back to that house. You can't go back to that bedroom. You can't go back to that dorm room. You can't go back to that apartment. You can't go back to that nightclub because something so dark and despicable and damaging happened there that it triggers you and it brings you back to that moment where

you suffer trauma. The result is as well that some people, it's not just places, but things or trauma triggers. For some people, they hear a sound or a voice. They see an object. They experience something in their life that triggers the worst day of their life. What they're doing here, they're saying that these places and these things, they can either be trauma triggers or temptation triggers. There are certain places that you're gonna be more tempted. True or false? True? We're between a casino and old town, just as an example. Left or right, all goes south. That's the way that it works. For some of you, there are places that are more tempting. There are things that are more tempting. For some of you, it's even in your home. The liquor cabinet. That's your temptation trigger. For some of you, the fridge. That's your temptation trigger. For some of you, your technology. That's your temptation trigger. What they're saying is that sin is real. It causes us to be unclean, filthy, defiled, and there are places that we go and objects that we see that become either for us trauma triggers or temptation triggers. They either bring us to one of the most painful moments in our life, or they get us into all kinds of of trouble. It's still true. It's still true, so then what we see as well is then we need to make a decision about these places and things. Again, they're dealing with the place of the wall and the thing of the gate. And the first question is, do I need to just remove this from my life? Do I just need to get rid of this? Or do I need to purify this? Is this something that could be used in a way that honors God and brings health and joy to my life? For example, in your technology, it's your temptation or trauma figure. You may need to put some software on there to keep you from getting into trouble. For some of you, you may need to just get rid of all your alcohol. And for some of you, you may need a smaller fridge. Just things to pray about. The question is, is this a place that I should never go, or is this a thing that I need to remove from my life, Or is it something that I can retain, but it needs to be utilized and consecrated to the Lord in a way that honors him. How many of you have taken your phone and say, I'm gonna dedicate this to the Lord. You may look at some different things and you may get off of social media if you do that. How many of you have looked at your fridge and said, I'm gonna consecrate that to the Lord? How many of you have looked at your budget, your schedule, your bed and said, I'm gonna consecrate that to the Lord? That's what they're doing with places and things. You've gotta make this decision in your own life. Where do I sense is unclean and what for me makes me unclean? When grace and I moved some years ago, we had that great joy of moving. How many of you love moving. Oh, gosh. We don't like moving, but one of the great gifts of moving is you get to decide what you keep and what you give to goodwill. For us, we were going through our... Do we want to keep this or do we want to remove this? And what we noticed was there were things in our house that came from people that we probably didn't want in our house. I'll never forget. As we were going through our things, there were a few things that I remember a few people had given us. And I'll never forget. One of the people said, "I'm giving this to you, and I want this at your house, so when you see it, you think about me." And later they were evil and betraying, and it was very painful. And every time we saw that, we did remember them. But it was like living in a haunted house. It wasn't very enjoyable. What we decided was these things need to go because they connect us to experiences and the relationships that are defiling. There are other things that we decided to keep that we got from people and to use them in a purified and consecrated way. I'll give you one example. There was a glass that a guy gave me. He's become one of the greatest public enemies of my entire life. If he's watching, Merry Christmas. He gave me this glass and I

was gonna throw it away. And what I decided was every time I use it, I would pray for his wife and kids because they were with an evil man. Purify it. Consecrate it. When it's places, it's like, should I go there or should I go there with the Holy Spirit to cleanse it? This thing? Should I keep it in my life or should I remove it? If I keep it, how can I purify it? That's what they're doing. It goes even deeper because what we see here, they're purifying the place of the wall, the thing of the gates and themselves. I wanna talk about you and I want to talk about the thing that you don't want to talk about. And that is the defilement that we all sense as human beings if we have a functional conscience. That every single one of us feels a sense of filth, uncleanness, defilement. We'll use words like brokenness. But the truth is, there are two ways that we get defiled unclean. Number one, what we do. Number two, what they did, We are sinners and we're victims of the sin of others. Let me just press into your life. Let me be your pastor, at least for a moment. We've all done things that make us feel filthy, dirty, and unclean. We've all had things done to us that make us feel filthy, dirty, and unclean. And that's exactly what these people are dealing with. The problem in our culture is this. Our culture has many problems, but here's one. We're aware of the ways in which we are victims and people have done things against us, but we're not aware of the way that we're sinners and the things that we have done. We have a culture that likes to talk about what everybody else has done without confessing anything that we've done. And the Bible is true on both accounts. The Bible says that we are sinners and we're victims of the sin of others. Both make us unclean. Both make us dirty, Both make us defiled. And what happens for those of us who feel dirty, unclean, or defiled, because of what we've done or what has been done to us. I wanna be careful here, especially if you have had abuse, sexual abuse, assault, molestation, something comes upon you to where you just feel unclean. How do I know that? My wife and I have been doing this job for a long time. Every victim of abuse and assault that we've ever talked to, when we asked them, what's the first thing you did? I took a shower. Why did you take a shower? I just felt dirty. And what they were looking for was not just cleansing of the body, but cleansing of the soul, so we all have this. We all have this sense that I'm not pure. I'm not clean. Something is wrong. Maybe it's what I've done. Maybe it's what they've done. Maybe it's both. And every one of us copes in a series of ways. Let me just hit these quickly. Let me first explain. The first time that anyone felt unclean was where? Genesis 3, our first parent sin against God. How do we know that they feel unclean? They experience for the first time something called shame. What do they do? They try and hide their shame with something called a fig leaf. The rest of human history is just different people picking different fig leaves. You can't see who I really am or what I've really done. I need to hide it. I need to excuse it. I need to blame others for it, whatever it might be. Some of you are like the Navy Seals. Here's the Navy Seals. Ignore and override. You did it or they did it. You're gonna ignore it, override it, move forward. You're the people who like to say that's in the past. We're not going backwards. I've moved on. It doesn't affect me. Usually as your voice raises and you get emotional, which is an indication that it's not in the past, it's in the present and even not processed it. You're still in it. Some of you, that cause for your defilement, your filth, your shame, you don't know how to deal with it. so some of you are the tough cookie. That's who you are. It didn't affect me. I'm tougher than that. I found my way through it. I'm doing great. As you scowl. You've not dealt with it. You've just sort of pretended like you're tougher and stronger than it. Some of you are the life of the party. Every time it comes up, you just make

a joke and/or you self-medicate. I'm fine. I'm doing great. Ha ha. Let me make a joke about it. Sometimes the people who mock the most are suffering the most. Sometimes the people who laugh the most are languishing the most. Some of you are a hypocrite. Now I know that word can be strong, but in the original Greek understanding, it was in a play. An actor or an actress would play a role and then they would change their mask and play another role, so you never knew who they really were. That's a hypocrite. And for some of you, you don't wanna talk about it. You don't wanna revisit it. And if anybody brings it up, you're going, I'm doing great. Let's talk about something else. And or you're hoping that your secret never gets found out. But it's known by God. For the pride people, they have decided that their sin is now their identity. This is what I've done, so that's who I am or that's what they've done, so that's who I am. I can't change, so I need to celebrate who I am. I need to be proud of what happened, either that they have done to me or I have done, and I need to now accept it as my identity. The victim is the person who says it really did happen and I'm honest about it, but I can't move on from it. The worst day of my life now defines every day of my life. The darkest moment becomes every moment. And then lastly, some of you are the holy roller. Welcome to church. And here's what the holy roller does. They just quote verses and smile, and pretend like they've conquered it. I'll give you some of your holy roller favorite verses. You're having a rough day. You're not doing good. I'm more than a conqueror in Christ. Yeah, I know, but you're not doing great. But I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me. Yeah, but that was terrible. God works out all things for the good of those who love and are called glory's purpose. You got three verses, all outta context. All fig leaves. Congratulations. Your verse is on a fig leaf. And these people, you can't get to know them. They're always just pretending. I'm doing great. I'm an overcomer. I've overcome. And they're always looking for people who are struggling and broken, so they can minister to them because then it sort of gives them this false perception like I'm beyond it and I'm gonna go back and help the lowly. Here's what happens. When we sin or we're sinned against, we feel dirty, unclean, and defiled, and we don't know what to do about it. We have different ways of trying to cope with it. Making sense to anybody? Don't think about other people right now. I could just sense it in the room. This is a really good sermon for my wife. She's thinking it'd be a really good sermon for her husband, so you both should take notes. But what happens is, true or false, in our life, things get dirty. Anything get dirty in your life. Your dishes get dirty. Do you know how to clean them? Unless you're a teenage boy, the answer is yes. Your car gets dirty. Do you know how to clean it? Answer? Yes. Do your teeth get dirty? Do you know how to clean them? Yes. Does your laundry get dirty? Do you know how to clean it? Again, unless you're a teenage boy, yes. Your soul gets dirty. Do you know how to clean it? Answer? No idea. That's the problem. In a sinful world, everyone and everything gets dirty. The question is how do you make it clean. What they're doing here, it says they're purifying themselves, literally, as they're going up to worship. The temple, their version of the church, was up on a hill. At the bottom, they would undergo ceremonial washings. They would literally cleanse themselves. Kinda like baptism. And then they would put on special clothes. What color do you think it was? White. And then the people would go up the hill to worship. You would see thousands, tens of thousands, maybe a hundred thousand people, going up a hill, all wearing white. Somehow their God told them how to get their soul clean, so what he's done on the inside, they're showing on the outside. These people are coming together for worship and they are really, really excited because they can get

their soul clean, thanks to their God. Let me tell you this. Only God can get your soul clean. Nobody else can get to your soul but your God. Here's what's amazing. This is about 400 or 500 years before Jesus. We are now a few thousand years after Jesus. They were excited to get their soul clean and Jesus hadn't even come. We should be at least that excited. Let me explain to you how to get your soul clean. And here's what it says in 1 John 1:7-9. "If we walk in the light." that's being open and honest. That's being overt. That's saying here's what I did and here's what they did. I'm gonna own my stuff and their stuff. "As he is in the light." God isn't in the darkness. He's in the light. "We have fellowship with one another." What that means is we really know each other. Some people don't even know you because they don't know what you've done or what's been done to you, so they don't know you. "With one another." And isn't it amazing, once we know what someone has done or has been done to them, we tend to have a lot more compassion, patience, and empathy, 'cause then we understand them. Oh, you went through that? I'm sorry. Now you make sense. I love you. The blood of Jesus. He died for our sin. His son what? It purifies us. From what? All sin. That would mean the sin that we commit and the sin that they commit. The sin that we have as sinners and the sin that we have as victims. If we claim to be without sin. I don't really need Jesus. I'm a good person. My life is under control. I've pulled myself up by my bootstraps. I'm doing great. I'll figure it out. We deceive ourselves. You're lying to yourself. And the truth is not in us, but here's the good news. If we confess. Name it. Here's what I did and here's what they did. Here's what happened. He's faithful, which is amazing. And just. He died for our sins to bring justice and will do two things. Forgive us for what? Our sins. All the stuff that we did, we could be forgiven for and purify us from all unrighteousness, which would include the things that they did to make us feel defiled and unclean. Okay, listen to me. I love you. I really do. I'm here all the time 'cause I love you. I have such good news for you. This is gonna change your life. You are not defined by what you've done. Some of you like, Pastor Mark, you don't know what I've done. He does and he tells us that you're not defined by what you've done. Satan wants to define you by either what you've done or what they've done. It's called the accuser of the children of God. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Number two. Not only are you not defined by what you've done, you're also not defined by what they've done. They don't get to define who you are. He does. You're not defined by what you've done. You're not defined by what they've done. You're defined by what Jesus Christ has done. That is the basis of your identity. You live from it. You don't live for it. It's at the starting line. It's not at the finish line. Let me tell you what Jesus has done for you here. He just told us. How do we get our soul clean? Says the blood of Jesus purifies us. Jesus did the most incredible thing. He actually did two incredible things. He took your place and he put you and his place. Jesus Christ is God. He's the only God. Jesus Christ is the hero of the Bible. He is the center of history. He is the savior of humanity. Jesus is God become a human being, to live the life that none of us have lived. The life that is pure and without sin. Jesus died the death we should all die, for the wage for sin is death. Jesus went to the cross and he took our place. And here's what's amazing. He put us in his place, so he became unclean to make us clean. He died so that we could live. He was separated from the Father, so we could be reconciled to the Father. He endured the cross, scorning it's shame, so we could live without any shame. He died in our place and we live in his place. What's amazing about this, the Bible then goes on to change the name, or the word, or the title to describe the

believer versus the unbeliever. For the person who doesn't belong to and believe in Jesus, the Bible over 300 times says you are a sinner. Once you meet Jesus, I'll ask the Christians, are we still sinners? Yeah, you weren't very enthusiastic about that, but I appreciate the truth. We are sinners. And if you're like, I don't know. Ask your spouse. There's a witness. But our identity is no longer sinner. It's saint. A few hundred times, the Bible calls God's people the Saints. The beginning of many of the New Testament letters to the saints in wherever they live. Here in Nehemiah, it says they purified themselves. We've still not left Nehemiah. That means that they're the holy ones. That means that they are clean. They are set apart. They're the saints. There's only per chance three times that the New Testament refers to a believer in Jesus Christ as a sinner. All are in the Book of James and all three are debated. The point is this. Sin is some of what you do, but Saint is who you are. Sin would be the explanation of your past, but Saint is the destination of your future. Right now, you're between the sinner that you were and the perfect resurrected, fully purified, wearing white in the presence of Jesus, saint you will be forever, and he is in the process of causing you, calling you to compelling you to become pure, clean, holy, righteous, like him forever. We demonstrate this purity, this cleansing, this holiness with something called sacraments. In Christianity it means means of grace. I'll give you three. Marriage. Husband and a wife go to get married. What color does the bride wear?

- [Congregate] White.

- What if she's done some things she's not supposed to do? If she belongs to Jesus, she wears white. Well, what if some things have been done to her that should not have been done to her? She still wears white because she belongs to Jesus. We show this in communion every week. We have communion in the back showing the broken body and shed blood of Jesus through the elements of bread and wine or juice. Dependent upon your culture, we have people available to pray for you. And it's to remind us, the blood of Jesus purifies us or cleanses us from how much unrighteousness? All of it. Even the things that we have a hard time forgiving ourselves for, God has no problem forgiving us for. In addition, we celebrate this in Christian baptism. When we wash our car, we wash our clothes, we wash our house, we wash our dishes, we use water. Water is the universal symbol of taking things that are dirty and making them clean. And this is what we do in Christian baptism. A person identifies themselves. They say, Jesus died for me. Jesus rose for me. I'm showing that going under and coming out of the water. And just like water cleanses the outside, the flowing river of life through the Holy Spirit cleanses me on the inside. What we're gonna do today, we're gonna baptize people. And it doesn't matter what they've done. They're forgiven and clean. It doesn't matter what's been done to them. They're forgiven and clean. Who they were is not who they are, and it is most certainly not who they will be, when Jesus is done with them. If you've never given your life to Jesus, this is the day. If you've never given your sin to Jesus, this is the day. As we head into Christmas, the one thing that God wants from you for Christmas is your sin. You need Jesus. We all need Jesus. We live in this broken world where people are in denial. They're angry. They're fearful. They're self-medicating. They're self-destructing because they can't get their soul clean, but He can and He would love to do that for you. All you've gotta do, friend, is simply this. Recognize that you are a sinner. That sin makes us unclean. That Jesus is our savior and he cleanses us from all

unrighteousness. We're gonna give you an opportunity after I'm done preaching, and I will end at some point, and there will be prayer teams in the back, and there'll be prayer teams online, and if you would like to receive Jesus or there's something that you're struggling with, or you need prayer for, or deliverance from, or healing through, or cleansing from, we want to invite the Holy Spirit to do that for you. Number one. You can be clean. Number two. You can be glad. Here's what we read in Nehemiah. "At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem." It's church service. "They sought the Levites." These are the ministry leaders. "In all their places to bring them to Jerusalem." Look at these words and tell me if this sounds exactly the opposite of our culture. "To celebrate the dedication, with gladness and thanksgivings." And oh, we got a band too. "Singing, cymbals, harps and lyres." We'd call it drums, guitars, and wolfers, but it's all basically the same. "And the sons of the singers gathered together. Nehemiah says, 'I appointed two great choirs to give thanks.' With the musical instruments of David, the man of God, and Ezra the scribe." He's the Bible teacher. "Went before them." They got Bible teaching and worship. "Both choirs of those who gave thanks, stood in the house of God, and the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader. And they offered great sacrifice that day. I missed one. And they rejoice for God had made them rejoice with great joy." It's like rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, rejoice. The women and the children also rejoiced. You know it's going good when the wives are happy. It's going really good. The men are happy. The women are not. Oh, the women are happy too. This is a miracle. They're both happy. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard where? Far away. Let me tell you this. Our world ain't clean and our world ain't glad. We had a thing a few years ago. I dunno if you remember. It was called COVID. It was kind of a thing. Since then, anxiety, depression, and mental health, globally, is up 25%. People are not glad. It's affected younger people the worst. They're having the most mental health, anxiety and depression record in the history of the world. And who's suffering the most of the most is not just the young, but the young women. Young women. Globally, mental health epidemic. Good luck even trying to get a meeting with a counselor. They are booked. The question is, if God can make you clean, then God can make you glad. If God can clean you up in here, he can give you cheer out there. These are the two things that our world most desperately needs, but only Jesus provides. What they're doing, they're worshiping God. You hear the words great joy, thanksgiving, rejoice, rejoicing. They're pretty excited about their God. When we come to worship, we come to worship the God who not only makes us clean, but makes us glad. Let me explain this. Everyone worships. Everyone worships. Worship is not a Christian issue. It's a human issue. Worship is what you live for, who you live for, what or who is most important to you, who or what you make the greatest sacrifices for. The alcoholic worships the bottle. The workaholic worships the job. The control freak worships security. We all worship someone or something. And at the end of the day, our worship is guided by one of two spirits. I'll explain this to you. Most people worship by the power of the unholy spirit of fear, and some people worship by the powerful Holy Spirit of God. That the decisions that we make are guided by the spirit that we choose. The Bible says that God has not given us a spirit of fear. Most people, the decisions they make, the lives that they live, the feelings they have, the choices they choose, are driven by spirit of fear. They're just trying to avoid pain or punishment. They're trying to avoid difficulty or obstacle. They don't want this person upset with them. They don't want this job to leave them. They don't want this marriage to fail them. What happens when you worship by the unholy spirit of fear? It's

demonic. Fear comes with the spirit. Let me say right now. Lots of people are struggling with fear. Where's the economy going? Where's politics going? Where's the culture going? What's gonna happen to me? What's gonna happen to my marriage? What's gonna happen to our kids? What's gonna happen to our culture? What's gonna happen to our future? Spirit of fear. What happens when we worship, when we make our life decisions by the spirit of fear? Two things happen. It literally drags you down because that demonic spirit of fear, it comes up from hell, and it comes up from hell to drag you down. Number two. It brings out the worst version of you. If your life is driven, worshiping the spirit of fear... I love you. I hate to say this. It's the worst version of you. You're angry. You're scared. You're anxious. You're sleepless. You're short-tempered. You're mean spirited. And let's say that we all get visited by the spirit of fear. Amen? You think I ever get visited by the spirit of fear. More than the mailman. He's gonna show up. But the Bible says that God has not given us a spirit of fear. Instead says that he's given us the Holy Spirit. The spirit of fear is unholy. The spirit of God is holy. What happens when you choose to make your decisions and to worship God by the spirit of God rather than hell coming up into your life, heaven comes down into your life, and it lifts you up rather than drags you down, and it brings out the best version of you rather than the worst version of you. Let me ask this question first. For those of you who have been with us, do these people who are worshipping, did they have reason to be fearful? Oh, yeah. Their economy was in decline and they had just given massive generous gifts to the temple, to the church, to God. Economically, reason for fear. Politically, do they have reasons to fear? Oh, yeah. All around them are there enemies plotting together to destroy them. Invade them. In addition, physically, they were exhausted. They just spent 52 days rebuilding a whole city, a wall and a temple. They were tired, as we all are this time of year. In addition, these people had great reason to fear because spiritually, they were also opposed and attacked. There was a PR campaign against them. There were threats of lawsuit. There was fake news. There was lots of slander and smear. They're dealing with the same things we're dealing with. They're enduring the same things that we're enduring, yet they're responding with rejoicing because the spirit of God casts out the spirit of fear. I'll read it to you again. "Celebrate gladness, thanksgiving, thanks. Rejoiced. Rejoiced with great joy. Rejoiced. And the joy was heard far away." These are happy people. And it's not because their lives got better, but because their lives got connected to God, who's over their life. That's the key. In worship, what they're doing is they are worshipping God. Let me say this about worship. We worship our way into trouble. We worship our way outta trouble. If you have fear of man, you worship that person. I'm gonna do whatever makes them be happy and not hurt me. That's how you worship your way into trouble. You worship God. That's how you worship your way outta trouble. The alcoholic worships their way into trouble. They worship God to get out of their trouble. These people have been in trouble for 141 years. Bad habits, generation after generation. Now they are breaking free, and you're seeing them obey the heart of the 10 Commandments in the Old Testament. They would've memorized this from youth. There are 10 commandments. The first two of these. There's only one God and you worship him alone. If you keep the two commandments, you don't break the rest. You can't have God as your only God, and worship him and commit adultery, or lie, or steal, or covet. They're worshipping God. Their priorities are now in order. They're worshipping God how he wants, and they're getting together, not to worship because of their circumstances, but to worship that God would pull

them up above their circumstances, so they are worshiping God in these ways. They're listening to the Bible being taught as you are, and then they're singing, cheering, kneeling, raising their hands, clapping and shouting. Amen. What we're gonna do in a minute? We're gonna worship because you need to. God doesn't need us to worship. God's gonna be fine tomorrow. Whatever we do, he's gonna be fine tomorrow. You and I, we need to worship. We were made to worship. Just like your body needs exercise, so does your soul. God cleanses us, so that our soul is clean, and then worship strengthens us, and it's exercise for the soul. We're gonna sing. Some of you need to learn to raise your hands. Some of you need to learn to shout, to clap, to cheer, to kneel, to sing. And what's amazing is, this is most important, I would say, for the men, because men are emotionally constipated. They just are. Here's their emotional spectrum. Grumpy, asleep. Those are your options, okay? And most men are not emotionally healthy 'cause they're not free and expressive. Worship is where the Holy Spirit starts to free us up, to be passionate, to be emotional, to be relational, to process. I worship three times a weekend and I admit I worship at least four times a week. There's no way to be emotionally healthy without worshiping. There's no way to get above your circumstances without worshiping. There's no way to be strong in your soul without worship, so God made them clean and now worship is where they come, and God makes them glad. And here's the good news. I have such good news. You're in the band. How many of you love live music? I love live music. I used to have a concert venue. I'd promoted shows and it was fun. I love live music. I love it. Nobody ever asked me to be in their band, ever. If you've got a band, ask. Just know this. I'll join your band. I've always wanted to be in a band. How many of you are like, it would be so cool to be in the band. In church, here's what you need to know. The band includes you because when we get together to worship, it's not like the band is worshiping you. You're in the band and we're worshiping Him. I have great news. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. You're all in the band. You've all made it. You've all made the band. You've won the voice. You're in. Okay, you're great. When we gather together to worship, don't just watch the band, be the band. Why don't I get a microphone? Well, we're praying about that, but for now, you get to be in the band. God makes you clean. God makes you glad. And then lastly, I will close with this. You can be generous. Here's what they say. "Men were appointed over the storerooms, the contributions, the first fruits, the tithes, to gather into them. The portions were carried by the law for the priest, for the Levites." Those are the ministry leaders. "According to the fields of the town. For Judah, rejoice over the priest and the Levites, who minister." The people love their ministry leaders is what it's saying. And you love us. And we love you for that. "And in the days of Nehemiah, they gave the daily portions for the singers, the gatekeepers." This is the staff of the ministry. "And they set apart that which was for the Levites, and the Levites set apart that which was for the sons of Aaron." Here's the movement. God makes you clean. God makes you glad. And then God makes you generous. And he uses these two words, tithes and first fruits. First fruit is first, 'cause God first. God first. Give to God first. Say God, I'm gonna make my priority, your priority. And it talks about a tithe, which is literally 10%. There's a big debate. Should Christians tithe? At our house, we see it as a floor, not a ceiling. You picking them out. We're not gonna judge you, but they are being generous. What I wanna say is this. Worship is sacrifice. This is part of their worship. When you give to the Lord, you're making a sacrifice. You're making a sacrifice, meaning I'm gonna give the money to the Lord, so I can't spend it on that. I'm gonna make a choice, which is a sacrifice.

And here they come to worship with their hands full. Zero people in the Bible come to worship empty-handed because worship is about giving and it's about sacrificing. Let me tie this to Christmas. How many of you're like, this is the worst Christmas sermon I've ever heard in my whole life? No, this is actually. I was thinking about it. We're in the Bible. I told you everything's about Jesus. It's Christmas time. Christmas is about Jesus. You know why they were so excited? Jesus was coming. Now they had to wait 400 years, but they were excited 'cause Jesus was coming. How many of you had kids or you have kids or you have grandkids? As Christmas comes, true or false, they get a little excited. They're anticipating. Is it today? Is it today? Is it today? No, today is Halloween. It's gonna be a while. Hang in there. They anticipate. There's a sense of expectation there. As Jesus was coming... This is the whole point of Christmas. Jesus has come. They were anticipating. They were expecting. And let me ask you this. Let me turn this into a Christmas sermon. Christmas is the season of year, where people do something in greater measure than at any other time of the year. What is it? They give. They give. Why? Because anything tied to Jesus just evokes and promotes generosity. How many of you you heard of the three wise men? First of all, we don't know if there were three. I'm gonna go to Matthew 2. It says there were three wise men. No, it says they brought three gifts. There could have been seven wise men and four cheap guys. We don't know. We've all got relatives like that. You're like, hey. I got you a present and you didn't give me one. Okay, great. what we know is that these wise men brought three gifts. Some of your familiar with them is the magi. Do you know what magi means? Magician. And it says that they came from the east. From the east. Here's what's crazy. God's people lived in the west. It was called Israel or Jerusalem. A group of people in the Bible, called the Babylonians or the Persians. Same people in place. Different kings and kingdoms. They invaded Jerusalem, Israel, in the days of a man named Daniel. There's a whole Book of the Bible called Daniel. They broke the walls. They burned the gates. They closed the church, the temple. They took the best young men as slaves and hostage. And they took 'em to the east, to Babylon, Persia. And there they were for 141 years. And one of those men was their descended and his name was Nehemiah. And God told him, it's time to go back west, rebuild the walls, rehang the gates, reopen the temple, so that we can reignite the worship of God. The whole Book of Nehemiah is one guy who was in Persia going back to Jerusalem for the worship of God. Over 400 years later, God becomes a man, and He shows up in Israel. His parents take him when he is little to the temple. He goes through the wall, the gates, to the place that Nehemiah and the people all rebuilt. We don't know how many. Let's say three. Three wise men are magi come from the east. First of all, how did they know that Jesus was gonna be born in Bethlehem? Daniel taught them the word of God. When he was in exile, he taught the magicians. That's what it says in the Book of Daniel. For more than 500 years, generation after generation, back in the Persian empire is telling their scholars, God's gonna become a man. He's gonna be Jewish. He's coming to Israel. He's coming to the temple. He'll be born in Bethlehem. The wise men here. Jesus has come. Guess what they do. They go from the East Persia. Nehemiah 1. Maybe even the city of Susa to Israel. The exact same journey that God's people took with Nehemiah. And they arrive. And here's Jesus. He's a baby. And why did they come? It says to worship him and to bring him gifts, treasures. Remember what they were? Gold and frankincense. Gold makes sense. That's the gift you give a king. Kings have gold, and if you have gold, kings take your gold called taxes. It shows that Jesus, this baby, he's

the king of kings. What was the second one? Frankincense. It's incense. How many of you girls like incense? Oh, I love incense. Smells so nice. Creates a pleasing environment. If you're a guy, you're like, I love it. We have real men. It's on Wednesday. Unless it's baked and scented, you got a problem. Incense was to show that Jesus had come as our great high priest because when a priest would go into the temple, they would light incense to create a fragrant environment. And then the incense would arise. And the Book of Revelation says that our prayers and worship ascends like incense into the presence of God. Those make sense. The third gift. This is a very unusual Christmas gift to give a kid. When you died, this is what they would use to prepare your body for burial. It says in John 19 that when Jesus died and they prepared his body for burial, they used myrrer. I wonder if they used that myrrer. And it was showing that Jesus would come as the king, gold. The priest who would offer himself as a sacrifice for our sin, incense. And was going to accomplish all of this through his death, myrrer. Where did they come from? The east. Where did they go to? Jerusalem. Let me tell you this, God knows exactly what he's doing in human history. God has everything worked out according to a divine plan that is perfect in every way. And the reason that we have so much gift giving around the time of Christmas is because the greatest gift given to planet Earth is Jesus Christ. We'll just close with this. God so loved the world, he gave his only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but receives this amazing gift, eternal life. Friends, if you met Jesus, just like any gift that is given, you gotta receive it. People can give you gifts, but unless you receive them, you don't enjoy them. Jesus is God's gift to you this Christmas season. Have you received Jesus? Do you know Jesus? Do you love Jesus? Do you follow Jesus? Do you trust in Jesus? Would you let Jesus today make your soul clean, give you a fresh, clean start? Would you let Jesus make you glad today, so that you could worship him by the spirit of God and rise above your circumstances? And would you let Jesus make you generous today, that you would forgive people and bless people, that you would share what you have, that you would give encouragement and life and light in a world that lacks anything that looks like life and light? In a moment, we're gonna have baptisms. If you want to give your life to Jesus, go to the back. We wanna pray with you. If you need prayer for anything, go to the back. We'd like to pray for you. If you're a believer who's never been baptized, we wanna show the cleansing power of Jesus through the sacrament of baptism. We've got shirts, and towels, and change of clothes and a private room. We're all ready for you. And for those of us who are God's people, let's just worship and rejoice. The world may have a lot of problems, but we know that the solution is Jesus Christ. Amen. Father, thanks for an opportunity to teach your word. Thank you that you work out everything according to your purpose and plan. God, I pray right now that no one hearing this would reject Jesus. That they would invite Jesus to forgive them. That they would invite Jesus to cleanse them. That they would invite Jesus to heal them. That they would invite Jesus to deliver them. That they would invite Jesus to love them. That they would invite Jesus to transform them. That they would invite Jesus to embrace them. And Jesus, we just thank you that ours is a visited planet. We thank you that you are the king of kings. We thank you that you are our great high priest. And we thank you that you died in our place for our sins, but you also rose, and you allow us to have newness of life as we follow in your Footsteps In Jesus' name. Love you, guys. Amen.