

Bearing Fruit in Keeping with Repentance

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 November 2025

Preacher: Donald Smith

[0 : 00] with the question, how did we get here? How did we get here? That was the question on the lips of the people! at the beginning of Nehemiah chapter 9.

! And we saw through that rerun of history three things, didn't we? I don't know if you remember them. We saw that the Lord was continually righteous. The Lord was constantly merciful, and His people are stubbornly sinful. That was their story then. That is our story now. Not a sinful people, but a righteous and merciful God.

And Joe really helpfully showed us, didn't he, two ways in which the people responded to those three truths. Two things they are to do. They are to confess their sin.

[1 : 24] We have done that this morning, haven't we? And they are to worship their gods. That is what we are doing right now. Confession and worship. That was the two responses we thought about last week.

But there is a third response. A third response that chapter 9 demands. It's not that Joe missed out something last week.

It's that we see that third response here in chapter 10. This chapter continues seamlessly on from where we were last week. The people are still speaking.

They have barely paused for breath. But what changes in chapter 10 is that God's people go from looking back into their past to now looking forward to their future.

If the question on the people's lips at the start of chapter 9 was, how did we get here? In chapter 10, the question on their lips is, where do we go from here?

[2 : 31] That is a good question to ask, not just for them then, but for us now. In our reading from 1 John earlier, we heard, didn't we, the wonderful words that God says to us, that if we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Those are wonderful words, and we have done that this morning, haven't we? We have confessed our sin together, and we have worshipped God for his mercy. But what now?

Where do we go from here? In the opening chapters of Luke's gospel, we meet crowds of people coming from Jerusalem, Judea, and the surrounding countryside, all flocking to John the Baptist.

They are coming to him to be baptized in a baptism of repentance. They are coming to John the Baptist to repent of their sin. But there is something about repentance, about true repentance, repentance that John made unmistakably clear.

As he was addressing the crowds, he said to them, true repentance bears good fruit. We might be tempted to think that repentance means little more than saying sorry for our sin.

[4 : 07] It absolutely does mean that, but John tells his audience, doesn't he, that they must bear fruit in keeping with repentance. Repentance is not just apologizing for past mistakes.

It's not just turning away from sin. It is also turning to God. We saw that again in our reading from 1 John.

Having reminded us of the forgiveness we have when we confess our sin, and the apostle John then turns and says to disciples of Jesus, by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.

Repentance means confessing our sin and then committing ourselves to walk in the way that Jesus walked. obeying him, keeping his commandments.

That is exactly what we see in Nehemiah chapter 10. The people have confessed their sin in chapter 9. Now they come and commit themselves to walk in God's way.

[5 : 24] We're going to start this morning with what is really our one and only points. Looking from the last verse of chapter 9 up to verse 29 of chapter 10, the rest of the chapter we'll see really kind

of flows out from these verses.

So let's begin by seeing that all of God's people promise to keep all of God's law. All of God's people promise to keep all of God's law.

Chapter 10 begins with another list of names. We've seen a few of them, haven't we, going through Nehemiah? We'll get another one next week. But each of them has served a kind of particular purpose.

But back in chapter 3, we saw, didn't we, kind of all hands on deck, everyone pitching in as they built up the wall. In chapter 7, we saw the long list of people from whom the newly rebuilt city would be populated.

Here in chapter 10, we have another list, this time of all those who had put pen to paper, who had signed on the dotted line, as the people committed themselves to live in obedience to God's law.

[6 : 39] Now, it might have felt like quite a long list when we read it. I felt like it was quite a long list when we read it. But relatively, it's not that long, is it?

You can check my working afterwards. I think there are 84 names there. That's a decent number, but it's probably about half of the people in here this morning. That's a decent number, but it's a lot less, isn't it, than the 42,360 people that were tallied up back in chapter 7.

But who are these 84 people? Did you notice, as we went through, did you see that this list was mercifully punctuated by a few short introductions?

This list of people includes the names of the governor, Nehemiah, as well as the priests, the Levites, and the chiefs of the people. So, only 84 names, yes, but a very significant 84.

It would be a bit like having kind of all 650 of our MPs sign a single document. There might be 65 million people in the country, but those 650 signatures, the signatures, that they incorporate the entire nation, don't they?

[8 : 05] And now, of course, where that analogy perhaps falls a little short here is that while we prayerfully support our MPs, we don't always agree with what they sign us up to, do we? But no such distinction exists here.

Just look at verse 28. The rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, the temple servants, and all who have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God, that their wives, their sons, their daughters, all who have knowledge and understanding. Everyone is there. That there are 84 signatures on the documents. There are 42,376 other voices behind them shouting their approval.

We are on board. We are with you. It's a point we're seeing repeatedly through Nehemiah, isn't it? All of God's people together achieving God's purposes.

We saw it in the hard work on the wall. We see it now in the promise to full and wholehearted obedience to God's law. This is the genuine fruit of the true repentance that we saw last week.

[9 : 28] And it's not just a few keen beans in church. Keeping God's law. But while everyone else goes about a more kind of easygoing way of life, every single one of God's people is promising here to keep God's law.

The elders and the deacons and the teens and the students, the husbands and the wives, the moms and the dads, the single people, those who are retired, those who have been Christians 50 years, those who have been Christians 15 minutes, every single one of them, every single one of us should be committing to keep God's law.

I say committing, isn't it, to keep God's law? It's more than that, isn't it? Verse 38 of chapter 9, that because of all this, we make a firm covenant. Verse 29 of chapter 10, all the people, what do they do?

They join with their brothers, their nobles, and enter into a curse and an oath to walk in God's law. This is a solemn, serious promise.

It's not a case, is it, of what we'll give it a go and see how we get on. It is a genuine, wholehearted commitment to walk in faithfulness to God's law.

[11 : 04] What does that kind of commitment, that promise look like? Maybe it'll help, just think of the last time you heard wedding vows. What is a husband or a wife saying, the bride and the groom?

For better, for worse. For richer, for poorer. In sickness and in health. What are they saying with those words?

They're saying, aren't they, I am going to do all that I can to always love you. When it's easy, or when it's hard, or when I'm healthy and I'm happy, or when I'm sick and I'm full of sadness. It's not saying, is it, I'll see how I feel when I wake up in the morning, or I'll love you when it kind of suits me. No, it's a solemn commitment to go all out in any and every circumstance to be faithful to that person.

That is what God's people are saying of God's law here. We're going to keep your law when it's straightforward and the world thinks we're doing a good thing.

[12:33] We're going to live by your word when our neighbors think it's backwards. We're going to obey your commands when our faith is flourishing.

We're going to stand by your statutes when it feels like our faith is failing. We're going to walk in your ways when it brings us prosperity. We're going to walk in your ways when it brings us poverty. Whatever turns life might take, we will live by the word of the Lord. You might think that's maybe a bit extreme.

That's exactly what we promise to do when we give our lives to Jesus. This is one of the questions we put before our new members.

Do you promise now by the power of the Holy Spirit to live a life worthy of the gospel? Repenting of your sin and pursuing Christ's glory and honor in every part of life in obedience to the word of God.

[13:47] This is what fruit, true repentance, bears. A serious and solemn promise to walk in obedience to God's word, to all of God's words.

Just look there at the end of verse 29. They promise to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord, our Lord. Not the easy commandments, not just the kind of big ticket items, all the commandments of the Lord, our Lord.

It's easy, isn't it, to embrace the commands in God's word that seem right and sensible to us, that make sense. But what about when they push back against the cultural tide?

What about when we can't really see the point or the importance of it? Are we coming in humble obedience? Are we looking for a way to wriggle out of it?

The fruit of true repentance means that all of God's people promise to keep all of God's law. And now, before we move on, perhaps one point worth addressing.

[15:04] We hear, don't we, we hear that the seriousness of the commitment here, and then we think of the breadth and depth of God's law. I mean, even if you just took Jesus' commands in the Sermon on the Mount, we promise to keep them.

We're going to fail, aren't we? We're going to slip up. We're not going to be able to perfectly keep that promise all of our days.

So, is there any point in this, what they're doing here? Is it foolish? Is it even arrogant, prideful, that they think they can do it? Well, let's just go back to the marriage vows for a minute.

Husbands and wives, have you unflinchingly kept those vows perfectly? To completely love and cherish your spouse in every and any circumstance?

The answer is no, is it not perfectly. Our love is fickle and frail.

[16:15] Our hearts are sinful. Maybe by God's grace you've never done anything egregious, but in your thoughts, maybe in some of your words, you have not faultlessly kept those vows.

And yet, they were absolutely worth making, weren't they? And they still stand. Because that promise is not a contract.

It is not a contract in which kind of love exists so long as these terms are met. We don't make those promises saying, this is who I need to be in order to be loved by you.

That's not what those vows are saying at all, is it? We make those promises because this is who I want to be because of my love for you.

As God's people, having confessed our sin and received God's mercy, his love, in and through his son, Jesus Christ, we come to promise obedience to his word, to solemnly commit our lives to walk as Jesus walked, not because we will never fail, but because we love him and have been loved by him.

[17:39] And in that, we are saying, every time I do slip up, I am going to come in repentance and recommit myself to this standard.

words, not to earn your love, but to express my love and devotion for you.

Now, we are not earning God's grace here, we are responding to God's grace. All of God's people promise to keep all of God's law. But now, in one sense, nothing more needs to be said.

They have promised to keep all of God's law, and yet, they do say more. We are at a stage of life where we have a two-year-old in the house.

He is an absolute joy and delight. I mean that, I really do. But he is two. Right?

[18 : 44] Which means obedience, right, is not currently his strongest attribute. And because he is not kind of a natural keeper of law, we tell him what is right, but then, to help him implement that understanding, we put specifics on it.

You need to listen. That is what is right. It encapsulates everything, but then we explain exactly what that looks like. So when mom asks you to come to her, you don't run in the other direction. You need to listen captures everything, and yet, when we struggle with a particular area, we need to emphasize, don't we, the right response. God's people have promised to keep all of God's law, but now, in the rest of this chapter, that they pick out the areas of God's law where they recognize they are most likely to slip up, to disobey, and so spell out what they need to do as clearly as possible.

That is a good principle to take with us into any area of life where we struggle with sin. Put specifics on it, put guardrails that you need to put on. But this morning, we are just going to focus on what they focused on here, because I think what they pick out are timeless battlegrounds for God's people.

First of all, we see in verses 30 to 31, God's people recognize their need to strive for holiness, striving for holiness.

[20 : 29] holiness. God's people are called to be holy, just like he is. That's the command of the Lord that God's people have just promised to keep. And holiness means separation, that distinction, a set-apartness.

If you look back to verse 28, you'll see that God's people there are those who have, what have they done? They have separated themselves from the peoples of the lands to the law of God.

We instinctively, don't we, imitate the people around us. If we do not separate ourselves from the world, we will become like the world.

And that does not mean having nothing to do with non-Christians. We're calling God, we're going to go out into the world with the good news. But it does mean not living like the world. The people in Nehemiah 10 immediately identify three ways that they have been living which has been compromising their holiness, their set-apartness.

And so they commit to abandon those practices and turn to the Lord. Three commitments. First of all, they promise, verse 30, they promise not to marry or give in marriage to those outside of God's covenant people.

[22 : 04] That is an instruction that Paul repeats to Christians in 2 Corinthians 6. Secondly, the people promise not to buy anything on the Sabbath from the people of the lands when they come to sell their wares.

And then thirdly, on the seventh year, they promise to forego their crops and their debts. And I will first read, that might sound like a bit of an odd trio, but what do they all have in common?

In each of them, were they to marry unbelievers? Were they to break the Sabbath by trading with the people who came in through the gates? Were they to hold on to their debts?

What would they be doing? They would be parking themselves in the gravitational pool of a world that lived in unholiness.

None of them are flagrant fowls, are they? But they are all putting themselves in a position to fail. Each of them are areas where they and we are tempted, isn't it, to blur the boundary.

[23 : 21] We think, what harm would a little trading on the Sabbath do? Maybe it's an opportunity to build a relationship with these traders, get to know them better. Maybe if we marry these non-believers, we'll be able to convert them.

Wouldn't that be a great thing? If we harvest our crops in the seventh year, won't we have a little bit more money and be able to give more to the church? Can you see the logic? We might think there are good reasons to blur these lines, but it is contrary to God's law.

That is not what he has commanded his people to do. And it would lead them to unholy living, not distinct, not set apart, but very much like the world.

Paul commands the church in Romans 12 not to be conformed to this world. Our call to worship at the beginning of this service, we heard that Jesus Christ saved us to be holy and blameless before him.

Paul's command not to be conformed to this world is an instruction that needs uttering it because we are forever tempted to step little by little towards the way that the world lives.

[24 : 48] There is so much we could rightly think about here and it deserves so much more time in a way but let's just take these very same points. Let me ask you how different does your Sunday look from the world Sunday?

Is it a day for the Lord or is it an hour? an hour? an hour? Are you deliberately blowing the lines? Are you seeking to live by God's law or by your reason? Are you in a relationship with a non-believer? They will pull you towards their way of life.

Do you sometimes neglect God's law? Perhaps not gathering with his people in order to make the bank account a little healthier. Maybe even justifying it by having a bit more to give.

God's law says don't do it. Don't do it. Whatever it might look like, put steps in place to resist that pull.

[26 : 10] Strive for holiness. And it is striving. It is not easy. It is not going to come naturally.

It will be costly. But God's people are called to be holy. And so holy living is what they promise to do.

If we know and love Jesus, we will want to keep his commandments. All of his commandments. Whatever the cost. We all want to be holy just like he is.

So they commit in very specific ways to strive for holiness. And then secondly, they commit in specific ways to support the work of God's house. Perhaps you noticed that as we were reading through it, verse 32 to 39 is all about the house of God.

It's mentioned nine times in eight verses. And the whole section is summarized with that last sentence there. We will not neglect the house of our God.

[27 : 26] Supporting the work of God's house was not personally profitable. It was not fashionable. It was not comfortable. And that is why they needed to spell out their commitment to it.

Now, we do not do we have a temple to supply with firewood. But what was God's house? It was exactly what it says in the tin, isn't it?

It was where God dwelt on earth. That now is not a physical temple, it is the church, the people of God amongst whom he dwells.

if we want to uphold our promise to walk in the way that Jesus walked, we must commit promise to support the work of his church.

Three ways we see the people commit to support God's house here. First, God's people promised to give. And they promised to give more than they were required.

[28 : 31] Verse 32, they promised to give a third of a shekel every year. The law set the bar at half a shekel every census.

They promised to give a slightly smaller amount far more frequently. It would be like giving three pounds a day instead of five pounds a month. It's that simple question.

Do you give to the church for the work of the gospel? Remember who signed up to obey all of God's law?

All of God's people? Do you give generously? Now, to be clear, if you are visiting or if you are not a Christian, there is no expectation whatsoever that you give.

I'm not directing this question at you. If you are a member of a church, I am asking you, do you give?

[29 : 40] The people in Nehemiah's day knew exactly the same temptations that we have today. What will anybody really notice? Nobody sees my bank account, I can give a bit less than I need to.

There will always be a temptation to hold back. So, what do they do? They make an explicit promise to give, and to give more than they needed to. They promised to give to the church, and secondly, they promised to serve the church.

There are many things in the life of the church that are necessary. Not all of those things, not many of those things are glamorous.

When it came to the temple, one of those areas was collecting the firewoods. There were not long queues of people lining up, waiting eagerly to take their turn at swinging an axe.

It would have been time consuming, tiring, thankless. So, what do they do? Verse 34, we, the priests, the Levites, and the people, we all promise to take our turn.

[30 : 57] every name goes into a hat, and whoever comes out, they're getting the firewoods. No one's above it, no one's beneath it. Everyone chips in.

Everyone was ready to get the menial work done. There are many areas of church life that are necessary, but not glamorous. Let me just encourage you, those of you who are doing that work, those of you laminating on a Friday afternoon, those of you doing the pat testing on a Wednesday, those of you dealing with a mountain of PVG applications, those of you who are getting all the food safety policy stuff ready, and so many more besides.

The Lord sees your work, and it makes him glad. But perhaps you are sitting here this morning, and you have more to give, you have more time to give.

Perhaps you are not doing the equivalent of collecting the firewoods. Let me say to you, get on the cleaning rota. Instead of waiting for your name to be drawn out of a hat, put it forward.

Go and speak to a deacon or to Judy. Ask where you can help, what needs done. If you don't get given anything, ask them to let you know when you can help.

[32 : 34] The Church of Christ needs all of its members to be getting stuck in, to be willing to do the dirty work, to be willing to serve, not waiting to be served.

Everyone, retired, working, unemployed, single, married, student, teen, everyone gets involved. So we have seen that they promised to give to the church, they promised to serve the church, and then thirdly, they promised to prioritize the church.

You'll see that from verse 35 through to the end of the chapter. Not only did they promise to give, they promised to give the first of all they get. And I think we need to sit in this for a moment just to appreciate what they are promising to do here.

Just look at verse 35 with me. We bind ourselves. We bind ourselves to bring the first fruits of the ground and the first fruits of all fruit of every tree year by year to the house of the Lord.

also to bring to the house of our God the firstborn of our sons, of our cattle, as it is written on the law. On it goes, and then on top of that, verse 38, on top of that, verse 38, they give their tithes.

[33 : 51] They're not just tithing, they are tithing and giving all their first fruits and giving a third of a shekel a year. And these were not wealthy people. They were sitting in a city that was still in ruins.

Many of them would be moving in. Their house was not yet built. But before they got a quote from the building contractor, they promised to give the first of everything they got. And the majority of them would have had enough to survive and very little else.

Before they know whether they will have enough to see through the winter, they give some of their precious little produce to the house of gods. A calf is born.

Will other healthy calves be born? Maybe, but maybe not. But that calf is going to the temple because that is our number one priority.

The average person here this morning, you might not feel like you are rich. Compared to the average Israelite in chapter 10, they would be astounded at your wealth. It would have blown them away.

[35 : 00] That the comfort, the luxury that we live in, the holidays we can go on, the food we can eat, the clothes we can wear, it would have blown their minds.

That does not mean we should impoverish ourselves unnecessarily, but it does mean I think we should be even more generous. Even more generous and find it easier to prioritize the work of the church.

It might make our lives a little less comfortable. It will not put us into subsistence living. Maybe it's too many uncomfortable questions this morning, but let me ask you.

Do you leave your giving to the end of the month to see if you can afford it? Or is it the first thing that comes out of the paycheck? Where does it lie in the list of priorities?

priorities? Is it more important than saving up for your holiday? It should be. When you're organizing the calendar, does supporting the work of the church take precedent?

[36 : 12] Or does it just make it in if there are gaps that can be filled? When you're organizing your diary, does the prayer meeting take precedent over the Champions League?

It should. Is the church getting the first fruits of your life? Or is it getting the leftovers at the end of the month?

Here was a people ready, eager, to promise to set themselves apart, to support the work of God's house?

Not to earn God's favor, not to show off the righteousness, but because they knew how unrighteous they were. This is all in response to the confession of chapter 9.

The recognition that we are not good. We are sinful, and yet God has been merciful. Because of what he has done for us, because of the great love he has shown to us, we now promise to love him by living the way he has asked us to, commanded us to.

[37 : 30] They promised to do this because they knew who they once were, and they knew what the Lord had done for them, and they wanted now to show their love and devotion to him.

let us bear fruits in keeping with repentance. When we confess our sin, we are to turn away from the way in which we once walked, and we are to turn and commit ourselves wholly to walk in the way that Jesus walked, promising to keep all of his law, not to earn his love, but to show our love, striving for holiness, holiness, supporting the church of Christ, setting ourselves apart, and giving all that we can, not because it will make our lives easier, but because he saved us to be holy and blameless before him.

Let us pray for the Lord's help in that. Father, we recognize the sin that lies in our own hearts, the tendency to not live according to your words.

Lord, we thank you and praise you so much that you have forgiven us that sin, that you have redeemed us from it, that we might no longer be slaves to sin but to righteousness.

So we pray now that you would help us to live in a manner that is worthy of the gospel of Christ, live in a manner that is pleasing to you as we respond to the great, the infinite, the immeasurable love that you have shown us in Christ Jesus by promising to love you and do what he has commanded us.

[39 : 26] Lord, help us for we are weak, but you are strong. May you work in us by your spirit, not so that we would be filled with pride, but so that Jesus would receive all glory, honor, and power, both now and forever more.

In his name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.