

Whose Side are You On?

Psalm 124:1 *A Song of Ascents.
Of David.*

If it had not been the LORD
who was on our side-- let
Israel now say--

² if it had not been the LORD
who was on our side when
people rose up against us,

³ then they would have
swallowed us up alive, when
their anger was kindled
against us;

⁴ then the flood would have
swept us away, the torrent
would have gone over us;

⁵ then over us would have
gone the raging waters.

⁶ Blessed be the LORD, who
has not given us as prey to
their teeth!

⁷ We have escaped like a bird
from the snare of the fowlers;
the snare is broken, and we
have escaped!

⁸ Our help is in the Name of
the LORD, who made heaven
and earth.

Neh 4:7 But when Sanballat and
Tobiah and the Arabs and the
Ammonites and the Ashdodites
heard that the repairing of the walls
of Jerusalem was going forward
and that the breaches were
beginning to be closed, they were
very angry.

⁸ And they all plotted together to
come and fight against Jerusalem
and to cause confusion in it.

⁹ And we prayed to our God and
set a guard as a protection against
them day and night.

¹⁰ In Judah it was said, "The
strength of those who bear the
burdens is failing. There is too
much rubble. By ourselves we will
not be able to rebuild the wall."

¹¹ And our enemies said, "They will
not know or see till we come among
them and kill them and stop the
work."

¹² At that time the Jews who lived
near them came from all directions
and said to us ten times, "You must
return to us."

¹³ So in the lowest parts of the
space behind the wall, in open
places, I stationed the people by

their clans, with their swords, their spears, and their bows.

¹⁴ And I looked and arose and said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes."

¹⁵ When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work.

¹⁶ From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah,

¹⁷ who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other.

¹⁸ And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me.

¹⁹ And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "The work is great and widely spread, and we are

separated on the wall, far from one another.

²⁰ In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

²¹ So we labored at the work, and half of them held the spears from the break of dawn until the stars came out.

²² I also said to the people at that time, "Let every man and his servant pass the night within Jerusalem, that they may be a guard for us by night and may labor by day."

²³ So neither I nor my brothers nor my servants nor the men of the guard who followed me, none of us took off our clothes; each kept his weapon at his right hand."

Psalm 125:1 *A Song of Ascents.*

Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.

² As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore.

³ For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous

Neh 5:1 Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers.

² For there were those who said, "With our sons and our daughters, we are many. So let us get grain, that we may eat and keep alive."

³ There were also those who said, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine."

⁴ And there were those who said, "We have borrowed money for the

stretch out their hands to do wrong.

⁴ Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts!

⁵ But those who turn aside to their crooked ways the LORD will lead away with evildoers! Peace be upon Israel!

king's tax on our fields and our vineyards.

⁵ Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children are as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards."

⁶ I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

⁷ I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. I said to them, "You are exacting interest, each from his brother." And I held a great assembly against them

⁸ and said to them, "We, as far as we are able, have bought back our Jewish brothers who have been sold to the nations, but you even sell your brothers that they may be sold to us!" They were silent and could not find a word to say.

⁹ So I said, "The thing that you are doing is not good. Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies?"

¹⁰ Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest.

¹¹ Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the percentage of money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them."

¹² Then they said, "We will restore these and require nothing from them. We will do as you say." And I called the priests and made them swear to do as they had promised.

¹³ I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may God shake out every man from his house and from his labor who does not keep this promise. So may he be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said "Amen" and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

¹⁴ Moreover, from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year to the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes the king, twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor.

¹⁵ The former governors who were before me laid heavy burdens on the people and took from them for their daily ration forty shekels of silver. Even their servants lorded it over the people. But I did not do so, because of the fear of God.

¹⁶ I also persevered in the work on this wall, and we acquired no land, and all my servants were gathered there for the work.

¹⁷ Moreover, there were at my table 150 men, Jews and officials, besides those who came to us from the nations that were around us.

¹⁸ Now what was prepared at my expense for each day was one ox and six choice sheep and birds, and every ten days all kinds of wine in abundance. Yet for all this I did not demand the food allowance of the governor, because the service was too heavy on this people.

¹⁹ Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people."

PSALM 124-125; NEHEMIAH 4:7-5:19

Taking Sides

I'm a pastor and we are in church. So I want to ask you, "WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?" What is your answer? Maybe you are quick to reply, "Why, I'm on God's side, pastor Doug." Maybe you aren't sure how you can answer, because

you don't know who the "whose side" refers to. You think that since this is a sermon, it probably refers to God's side. But maybe it doesn't. Then there's the "you" in the question. Whose side are YOU on? Who does "you" describe?

In fact, I'm not asking the question about whose side (you and I) are on, at least not yet, though I did think most of us would assume that's what I mean. I wanted it be a little tricky. Because when it comes to the Bible, to think this way first actually gets it backward.

Joshua once met a man (Josh 5:13). This man was suddenly standing before him and he had a drawn sword in his hand. He must have been quite awesome in appearance, but Joshua was brave and needed an answer. So he basically asked him, "Whose side are you on?" He wanted to know if the man was for him and his army or on the side of his enemies.

The man's response was extremely brief: "No."

Joshua had to be thinking, "No? No, what? No, you're not on our side or no you're not on their side?" "No" was all the answer he received. Though, he did then get more information about who this man was.

“No; but I am the commander of the army of the LORD.” “Commander” can be translated as “captain” or even “prince.” This is the Prince of the Hosts of Heaven. He is on his own side. Joshua had asked the right question first. And he learned that he was talking to the Angel of the LORD, so he fell down and worshiped.

Whose side are you on, God? That’s the \$64,000 question. It’s a question that necessitates an answer. That answer must come from Scripture. Interwoven with this question is the other: Are you on God’s side and how would you know? Only when you know with certainty the answers, can you then move to the application of what it means if we are on the same side together.

Why would I start a sermon in such a way? It has to do with the way our first Psalm begins. “If it had not been the LORD who was on our side—let Israel now say—if it has not been the LORD who was on our side...” (Ps 124:1-2). Two times in two verses, this Psalm of Ascent asks Israel (and as we saw last week, therefore the church) to repeat this thought: *If it had not been the LORD who was on our side.* But to get to its application or what this means, we have to investigate the prior questions.

First, how did the LORD “get” on “their” side? The answer is found way back in Genesis and Deuteronomy. Genesis 12 is the starting line in a very particular way for Israel. The LORD came to Abram and told him to leave his country and family and home and go to the place he would show him. There, he would make him into a great nation (**Gen 12:1-2**). Who is the one going to whose side here? It is **God coming to Abram**, a man whose father worshiped other Elohim (**Josh 24:2**). In other words, **Abram wasn't looking for the LORD**. The LORD went looking for him. This whole “side” thing is God's business!

Moses puts it this way. “**You are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery**” (**Deut 7:6-8**). Moses is talking about Israel, and he is clearly teaching that

it is **the doctrine of election** that is the cause of the LORD being on Israel's side. Election and his sworn oath to do so. Again, this is God's prerogative. He is the instigator.

All this happened because of a plan that was first told to Satan. **"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel"** (**Gen 3:15**). This is the germination of the Bible's "Seed" theology which continues to grow through Noah (**Gen 9:9**); Abraham (**15:5**), David (**2Sa 7:12**), until it finally becomes the full glorious Tree of Jesus Christ who is the Seed (**Gal 3:16**).

What was the purpose of his coming? In one sense, you could say it was **to make it possible for his people to be brought into a right relationship with the Father** as he became our Prophet, Priest, and King. Jesus did everything needed to bring anyone he wants to his side. Why would we need this electing work of God?

All are born into this world as **"sons of disobedience"** who were **"following the prince of the power of the air"** (**Eph 2:2**). He told the Pharisees, **"You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires"** (**John 8:44**). But to his disciples he said, **"You did not choose me,**

but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit ... I chose you out of the world” (John 15:16, 19).

Amazingly, even the disciples originally had the devil as their Father. Election works on both a corporate and individual level. Yes, corporately, Israel and therefore the Twelve were God’s chosen people. Corporate election got them physical blessings. But the same was true of the Pharisees. They needed a different Father which came to them through adoption. This is where the spiritual blessings reside.

Again, this is why Jesus came. “To redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:5). Adoption means that God becomes *our* father. It comes when God, through the Gospel and the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit (“you received the Spirit of adoption as sons” Rom 8:15) calls you by name so that you hear his voice. As Jesus said, “An hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (John 5:25). Again, “He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out ... the sheep follow him, for they know his voice” (John 10:3-4).

I'm telling you this so that **if you do not know if God is your Father**, you might know that Jesus is calling you even this moment to come and follow him. This is one of the main things we must always hear in church. God has made it possible for children of the devil to become children of God. Children born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God (**John 1:12-13**).

The next thing is, **how would you know** if God has become your Father? In other words, how would you know if you were on God's side? Well, you hear his voice when he calls like this and you say, "**Yes. I believe that. I want that. I need that.**" This is looking to Christ by faith, trusting that these things are true. It is a turn of your life, a forsaking of your own ways—a repenting—to go and follow Jesus who is both Lord and God. Not only is he Master, but he becomes *your* Master.

If you trust in him by faith, if you find yourself longing for these very words to be true for you, then you may know that you have eternal life and that God has called and has adopted you into his family. Then you will know that you are on the same side, because in Christ he has reconciled you to himself. So please, I plead with you now, look to this Jesus

who has come down to you so that you do not have to go trying to find him. This is the only way you can begin to sing Psalm 124.

Ps 124 and Nehemiah's 5th Testimony (Neh 4:7-23)

If you know you are on his side, **then you can sing** with Israel the beginning of Psalm 124, which is what we want to look at now. In the ESV the song begins, “**A Psalm of Ascent. Of David.**” But the LXX^A and a number of Hebrews MSS texts do not ascribe it to anyone. Someone has rightly written, “**It is a late guess, inferred perhaps from the similar threat of drowning in the Davidic Psalms 18 and 69.**”¹

Does it matter that much? Mostly, no. If David wrote it, which we have already seen he did with Psalm 122, Nehemiah and Ezra could still have thought it was a useful song for helping teach Israel about this newer, post-exilic history during the Feast of Tabernacles, which we have seen

¹ **Goulder**, 54. Also **Leslie C. Allen**, *Psalms 101–150 (Revised)*, vol. 21, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 221. He cites **A. F. Kirkpatrick** (*The Book of Psalms*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906], 744), who notices that the language of the song is much more recent than David. I will cite Kirkpatrick later as he and other older commentators before Goulder's work saw Psalms of Ascent and Nehemiah parallels.

is part of the reason these songs are collected together. On the other hand, there is an interesting near-perfect pattern to the authorship of the Songs of Ascent if it is retained ([see next page](#); I've not seen anyone comment on this, and I have no idea what its purpose might be).

At any rate, the song begins, as we have seen, by singing about the LORD being on our side, thus making it vital that you know that he is on *your* side. In the pattern of the Psalms of Ascent, it [repeats this idea](#) in two straight verses, creating a kind of [stair-like effect](#). This is how the majority of these poems are written. The effect continues in the repetition in [vv. 2-3](#) of the word “against” and in the idea of watery floods in [4-5](#), and in the idea of escaping from some terrible death in [6-7](#).



Psalms of Ascent	Symmetry of Authorship
120	?
121	?
122	David
123	?
123	David
125	?
126	?
127	?
128	?
129	?
130	?
131	David
132	?
133	David
134	?

Because the LORD is on their side, they can now understand what this actually means. What is the specific **context** of needing the LORD on their side about in this song? “People rose up against us” (2). Again, in **verse 3**, “They when would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us.” Here is where we can turn to **Nehemiah’s fifth testimony** (**Neh 4:7-23**).

This one is longer than those we have seen so far. It begins with an introduction to a new event. “**But when**

Sanballat and Tobiah [the Ammonite] and the Arabs [Geshem and others] and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry” (Neh 4:7). Again, as the song sings, “Their anger was kindled against us.” This time, Nehemiah shows that there are even more enemies than we have first suspected.

He adds the **Ashdodites** to the others we have previously seen. This is a curious addition, which comes up again later in Nehemiah when the men **intermarry with their women** (Neh 13:23). The town shows up rarely in the OT, but first appears as one of the three strongholds that along with Gaza and Gath (Josh 11:22), where a remnant of the **Anakim** giants remained. Not that all of Ashdod was full of giants, but of the few that were left, some were in it. It was from these cities that Goliath and the other giants in David’s day came.² Of course, this would have been well known, and so the addition only increases the fearfulness of the enemies that are now pursuing the people of Israel as they seek to rebuild the wall.

² This Gaza-Strip Giant inhabitation likely has roots way back in Deut 2:19.

But I think we can learn a bit more about this hostility from Chronicles. **300 years before** Nehemiah, in the days of king **Uzziah**, this king of Israel made war against the Philistines, and broke down the wall of Gath, the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of **Ashdod** (**2Ch 26:6**). The next verse tells us that God helped him against the **Arabians** (**7**). The next tells us that the **Ammonites** had to pay tribute to Uzziah (**8**). Finally, the next verse tells us that Uzziah **built** towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate and the Valley Gate and the Angle and fortified them (**9**).

All of this is an incredibly rare group of people and events to mention together. In fact, it only happens elsewhere here in Nehemiah. The same enemies. The same focus on walls. Friend, if this does not teach you both about **the ancient origins of hostilities** in the Middle East that have lingered on forever, and even more, the ruthless nature of unforgiveness that festers over generations, nothing will. 300 years have gone by and still they retrain their disdain and ferocity against the chosen people of God. They remember what God and Israel did back then. They want nothing to do with either of them now. They do they want a replay of history.

Thus, “They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it” (8). “Confusion” is a rare word and has been translated as anything from to “hinder” (KJV), to “disturbance” (NAS) or “stir up trouble” (NIV), to “do it injury” (YLT), to “destroy it utterly” (Brenton LXX).³

This time, my thoughts go forward in time, to that last great battle when Satan will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle and they will march up over the broad plain of the earth and surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city (Rev 20:8-9). This has happened since Nehemiah’s day, particularly in 70 AD. And it has been happening to God’s people, the heavenly Jerusalem, in every century since. There is also a terrible day coming when the whole world will seek as one to destroy Christ’s church. This is at the instigation of Satan.

Curiously, there is something possibly supernatural just below the surface as the song continues. “Then the flood would have swept us away, the torrent would have gone

³ The LXX here uses the word *paratasso*. It refers to the drawing up of battle orders, which clearly means at least fight, but probably much more than this.

over us; then over us would have gone the raging waters” (Ps 124:4-5). Goulder explains something we have seen before in the Psalms. “Israel had inherited creation [stories] in which God triumphed over a water-monster, Leviathan (Ps 74) or Rahab (Ps 89); and in both these psalms such monsters symbolize the powers of chaos still active in enemy armies.”⁴ Of course, Leviathan is personified in Satan, the Dragon of Isaiah (Isa 27:1) and Revelation (Rev 20:2). And in Scripture, he clearly insights the nations of the earth against God’s people.

Therefore, we are in great need of God’s help. And it is a good thing that he is on our side! The next thing Nehemiah does is the continuation of an important teaching lesson in such instances. He “pray[s] to our God” (Neh 4:9). What other possible first response could there be?

One he has prayed, he begins to act. He does not wait for a miracle from the sky. He “set a guard as protection against them day and night” (9). As they continued to be attacked verbally (10-11), the Jews came to Nehemiah ten times begging for him to return (12). Nehemiah took courageous action and stationed people by their clans, with

⁴ Goulder, 54.

their **swords**, **spears**, and **bows** throughout the open places behind the wall (13). No one will take their weapons from them, because they know what would happen to them if they let it happen, even as Jews 2,500 years later learned in the holocaust.

He then gave the people the **instructions** of Moses to Joshua: **Do not be afraid of them** (14). **Remember the Lord who is great and awesome** (14). **Fight for your families and your homes** (14). Again, this is not sit around and hope for the best. It was making a plan and putting it to action. The plan worked. It frustrated the enemies and the work on the wall continued (15), with half of the men working on construction and the other half ready for war (16-23).

His theological point of view here is important. **Human responsibility and God's sovereignty** worked together. Though he stationed the men and told them to fight, nevertheless, **"Our God will fight for us"** (20). The Psalm thus changes its tune in this exact way. **"Blessed be the LORD, who has not given us as prey to their teeth! We have escaped like a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken, and we have escaped. Our help is in the Name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth"** (Ps 124:6-8). The

song perfectly fits the context of Nehemiah's fifth testimony.

Because this story is a type of the great battle to come, which involves our future, and because God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and because God has shown his favor to us in Christ, we can also sing this glorious song of God's power over his enemies. As well you should whenever his people are saved or even when they willingly die for him. For that means he has brought them home to heaven.

Psalm 125 and Nehemiah's Sixth Testimony (Neh 5)

But we are not finished today. Psalm 125 provides a **great warning** for what it means to truly be able to sing Psalm 124. This is clearer when read against the backdrop of **Nehemiah's sixth testimony**. This testimony is found in Nehemiah 5.

It begins, again, with a **new circumstance**: **Now there arose a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brothers (5:1)**. From the start, we can see the importance of the way we began this morning, with the

need to know that the LORD is on your side. For we have here brother doing terrible things against brother. Jew against Jew. Israelite against Israelite. Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. Sitting here listening to a sermon does not make you a Christian.

What was happening? There was a famine. Some said, “For there were those who said, ‘With our sons and daughters, we are many. So, let us get grain, that we may eat and keep alive’” (5:2). Others said, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine” (3). Still others said, “We have borrowed money for the king’s tax on our fields and our vineyards. Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children are as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards” (4-5).

As terrible as that all is, when times were tough in the ancient world, this was often the way of it. But it is not famine, not over-population, not taxation, not even indentured servanthood that made Nehemiah mad. And he got *very* angry (6). Why? His own people were doing this to

one another. “I took counsel with myself, and I brought charges against the nobles and the officials. I said to them, ‘You are exacting interest, each from his brother.’ And I held a great assembly against them” (7).

In his best lawyering voice that would have made **Perry Mason** proud, he told them we have just come out of enslavement to the nations, we have brought many back to the land. And now you turn around and sell your brothers, even suggesting that we buy them back from you? (8). They were silent. Guilty as charged.

He was not done. What you are doing is **not good**. You ought to be walking in the fear of our God in order to prevent the taunts of the nations who are the real enemies (9). Instead, you make them blaspheme God’s name, while you hurt one another. This is the very reason we went into exile in the first place! Have you learned nothing? There are so many applications to be had here about basic morality and obeying God’s law, but I will leave those to you in order to stay on point.

Nehemiah continues. I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us **abandon this exacting of interest** (10). In other words, Nehemiah had

means, but he would not take advantage of the people. This kind of basic looking after family is found in both Testaments, and Nehemiah is the quintessential godly leader. Wicked, Satanic people do these other things. He demanded they return to everyone their fields and vineyards and orchards and houses and the interest they were exacting from the people (11).

Here's the warning then. These men, who were Israelites, his chosen corporate people, were not on the Lord's side! I'm guessing they would have sung Psalm 124 proudly. The LORD *is* on our side! “No.” That is how Psalm 125 in conjunction with Nehemiah can help you get to the root that Psalm 124 presupposes.

Importantly, we now ask, what would they do about it? Nehemiah makes them swear that they will obey him, and he even called the priests to oversee it (12). Then, in a symbolic act, he shakes out the fold of his garment and says, “So may God shake out every man from his house and from his labor who does not keep this promise” (13). Making oaths to God is serious business. That includes the oath of baptism which starts it off as Christians, and oaths that we make each week in Church, that we believe in the Triune

God and in Christ has done all these things for us. It also, of course, includes our obedience to the LORD concerning his law when we say that we agree that it is good and that we will obey it. If we should fail to trust and give up the race, “**May we be shaken out and emptied.**”

In light of this, can you see what good news election is then, and how important it is to know that God is on your side first? What did the wicked men do? Incredibly, by God’s grace, they all to a man said, “**Amen**” and **praised the LORD**. And the people did as they had promised (13). This beautiful verse is a reminder to generations that come after horrible discipline at the LORD’s hand. Remember the context as you allow me to meddle a bit for a moment. They had no sooner returned to the land than they start acting just like their forefathers in treachery and hate of neighbor. But they were close enough to the discipline to remember what God had done. This seems to have been a means God used to soften their hearts towards him.

Beloved, we are a people who have come from much hardship. Though, perhaps you do not know your history. As Christians, many who came from Europe and even other parts of the world suffered terribly for their faith. Our

fathers endured unspeakable horrors at the hands of wicked men, men who said that God was on *their* side. Horrible suffering, imprisonment, burning at the stake. This was especially true, though not exclusively true, of Baptists, who were persecuted like few others. These are the very things that gave America its First Amendment. And even the secular Fathers of America understood how quickly men forget.

We are now living in unprecedented prosperity, many generations after such cruelty of brother against brother. And the present generation seems hell-bent on returning to the cruelty and tribalism of the old ways. Soon, there will be no First Amendment that even matters.

I say this not to make a political statement, so much as to make a moral application. Keep your hearts soft towards God, beloved. It takes not one generation, but less than one. You can change just as easily as your children. Our natural disposition is the opposite of softness towards God. Do not let prosperity, especially prosperity that comes off the backs of slaves, or indentured servants, or the deaths of babies (think some forms of stem cells), or a myriad of other things make you insensitive to God or neighbor. Do what God

says. And know that he is on your side. I speak to you who are loved by God. And to those who do not know, remember, it is never too late to turn back to the LORD, just like these Israelites did. For today is the day of salvation.

Amazingly, when the church reformed in Nehemiah's day, they put this godly man in charge of them as governor (14). He governed them with godliness rather than in wickedness. He governed them closely rather than aloofly and from afar. "Neither I nor my brothers ate the food allowance of the governor" (14). I did not lay heavy burdens on the people or lord anything over anyone *because of the fear of God* (15). Do you see the true consequences of leadership that really fears God? I preserved in the work on this wall. I acquired no land. He was one of them, not above them. All my servants worked with me (16). Even at my table, 150 Jews and officials from the nations came (17), and I took from my own stock the oxen and sheep and wine, so as not to demand anything because I was a ruler of the people (18).

His testimony ends in another prayer. "Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people" (19). As we look at Psalm 125, we see that it ends similarly:

“Peace be upon Israel” (Ps 125:5). But the way it gets there is very similar to this sixth testimony.

It reminds them, “Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever” (1). Such words are a constant needed reminder in the midst of suffering at the hands of others, so that you will not give up trusting! The stair-step repetition continues in the next verse with the theme of mountains.

“As the mountains surrounded Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time forth and forevermore” (2). Returning to Armageddon, the nations surrounded the camp and the city of God—that is the church. But the psalm teaches us that *the LORD surrounds his people*, not only in Nehemiah’s day but forever into the future. So, when they surround you, look up and out and see the protection of God. He will not let your feet slip into the pit of hell.

Verse 3 actually echoes the things the people were doing to the enrichment of their wicked brothers. They were selling their land. But the verse says, “For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous stretch out their hands to do wrong” (3). Can you see how this applies not only to the

righteous who are suffering, but even to God's elect who have as of yet come to repentance. The wickedness stopped. Many were saved. And it was God's mercy so that the entire nation did not fall in those days into more punishable wrongdoing.

It finishes with a prayer too. “Do good, O LORD, to those who are good” (4), even as Nehemiah did asked God to remember him for good, because of the good he had done for the people. The good is for the sake of those “who are upright in their hearts!” (4). And why are they upright? Because they trust in the LORD (1). It is by faith.

But woe to those who are not. “But those who turn aside to their crooked ways the LORD will lead away with evildoers!” (5). Why? Because justice demands it and he will not let such evil being done to God's people continue indefinitely. Because he loves the peace of Israel. And as we saw last week, today, Israel is where the Spirit of God is. This is his church, in those who trust in Christ and know that they are on his side, because God in Christ has come down to them to show them that he is on theirs.

So now ask yourself again. Whose side are you on? Then, when you answer, remember to go back to the first

thing I said. And know that if you are on his side, it is first because he is on your side in Christ Jesus.