

Why Should Christians Get Upstream in Culture?

- [Narrator] Nehemiah 11. "Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem, "and the rest of the people cast lots "to bring one out of 10 to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, "while nine out of 10 remained in the other towns. "And the people blessed all the men "who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem. "These are the chiefs of the province "who lived in Jerusalem, "but in the towns of Judah, "everyone lived on his property in their towns. "Israel, the priests, the Levites, "the temple servants, "and the descendants of Solomon servants. "And in Jerusalem lived certain of the sons of Judah, "and of the sons of Benjamin. "Of the sons of Judah, "Athaiah the son of Uzziah, "son of Zechariah, son of Amariah, "son of Shephatiah, son of Mahalalel, "of the sons of Perez. "And Maaseiah the son of Baruch, "son of Col-hozeh, son of Hazaiah, "son of Adaiah, son of Joiarib, "son of Zechariah, son of the Shilonite. "All the sons of Perez who lived in Jerusalem "were 468 valiant men. "And these are the sons of Benjamin. "Sallu the son of Meshullam, son of Joed, "son of Pedaiiah, son of Kolaiah, "son of Maaseiah, son of Ithiel, "son of Jeshaiiah, and his brothers, men of valor, 928. "Joel the son of Zichri was their overseer, "and Judah the son of Hassenuah was second over the city. "Of the priests, Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, "Jachin, Seraiah the son of Hilkiah, "son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, "son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub, ruler of the house of God, "and their brothers who did the work of the house, 822. "And Adaiah the son of Jeroham, "son of Pelaliah, son of Amzi, "son of Zechariah, son of Pashhur, "son of Malchijah, and his brothers, "heads of fathers' houses, 242. "And Amashsai, the son of Azarel, "son of Ahzai, son of Meshillemoth, "son of Immer, and their brothers, mighty men of valor, 128. "Their overseer was Zabdiel the son of Haggadolim. "And of the Levites, Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, "son of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, "son of Bunni; and Shabbethai and Jozabad, "of the chiefs of the Levites, "who were over the outside work of the house of God. "And Mattaniah the son of Mica, son of Zabdi, "son of Asaph, who was the leader of the praise, "who gave thanks. "And Bakbukiah, the second among his brothers. "And Abda the son of Shammua, "son of Galal, son of Jeduthun. "All the Levites in the holy city were 284. "The gatekeepers. "Akkub, Talmon and their brothers, "who kept watch at the gates, were 172. "And the rest of Israel, and of the priests and the Levites, "were in all the towns of Judah, "every one in his inheritance. "But the temple servants lived on Ophel, "and Ziha and Gishpa were over the temple servants. "The overseer of the Levites in Jerusalem "was Uzzi the son of Bani, "son of Hashabiah, son of Mattaniah, "son of Mica, of the sons of Asaph, the singers, "over the work of the house of God. "For there was a command from the king concerning them, "and a fixed provision for the singers, "as every day required. "And Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, "of the sons of Zerah the son of Judah, "was at the king's side "in all matters concerning the people. "And as for the villages, with their fields, "some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath-arba, "and its villages, and in Dibon and its villages, "and in Jekabzeel and its villages, "and in Jeshua and in Moladah and Beth-pelet, "in Hazar-shual, in Beersheba and its villages, "in Ziklag, in Meconah and its villages, "in En-rimmon, in Zorah, in Jarmuth, "Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages, "Lachish and its fields, and Azekah and its villages. "So they encamped from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom. "The people of Benjamin also lived from Geba onward, "at Michmash, Aija, Bethel and its villages, "Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, "Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, Lod, and Ono, "the valley of craftsmen. "And certain divisions of the Levites in Judah "were assigned to Benjamin."

- All right, we have just a few weeks left in our study of a great book of the Bible called Nehemiah. It's in the Old Testament, and we're in chapter 11 today. And what we're gonna do, oftentimes we spend a lot of our energy just looking at our life, our family, our finances, our faith, our relationships. We're gonna do today, we're gonna get a bigger picture, we're gonna look down on culture in general, in our lives in particular from the perspective of God. So let me set up Nehemiah 11. And this is gonna be a little bit of a mind melt. You're probably gonna hear some things that maybe you've never thought about. And if you read Nehemiah 11 this week, you have no idea where this is gonna go, 'cause it's not going where you're expecting. But let me just jump right in. There are kind of two views, when you look at culture and the world, and where society is trending, there is the Christian view, and that is that we are sinners by nature and choice, that the world is cursed. And if you just let everybody do whatever they feel and think, and want, it's gonna get better or worse. Worse, way worse, okay. Now the more progressive or liberal, or non-Christian view is that we're basically good. And since we're good, if you just let people do what they want, if you let them think whatever they want, if you let them do whatever feels right to them, the world will get better. And so the result then is we need less law, we need less leadership, we need less religion, we need less Bible teaching, we need less parents, we need less authorities. People are good. Just let them be and things will get better. Now, we don't believe that. That is a myth. And this law of entropy that exists in the physical world is true in the moral and the spiritual. The law of entropy basically says, if you just leave something alone, it's going to die, it's going to decline, it's going to decay. What is true physically, is also true morally and spiritually. If you just let everyone do what they want, feel what they feel, think what they think, ultimately they're going to hurt themselves, and destroy everything. So what happens is, then God calls his people to live in a counter-cultural way to say, you know what, we're going to defy gravity to some degree. The way we do life, and sex, and marriage, and gender, and family, and religion, and finances is different, because God's people are to live better lives, and to set an example for others. So let me ask this question. Western culture, let's say America in particular, do you think things are getting better or worse culturally, morally, spiritually speaking? One, two, three. Worse. That was unanimous. And there was one person like, I don't know. Just look at the internet and Google anything, you'll see it's getting worse. The world that we're in, looks like it's in this entropy decline cycle, because it is. And what happened recently, I don't know if you guys knew this, we recently had an election. I'm not gonna talk a lot about politics, but let me just say, for a lot of God's people, it was not encouraging. Can I say that? All of a sudden. And here we are in East California. You're like, what happened? So you know what happened? And there was a lot of people thinking, well surely culture hasn't deteriorated to a certain point. And then we get a cold, you know, tall glass of reality. It's like, okay, this is really where our state is, where our nation is, where our culture is in the west. And a lot of God's people now have a lot of anxiety, some are discouraged, some are depressed, and some are moving to Idaho. So you know, that's where we find ourselves. Or Tennessee, those are the last places to hunker down. So what I wanna do is I want to ask, okay, where we are, is it a place that God's people have been, and was there an occasion where God called his people to action that led to some transformation? And what we're gonna do, we're gonna look at Nehemiah and we're gonna realize that we find ourselves in pretty much the

same predicament. And so let me summarize Nehemiah. It's an Old Testament book a few thousand years ago, but tell me if this doesn't sound familiar. There was a nation that was blessed by God uniquely so even though many, if not most of the people were not living as believers. There's a difference between being blessed by God and believing in God. Many of them did not believe in God, but for a very long time their nation was uniquely blessed by God. Sound familiar? This was the ancient nation of Israel, and it's not dissimilar to our nation and day. The people got so accustomed for generation to generation being blessed, they just sort of took it for granted and got entitled. Oh, we'll always be safe, our borders will always be secure, we'll always have prosperity. You know the economy will always bounce back. We're gonna be okay. So they got entitled and as a result they got very indifferent, they got very lukewarm, they got very selfish, and they got very self-indulgent. And that started this slow deterioration and decline of their culture. And now God knew that this was not going to end well for them, so he sends a succession of prophets, and a prophet would stand up, proclaim the word of God, and tell the people this needs to stop, and obedience to God needs to start. In your Bible, this would be books like Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. Those are three major prophets that God sent to tell his people, the blessing won't continue forever, unless you start believing and behaving. The clock was ticking. Eventually after lots of patience and many prophets, God finally ran out of patience for this nation, and these people. And he allowed a foreign nation called Babylon to invade them. This is all recorded in the book of Daniel. Daniel and Nehemiah are connected. So Daniel was living in the days that God withdrew his hand of blessing. You can kind of think of it like this, God was providing and protecting, and they were rebelling and disobeying. So very slowly he started to remove his hand of protection and provision. Not all at once, he was very patient, but eventually he removed his hand of protection and provision, and then this godless, demonic, horrible nation called Babylon invaded Israel. They tore down the walls, they closed down the church or temple, they enslaved God's people, and this is all recorded in the book of Daniel. Now this nation of Babylon is both an ancient nation, and it is a demonic spirit. I'll prove it to you in a moment. And what we're seeing in Nehemiah, to connect these two, 141 years after Daniel, Nehemiah is in Babylon, it's called Susa at the time, it was overtaken by the Persians, it was the head of the Persian empire. You're like, what is the Jewish guy doing in Babylon? Well, for 141 years God's people had been there, 'cause they got invaded, they got taken as captives. So Nehemiah is away from home as a Jewish man, God breaks his heart and he wants to go back, rebuild the walls that were destroyed in the days of Daniel, rehang the gates that protect the city and the people, reoccupied the city with God's people, and then reopen the church or the temple for the worship of God. And so he's trying to undo the damage that was done in the days of Daniel. That being said, it was an ancient city, both in the days of Daniel and also in the days of Nehemiah. This Persian or Babylonian empire. But it's also a demonic spirit. Now if you don't know, the world we live in is inhabited, not just by beings that we see, but by beings we don't see. The Bible says in Ephesians that our war isn't just against flesh and blood, but powers and principalities and spirits. What that means is, people come and go, but demons are the same every generation. And you start to see demonic, evil, destructive patterns. And this spirit of Babylon lived in the days of Daniel, it was still against Nehemiah 141 years later, as he's trying to reopen the worship of God. And here's what I'll tell you, the spirit of Babylon is still at work today, and you can feel it and you can sense it. If you look at where

culture and morality is trending, it seems like we're up against some sort of invisible force that is tremendously powerful, and continues winning. This mention of Babylon continues all the way to the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation. In the book of Revelation, it tells us about what happens in the end. There was a battle between the spirit of God, and the spirit of Babylon in the days of Daniel. There's another battle between the spirit of God and the spirit of Babylon in the days of Nehemiah. Revelation says that battle will continue until Jesus comes back and wins the victory once and for all. I'll give you a few quotes from Revelation 17:5, calls Babylon, quote, the mother of prostitutes. And that, quote, Babylon the great, falls, is mentioned in Revelation 14, 16, 17 and 18. Now by the time the Lord Jesus comes back, the city of Babylon and the nation of the Babylonians and the Persian empire, that is the underpinnings of the book of Nehemiah are gone, but the demons remain. Today the spirit of Babylon is very much alive and well. The spirit of Babylon is still at work in the culture in which we live. The spirit of Babylon is a counterfeit of the spirit of God, and the spirit of Babylon is trying to establish a counterfeit kingdom that is a counterfeit of the kingdom of God. We're gonna get into all of this in Nehemiah, but this is the Persian empire. The capital city of Susa, in what was ancient previously Babylon. And so today the spirit of Babylon is working through the media, telling lies instead of truth. Today the spirit of Babylon is working through social media, suppressing things that would be good for people, because it's true to God, and then basically pushing things that are not well for human life and flourishing. In addition, the spirit of Babylon has found a way into the educational system, to educate the next generation or to brainwash them in things that are contrary to God. The spirit of Babylon is involved economically, it is also involved socially and culturally. The goal of the spirit of Babylon is to overtake every sphere of society, and to establish a counterfeit kingdom that is in opposition to the kingdom of God. That's what Nehemiah is up against from beginning to end of the book bearing his name. In the New Testament, the language would be, that this is the world. It's the church versus the world. Now let me say this, going back to the book of Daniel. So right, just hold your brain in, it might leak outta your mind. Just think about this. And you know, I'm not a tin foil hat person. This is in the Bible, okay. The spirit of Babylon in the days of Daniel, and then 141 years later in the days of Nehemiah, to our own day, is always seeking to do three things. Number one, close the church. In the days of Daniel, they forbid the worship of God, they invaded Jerusalem, they shut down the temple, and the worship of God was canceled. In the days of Nehemiah, he's trying to get from Susa, the capital city, back to the head, or the headquarters of the city of God, Jerusalem, to what? To reopen the temple so God can be worshiped, because quote unquote, the church had been closed for 141 years. I'm telling you, a few years ago the spirit of Babylon went global. Tried to close the church, just close it. That's always the first goal. Second, if the spirit of Babylon can't keep the church closed, it'll seek to make the church compromised. If the church is open, then the word of God needs to be closed so that even if the people come, they don't come to the truth. What you're gonna see, if you come back, I hope you would, bring a friend. But in the next few weeks when we close Daniel, the church is open, it has been closed for 141 years, now it's open, and guess what? It quickly becomes compromised. All of a sudden the Bible isn't being taught, the spirit of Babylon is doing the instructing. The believing men are marrying unbelieving women, they're raising their kids apart from the Lord. Nehemiah gets very frustrated and upset. You can read ahead. The first goal of the spirit of Babylon is to close the

church. The second goal, if it can't keep the church closed, and the church is open, is to have it compromised. What we would call apostate or woke. False teaching, soft teaching, taking the spirit of Babylon, and bringing it in to the children of God. The third thing that the spirit of Babylon is always seeking to do, is to literally cut off the next generation. Literally cut it off. 'Cause if you love the Lord and your kids don't, then faith ends when your life ends. In the days of Daniel, they did gender mutilation on Daniel as a young man. For him to be taken as captive, required that he not only serve the Babylonian king, that he had gender confusion, gender mutilation, they castrated him as a young man. Sound familiar? 141 years later, same thing happens to Nehemiah. It's not expressly stated in Nehemiah as it is in Daniel, but it is most assuredly inferred, and most theologians agree that to serve the king of Babylon or Persia, Nehemiah had to undergo gender mutilation and castration. Does this sound familiar at all? Like hey, let's close the church. If it's open, let's make it compromised, apostate and woke. And while we're at it, let's mutilate the next generation of children. See, the Bible isn't about what happened, it's about what always happens. The Bible is not old, it's eternal. The Bible tells us what happens, and we think, well that happened a long time ago. Yeah, but the spirit that did those things is still active today. So you start to see patterns, you start to see themes, you start to see connections. So what was God's plan? Well, God's plan with Daniel was, be a missionary to Babylon. And then God's plan for Nehemiah was leave Babylon, go be a missionary to Jerusalem. The point is, as the world continues to be governed and run by the spirit of Babylon, God's people need to be filled, and led by the spirit of God. So that brings me to the text, okay, that was the introduction. Here we go. I'll read part of Nehemiah 11, this is where we pick up the story. They've rebuilt the walls, they've rehung the gates, they've reopened the church. Now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem, that's the city of God, and the rest of the people cast lots, so they're rolling the dice, to bring one out of 10 to live in Jerusalem, the holy city. So 10% are going to intentionally relocate into the urban city of Jerusalem, while the nine out of the 10 remained in other towns, they're scattered. And this is all people doing mission work. And the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem. These are the chiefs of the province who lived in Jerusalem but in the towns of Judah, everyone lived on his property in their towns. Israel, the priest, that's ministry leaders, the Levites also ministry leaders, temple servants, people who are employed at God's house, the church, and the descendants of Solomon servants. It goes on to say, and in Jerusalem lived certain of the sons of Judah, and of the sons of Benjamin. Then there's this long list of names of families moving for missions. I'm not gonna read it all, you could read it for yourself. It's just a good page outta the Hebrew phone book. And here's what it says about a few of them. Valent men, men of valor, heads of father's houses, mighty men of valor, and skilled craftsmen. So let me summarize this. Here it just told us about Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the city of God. The counterbalance of that is Susa, which we learned about in Nehemiah 1, it's the city of man. Let me explain what's going on here in Nehemiah. And it's the difference between what Jesus will refer to as the city of God, versus the city of man. The backdrop for Nehemiah is Jerusalem versus Susa. Susa is Babylonian-Persian, that's the city of man. Jerusalem, that's the city of God. And there is a battle between the two. And ultimately Jesus said it this way, to God's people, the church, you are the light of the world. What does that mean? The world's dark. Have you noticed that? I mean for those of you who are joining us online, thank you. But in Arizona today, it's like the first day that we haven't seen

the sun, you know, since you know the 70s. It's a dark day. This is the first day that I've driven into church in six months, and my headlights automatically turned on, 'cause it's dark. The world we live in is, it's dark. True or false, it feels dark. Not just physically but spiritually. Here's what Jesus says, I'll read the next, a city set on a hill cannot be hidden. That the church, God's people are to be like a city of light shining forth to the cities of darkness. The city of God is the city of light, the city of man is the city of darkness. The city of God is the city of truth, the city of man is the city of lies. The city of God is the city of life, and the city of man is the city of death. And what we see bearing out in Nehemiah is literally the city of man is typified by Susa, it's the capital city of the Babylonian-Persian empire. The counterbalance is Jerusalem, literally the city of God. Now, there was a church father, a scholar, a good Bible teacher, his name was Augustine, and he lived a long time ago. He lived during the reign of the Roman Empire, and the decline of that same Roman Empire. The Roman Empire in its day was the most powerful, the most affluent, the most secure, and the most dominant nation in the world. Sound familiar? They were the America of their day. They had a long, the Romans did a long season of peace, because they had secure borders in large part, they had a tremendous military, they had a very affluent economy. Their people lived at a lifestyle that the rest of the world, quite frankly, longed to experience and enjoy. And what happened to the Roman Empire, they went into a slow decline cycle. All of a sudden people didn't love their nation, they hated their nation. They didn't respect the rule of law, they rebelled against law. They no longer had love for their neighbor, interest for the wellbeing of others, they became very self-consumed, and they became very self-destructive. All of a sudden, when you don't have to work that hard, and you are living in a time of peace and prosperity, it's not others that destroy you, you destroy yourself. You just drink a little too much. You eat a little too much, you give yourself a little too much laser, you get a little too lazy, and eventually entropy sets in, and you start to decline and die. That's exactly what happened to the Roman Empire. And I'll tell you this, it's exactly what's happening to our nation. It's slow decline. Not by invading from the outside but by self-destructive, selfish, fleshly decisions made individually and personally. So God's children were living in a day, the church was living in a day much like our day, where God's people are like, you know, the future just doesn't look good. Like, where we're going politically that doesn't look good. Where we're going economically does not look good. Where we're going morally, culturally does not look good. And God's people had a strong sense of anxiety, and fear and dread. Sound familiar? Most of you have probably been feeling something similar, and if not, tell us what your secret is, we'd like to figure it out. So Augustine writes a book called, 'The City of God.' And what he explains to God's people is, well the reason that the Roman Empire is declining and dying, is because it's the city of man. And thankfully as God's children, though we live in the city of man, we are citizens of the city of God. And we need to live in a counter-cultural way as God's people, like Jesus said, the city of light, not living in the cultural darkness. Now this is exactly what we're seeing play out in the book of Nehemiah. The city of God is typified by Jerusalem, and it's the city of light. Jerusalem is mentioned 37 times in the book of Nehemiah. So it's a big deal. It's also called Zion, and it's mentioned in the totality of the Bible, more than a thousand times. I'm just telling you, if God tells you something a thousand times, it's because you're supposed to remember it. He just keeps mentioning Jerusalem or Zion. It literally means the city of peace, as opposed to the world, which is about conflict and division. It is ruled by Jesus, the King of kings, the Prince

of, the Prince of peace who rules over Jerusalem. It was established as the the capital city for the Jewish people by God, through King David, which is why to this day it should be, and is the capital city. In addition there the temple was established because Jerusalem, the city of God, was supposed to be the headquarters that sent out the light of God's word into the darkness of the world. Jesus comes and he is the light of the world. So the whole point of the city of God was to set up Bible teaching, worship, sacrifices, devotion to God, so that Jesus, the light of the world would come, and that the light of Jesus would shine from the city of light, the city of God out to the cities of men. So the whole point of Nehemiah, and we've been studying like why are they building a wall? Why are they, you know, opening the church? Because they're getting ready for the coming of Jesus. And so Jesus came. And when Jesus was a baby, where did his parents take him? Jerusalem, to the temple, to dedicate him to the Lord. Later, when he was a young man, he went with his parents to the temple to worship God, and he remained behind, and he had theological Bible discussions and debates, and they were amazed that he knew the Bible so well. They're like, this kid really knows the Bible. Yeah, he's actually the hero. He's got this whole thing down. Some years later, it was very interesting in the life of Jesus. So years ago I preached through a book of the Bible called Luke. It took about two years. And the whole book pivots with one verse in the book of Luke 9:51 it says that Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. What it's saying is all of his life, and all of his ministry, and all of his experiences previously were outside of Jerusalem. And then one day the Holy Spirit tells him, today's the day to go toward Jerusalem. He set his face toward Jerusalem. That was the pivot in the ministry of Jesus, going from the rural area to the urban area. When Jesus got to the city, he began preaching and teaching, performing miracles. He was hated and he was opposed, and he was despised. The night before he died on the cross, in our place, for our sins, Jesus was where? He was in a garden called Gethsemane, and it's in the city of Jerusalem. In addition, Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem, and eventually he would be crucified just outside of the walls. So the walls that Nehemiah rebuilt when they crucified Jesus, they took him out of the old city of Jerusalem, surrounded by the protective walls. They crucified him up on a hill. I've been there. And guess what he was looking down on? The city of Jerusalem. Jesus Christ hung, bled and died overlooking the city walls into the city of Jerusalem. Jesus died and he was buried. Three days later he rose, and as soon as he rises, where do you think he walks back to? Jerusalem. And he begins preaching and teaching. And the Christian Church as we know it is then inaugurated when in Jerusalem, Jesus ascends back into heaven, our God who died and rose returns back to his heavenly throne. And he gathered his first disciples together in Acts 1 and 2, and he says, don't go tell everybody yet, as I go up, wait for the Holy Spirit to come down. So Jesus goes up. And right now, let me tell you this, Jesus is alive. He's ruling and reigning. He is the Prince of peace. He is the King of kings. He is the Lord of lords. And the Bible tells us that right now, where is he? The new Jerusalem. There's a Jerusalem on earth, and there's a Jerusalem in heaven. And what the Bible tells us in the book of Revelation at the end, that one day Jesus is returning, and he's bringing the new Jerusalem. And guess where he is bringing it to? The old Jerusalem. I'll read it to you, Zachariah 14:4. "His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives "that lies before Jerusalem." Jesus is coming back to Jerusalem. Here's the big idea, you and I are citizens of that Jerusalem, and the King of that kingdom is our King, the Lord Jesus. Our residence is not our citizenship. We are temporarily here, when he returns we will be eternally

there. Now what's really curious about this as well, here's the storyline of the Bible, and there's gonna be a point to this, so just bear with me. So the Bible starts and it opens with a garden. Before there is sin, God makes our first parents, puts them in a garden called Eden. Eden means paradise or delight. It was a beautiful finished, manicured garden. The rest of the planet was untended to, it needed a lot of work. And what God said basically was, okay, this is what a finished product looks like, be fruitful, increase the number, fill the earth, subdue it, go make culture. Theologians will call this the cultural mandate. That's in Genesis, the book of beginnings. You go to the last book of the Bible, Revelation, the book of conclusions, and what we see is that our eternal state is urban. It's in a city. The new Jerusalem comes down from heaven with the King of that kingdom, the Lord Jesus. In the middle of Jerusalem there is a garden, the garden of Eden comes back, and there's the tree of life, the tree of life comes back. So what God originally started with will be there at the end. But surrounding this garden, and also this tree of life, is a great urban vision of the new Jerusalem. And so you and I need to think, in terms of the strategic importance of cities including our own. Now the counterfeit, because everything God creates, Satan counterfeits. Everything God builds, Satan tries to break. Everything God creates, Satan tries to destroy. The counterfeit is the city of man. It is typified by darkness, and in Nehemiah it's Susa, that we learned of in chapter one, verse one. And the spirit of God rules the city of God, and the spirit of Babylon rules the city of man. Here's what I'm telling you, our world is run by evil. Our world is run by darkness. It just is. If you are a person, and I love you, but just hear me out. If you're a person who thinks that we're evolving, you're not paying attention. Like, we're good and getting better. No we're not, we're bad and getting worse. And so the way I like to say it is, there is the kingdom of God and there is hell, heaven and hell. That when all is said and done, when Jesus returns, when the world is at its expiration date, that ultimately only two cultures will remain, heaven and hell. You and I live in the middle, and we live in the time between the times, and we've gotta decide, am I gonna pull hell up into my life or am I gonna invite heaven down into my life? Do I wanna live under the reign of the city of God, or do I wanna live like everybody else in the city of man? See, when you choose bitterness, you're pulling hell up into your life. Choose forgiveness, you're inviting heaven down. When you choose a lie, you're pulling hell up into your life. When you choose the truth, you're inviting heaven down. When you choose Jesus, you're inviting heaven down. When you choose anyone or anything else, you're pulling hell up. The reason that it feels like we're living in hell, is because people keep making decisions to pull it up into our lives. And so the point in Nehemiah is this, God sends Nehemiah back to the city of God to open it, so that the spirit of God can come down, so that God's people, even though they're surrounded by cities of darkness, they can live as God's people with freedom and joy in the city of light. This is exactly what Jesus prayed when he said, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done "on earth as it is in heaven." We wanna live kingdom down, not hell up. We wanna live like the city of God, we don't wanna live like the city of man. And that's the whole battle in the book of Nehemiah. Okay, so you still with me? Either way, just encourage me and say yes. Okay, so. So, if we are citizens of the city of God, the city of light, we're surrounded by darkness and the spirit of Babylon, and the cities of man, how can we, as God's people, be used by our God to shine light into the darkness, and to bring good into evil and to bring truth into lies. That's the question, right? Okay, I'll answer it for you from Nehemiah. There are five ways the city of God, that's us, can seek to

change the city of man. And let me say this, for those of you who maybe think that Christians are unloving and tolerant and unkind, let me say this, we believe the Bible is true, and we love you. But if you're not living according to what God says, we don't think that's best for you, and we want the best for you. And so we're telling you that some things need to change, not 'cause we're better than you. In fact, many of us are worse. We know us, right? It's not good people and bad people, it's bad people and Jesus, that's the storyline of the Bible. But if you love someone, and they're living contrary to God, and God's blessing is not going to be on their life, and they're going to die and go to hell, if you love them, you tell them. You tell them, this is not God's best for you, and this doesn't end well. So you need to know that when Christians want to help seek cultural change, it's not because we hate people, it's because we love people. One way you can do this is legally, God is going to call some of you as the days get darker, to be legally involved. There are certain law firms that'll fight for freedom, and faith, and family. To summarize up to this point in Nehemiah, did he get legally involved to secure religious liberty for God's people? Yes, he meets with the king, he gets laws passed, he gets legal permission. He works through all the process to have the legal protection to enjoy religious freedom. Some of you are gonna be called to that. Number two, there is political change. Now, was Nehemiah politically active? He was. When he was in Susa, he was cupbearer to the king, that is a political role where you work for the godless demonic king, you throw the parties and events, you order the food, you're the caterer, and you know you're the sommelier. How do you say it? Sommelier, the wine guy. I'm more of a whiskey guy, but the wine guy anyways. I probably shouldn't have said that. But anyways, if you're a Baptist, leave a comment online. We'll pray for you. So what he would do is he would sample the wine before it would go to the king, because if there was an assassination attempt, he would literally sacrifice his life for the king. So he's a guy who has a political job. When he moves to Jerusalem, what's his new job? Governor. Oh, don't you wish we had Nehemiah as our governor? Oh, just take a deep breath. Okay, we don't. Okay, so anyways, he was governor of Jerusalem. So he is a political job. So we see from Nehemiah to seek religious freedom for God's people to live as God's people, and to shine the light of the truth of God's word, and the person of Jesus, it's okay to be legally involved, it's okay to be politically involved. But there are other ways as well. Number three, financial. Did Nehemiah, or did God use Nehemiah to raise an incredible amount of money to fund ministry? He did. I mean if you were here, it is probably in the equivalent of our day, probably hundreds of millions of dollars. He got money from the government and the king, who was godless but trusted him. He got money from the most affluent people, and everyone else gave what they could. He was very economically, financially bold, in trying to fund ministry, get the church open, protect God's people, create a place for them to be God's people and to live under the light of God's word. Some of you are gonna be called to this, some of you're going to be called of God to make a lot of money and to steward it wisely, to use your economic wherewithal to make a cultural difference. Many of us will not have this experience, but some of God's people do. And this is what is driving presently the spirit of Babylon, and the city of man. So just explain this to you briefly, there are large financial management groups that oversee things like retirement. BlackRock, Vanguard Group and State Street are three examples. They hold 20% of the Fortune 500 companies, and they are the number one shareholder in Disney. And they have decided that they need to fund progressive, woke, cultural re-imagining and climate justice.

So most, many of you, maybe most of you, you put your money in your retirement account, it's going to an organization that is taking some of the profits to fund everything that you disagree with. How many of you felt even going into a store lately, you're like, does everyone hate me? Like everything here seems to be marketing something that I'm against. You gotta buy something online, you're like, I don't wanna join this cause, I don't wanna put up this hashtag, I don't need a rainbow flag. Like, can I just please get toilet paper? Like I just, I don't. Why did toilet paper get weaponized? Like you know? Why is that? Because economically they are using the power of their economic platforms to push a cultural agenda. But here's the good news. God's people are still the most generous. So the report just came out, in 2022 70% of all charitable and philanthropic giving in the United States of America, came from Christians. See, if you're not a Christian, you're like generosity is taxing other people. If you're a Christian, you're like, no, generosity is what you give, not what you give from their pocket. God's people are still the most generous in America. Last year, Christians in America gave more to fight global poverty than the United States government. So what I would say is, as you look at your money and your economic wealth, as a steward, just asking, okay, where can I do good for the city of God? Where can I do good to bless God's people? Is it a Christian school? Is it a Christian liberty organization that's protecting religious freedom? Is it a church? Is it a ministry? Is it the Bible League? You know, where can we. 'Cause I'm telling you this, Satan has out-fundraised us. And so God's people need to be generous to fund the kingdom of light. So part of it can be legal, part of it can be political, part of it can be financial. Another way that the city of God can change the city of man, is spiritual. Here's what we see in the book of Nehemiah, and it's a case study on how to revitalize a dead, dying, decaying demonic culture. And what we did see was revival. Sometimes when God's people are losing legally, politically and financially, the Holy Spirit just shows up and says, I'm gonna save a lot of people, otherwise this is not gonna end well. We saw this in the book of Nehemiah. They gathered together for worship, and my new life verse, they enjoyed a six hour sermon. I mean I just, yes Lord be it so, okay. Six hour sermon, and then they responded with worship, and generosity and serving. They were kneeling, they were weeping, they were enjoying the presence of God. There was what we would call a revival. That's where people who were far away from God, run near to God, where people who don't know God come to know God, and those who are lukewarm, they get activated, ignited and they become red hot. I am telling you that apart from a revival, I think we are in trouble. Okay? Because so far, legally are we winning or losing? God's people, the city of light? I'm losing. Politically, winning or losing? They got a little louder. Okay. Financially, are all the companies for Bible teaching, or against it? Are we winning or losing? Losing. So what we need to be praying for and planning for, hoping for is revival. Starting in our own life. Jesus, I love you. People need you, help me be part of the solution. Ultimately, until God changes us on the inside, nothing really changes on the outside. The other is cultural, and I'll hit this quickly maybe. So what he's doing here in Nehemiah, God is moving his people into a city called Jerusalem. 10% are going to live in the city, strategically for ministry. And the point is, God and Satan both know that getting the city is absolutely crucial to what the culture will become. Let me explain this to you. Cities are upstream, the rest of culture is downstream. We're at that time of year where it's gonna start snowing in the mountains. Prescott, Show Low, Pinetop, Heber, Flagstaff, they're gonna get some snow. Then the snow melts and it flows down to the valley. Just like the snow,

culture starts upstream. It starts at a higher elevation. And that is in a city. A city is marked by two things, density, more people, diversity, more kinds of people. So here we are, we're now in the fifth largest city, our valley is in the United States of America. More density, have you notice that? Everywhere you go you're like, crane, house, crane, house, crane, house. Seems like our state birds should literally not be a crane, but like a construction crane. That should be our new state bird, 'cause that's the only thing flying over the whole city. And that's why you can't get a big lot, because of density, there's not much land. And diversity. Okay. How many of you weren't born here? Answer, all of you. Okay, we're all from somewhere else. So you've got, everybody's from somewhere. More density, more diversity. But cities are upstream, we learned this, I don't wanna get too political, we learned this in the election. How many of you would for example see a whole state that was red, and then like a few dots that were blue, and the blue won. Threw up in my mouth a little bit, but you saw that, right? It's because there's more people densely pocketed in that populace. And so those places that are upstream, they choose what the culture becomes. Now in a city you've got education, entertainment, travel, transportation, you've got colleges and universities, you've got news outlets. Culture gets made upstream in the city. That's why you and I are here at a significant time in history. We are in one of the, if not still, the fastest growing city in America, the fifth largest city in America. Maybe God brought us together for the same reason that he brought them together, was to be a city on a hill, to set up the city of God, to be the people of God, to be under the word of God, to celebrate the rulership of our King Jesus. And to let darkness see the light and the difference that life with Jesus makes. You may not be here by accident, you may be here by divine assignment. In addition, just like certain people have financial capital, other people have cultural capital. There's a sociologist, James Davidson Hunter says this, people that have a hundred million dollars have more impact than a person that has a dollar economically, the same as true culturally. If you're upstream, you're now in a culture making center. You're in a strategic place. And I'm telling you, this isn't just about us, our statement here at Trinity Church is, we open our bibles to learn, we open our lives to love, so that lives and legacies are transformed. All those kids in the back, and all of your children, part of the reason that we are raising them is to send light into the darkness, and to send missionaries into the future. Our goal, our hope, our prayer is to keep our children from the kind of trauma and brainwashing that is tragically happening. And to then send them into the future, as Nehemiah was, to be light in a culture that is increasingly dark. Because cities have more anonymity, so they have more sin. If you live in a small town, everybody knows you, when you get to a city, nobody knows you. Now you can do whatever you want, and you're gonna do a lot of things that are going to harm you. That's why addiction, that's why mental health, that's why crime tends to spike in urban areas. More anonymity, leads to more misery. In addition, it becomes, the city does, the place where the good news of the forgiveness and transforming life power of Jesus is the most necessary. Like crime is up, drug addiction is up, mental health is up, violence is up, anxiety is up. Yeah, 'cause life without Jesus doesn't work, right? There's no peace until you're under the Prince of peace. And there's no light until you're in the kingdom of light. And sometimes what happens in this city, it accelerates darkness and destruction, but it becomes the place that the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ can shine the most brightly. And I know some of you, let me just speak briefly to the parents, and then I might close. How many of you right now you're thinking about having kids, you're like, I don't know if I want to have kids.

Look at the future. It's scary. How many of you have kids and you're like, I'm really scared. Let me tell you this. I would rather raise children for the light in the darkness than in the dimness. God's frustration with his people in Nehemiah is, the world is dark, he wants them light, and they keep trying to have a dimmer switch. Well, I don't wanna be totally dark, I don't wanna be totally light. God, is there somewhere that like we can break some of the commandments, but not so much that you'll get angry. Can we find some middle ground where like we got one foot in the city of man, one foot in the city of God, and you're gonna still bless us and we'll be okay. And God keeps pushing them saying, no, darkness or light, truth or lies, good or evil, the spirit of God or the spirit of Babylon. We've got five kids, great kids, I love with my whole heart. My son's helping lead student camp, they're up in the mountains right now. Biggest camp we've ever had. Pray for the students. I raise my kids in the city of man, urban, dark, drugs, opposition, hostility, and guess what? They love Jesus. You know why? They've seen the alternative. Now kids get most confused in a lukewarm, dim religious environment. Well, they say they love Jesus, but they don't act like it. They say they believe the Bible, but they ignore it. It's very confusing when it's like, hey, you see that guy with fentanyl that has his underwear outside of his pants, and he just wet himself at the park, while he was yelling at the moon? Yeah, he needs Jesus. Yeah, he does, dad. I can see that. It becomes very obvious. It becomes. Some of you are. Some of you aren't laughing. You're like, that's my brother. We're praying for him, okay. But when you raise kids and you're like, hey kids, is this working? They're like, that doesn't work. Okay, Jesus works. The Bible works, the gospel works. The church works, the kingdom works, the Holy Spirit works. And that ain't working. That's the good news. So let me close with this, maybe. This is an incredible time to be alive. This is a remarkable, everybody's like, it's getting darker. Yes. Now finally, they can see the light. Finally, they can see the light of Jesus Christ. Finally, they could see the light of the kingdom of God. Finally, they could see the light of the truth of God's word. Finally, they could see the light and the illumination of life lived by the power of the Holy Spirit. I know that the world is getting darker, but I am telling you, it's a great opportunity to shine light into darkness. I believe that the best days of Christianity could be in the future, not the past. I believe as everything else falls down, I believe that the church can rise up. As I read Nehemiah, I am filled with hope and encouragement. Now, not when I hear the news, but when I open the Bible and I hear the good news of what God has always done. And as he did in the days of Nehemiah, he can do in our own day, amen. So I'm just gonna encourage you, as God's people, don't lose fear, don't let fear guide you, let faith guide you. Don't let discouragement overwhelm you, let God encourage you. Don't worry about how dark it's getting, see that as a tremendous opportunity. The darker it gets, the brighter the light shines. Amen. All right. Do you believe that Jesus is God? Do you believe that this world is fallen? Do you believe that demonic forces are creating death and destruction? Do you believe that the spirit of Babylon is still trying to close or compromise the church, and cut off the next generation? What I'm telling you, we've been here before and we're still here. That means God has a future for us. Let me release the real faith online audience.