

Mike Rakes
Renew Part 17
The Best is Yet To Come
August 21, 2011

Take your Bibles. I want to go back to II Samuel 5. I am going to kind of do an overview a little bit here. You know our culture is changing and I think I have kind of been narrating for you the end of an era both in church and even in private schools. And, I follow on Twitter, I follow the Association of Higher Education, that looks at private Christian schools, not just elementary, middle and high school, but it looks at colleges as well. I follow them on Twitter and they sent out a Twitter update to all faculty members of private colleges that they needed to brush up on their resumes and plan on getting a second career. It was a shocking article. In fact, I forwarded it to a few people because there is such a shift coming in the way people are thinking. And it was saying that basically that faculty members need to be aware that the education bubble has grown so big that kids can't pay their school loans, therefore, that a lot of the private institutions around the country are going to lose their funding, and therefore, will be trimming back the programs they offer, which means it will impact the faculty dramatically in the coming decade. It was a shocking article. In fact, I thought – I don't know if they thought that was all private and all that, that nobody would see that, but it's a reality. And I am just chuckling in the sense, not in a happy way, but in a way of saying - we better wake up, that our world is changing. The world in which I grew up in, Leave it to Beaver was kind of going off the air when I started to become aware. Shows like Mash were out on the edge. Now that seems like sissy talk, related to what is on television. It's just a different world. We live pretty close to Mayberry, right here. And, so I could say Mayberry doesn't exist anymore, but I guess it never existed in that sense. No, I'm teasing. I've had Barney Fife's chili cheeseburger, okay? It's just gonna be one of those days. I can just tell. Go ahead and get the religiousness off. Here we go. So there are some basic assumptions that I've been saying this month and I've been bringing to you, and I wanted to go back through them right before I get in to II Samuel, because I'm seeing so much in these few chapters of David's ministry and life that are critical to where we are as a nation, as the people of God in America, and even as a church in Winston Salem. Basic assumptions: we assume the resourcing of God's kingdom and activity in the world is changing. We assume that government programs like health care for seniors and other programs may diminish in the decade to come. We assume things like the Pell grants and other programs may diminish the next generation's ability to get a Biblical education. We assume that funding the church and Christian schools through tithing and tuition will become a greater and greater challenge in the years ahead. We assume that God is speaking to leaders by his Holy Spirit to create new ways to fund his work in the people around the globe. We assume that the percentage of charitable giving for tax credit will in some way change in the next couple of decades. We assume that God is wanting to do a great work on the east coast of the United States through some local church. We assume that God wants the Spirit driven church to be dramatically more innovative, to reflect the imagination of the Holy Spirit available for dealing with all of these cultural complexities. We assume that God wants to re-language the gospel to mainstream culture through us. We assume that God wants to raise up men and women and children to respond in new and creative ways, that God's kingdom advance. We assume that God's people and others need ministry after business hours. We assume that a greater emphasis on the love of God, by his Holy Spirit, to all people everywhere, better reflects what it means to be a Biblically functioning community. And we assume that He

must be more in our daily lives through a mindset of a 24/6 church, than one that emphasizes the 90 minute Sunday morning worship experience. And we assume all this and much more conserved to bring renewal to local churches by utilizing current facilities seven days a week, rather than a few hours a week. Can you say amen? Can you say amen? If you don't believe those assumptions – you can replay this in about a decade. Because something I've learned is that in my ministry and how God has used me, I've always been just a little bit further ahead of where the people were and then everyone wakes up later. And I get frustrated but now I realize God uses my voice to give us a caution and a warning. I don't know if you saw this week in the paper – that Winston Salem, that this area, is the highest rated related to hunger. And I tweeted that and put it out on The City for you to see. But, having said that, if you read the following towns – the next three or four towns down are all towns that we have pastored in. I was like “God is poverty like following us? Are we bringing the blight to these places?” And I realized that God has uniquely prepared us for leadership in Winston Salem at this time, because Darla and I have pastored in cities that are listed, and this is an independent report, they are listed as desperate places for people that are hungry. And we have pastored churches right through those and God has been preparing us in these smaller towns, ready for an assignment such as this. And I bring to you the word of the Lord today to tell you that God wants to use you, your wife and your children to speak through and minister to the hurting and the broken and the up and outers as well as the down and outers, those that need to know about Christ. And I believe that you are going to watch a debt-free ministry really find it's legs and become powerful and strong, that we begin to interview candidates and others who would say our ministry needs money and we have a whole team that helps them think about that, and we are able to be the lender and not the borrower, in the name of Jesus. Amen. I believe that. Even today we are just sounding the alarm to students, to wake them up right now. We don't need middle schoolers or high schoolers to go to sleep spiritually, but to awaken. And even after the second service there is this luncheon being held over in the gym just to try to get them awake and aware of what is going on, that's we have got to prepare for these coming changes. Well, there is a big change going on in the kingdom here in II Samuel. Saul is dead and David has been king for about seven and a half years over two of the tribes of Judah. But now all of Israel is going to come together. It's in Chapter 5. I'm not going to take a long time here but I want you to see that the writer, the narrator, is building to a conclusion for the Jewish people, for which he wrote this obviously, as they listen to the conclusion of how David becomes king over all of Israel. And so, their hearts would beat fast as they would listen to these stories as it elevated David in their eyes and saw that God could take a nobody and use them to bring power. What was going on is a little bit more complex and I just want to say it with two sentences. And that is – that the freedom of God to move on behalf of the people was constrained because the people demanded a king that they could see in Saul. They demanded a king that they could see. So God wanted to be free to interact and move on the people as He chose. You're saying “so God's not free?” I'm just saying that the people put someone in between them and God. God wanted to be their king but they wanted an earthly king that was knowable or accessible, that they could make an appointment with, rather than talking and allowing the Lord to do His sovereign work over them. So, as King Saul takes on more and more power the people get more and more oppressed, and even depressed, if you will, because they are defeated. So much is happening. And frankly, in some ways, we must be careful not to experience the same demise, for instance. Americans want a religion of compatibility that allows them to add Jesus to whatever they are doing six days a week. They add Him in on Sunday to rid themselves of a little bit of guilt. And like Israel, if we're not careful, we are going to replace the

sovereignty of God in our lives with a kind of consumeristic God that will give us what we want at the spiritual food bar. John Wesley said “we all want to celebrate the cross but insist on Christ doing all the suffering and dying.” We have replaced the covenant commitment with spiritual consumerism, making God in to a vending machine dispensing cosmic miracles whenever we need one. Now we know that’s not true. And we wouldn’t enter in to this as a mindset and say this is what we want to do. However, we might live that way, and living that way would just be the same thing as making that statement. So today, what I want to do, this message is important to you because I want to show you three signs. I want to show you three signs that the best is yet to come in your life. I want to give you three signs that the best days are in front of you. Not some Pollyanna idea, but a way for us to understand that the best days of David’s life were ahead of him, and ultimately a great legacy left and David doesn’t know it. So here we go – Chapter 5. All of that was fluff and has no impact whatsoever, but I feel a lot better. I had to get that out. So now, verse number one, may the Lord forgive me, verse number one, II Samuel Chapter 5. All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said here we are, your own flesh and blood. Even while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led us out to battle and brought us back. The Lord also said to you: you will shepherd my people Israel and be ruler over Israel. Now they’re saying “now we don’t want a king now, we want a shepherd.” Saul helped change their mind. After forty years of his kingship they are ready for a shepherd now, which is what God wanted them to have all along. So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David, because he was already king over two tribes, King David made a covenant or a contract with them at Hebron in the Lord’s presence and they anointed David king over Israel. For those of you God has given a promise to and said “I’m going to do this” and he still hasn’t done it – all I can tell you is when David got the promise he was likely ten years old, and he has to wait now. You see it played out here. He was thirty. He had to wait twenty years, most likely, to be anointed king over all of Israel. Two decades he ran for his life with Saul. It might even be more than that. Some speculate it’s more. Here it plays out. So, verse number four. David was thirty years old when he began his reign. He reigned four years in Hebron. He reigned over Judah seven years and six months. And in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah. So the king and his men marched to Jerusalem against the Jebusites. So it actually wasn’t called Jerusalem when they marched against it, it was Jebus. And against the Jebusites, who inhabited the land. And the Jebusites had said to David: “you will never get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off, can repel you.” Thinking David can’t get in here. The only problem is they hadn’t calculated the thought that God was with David. So look at verse 7: yet David did capture the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. So here we go. Three aspects of David the shepherd King that really are in contrast to Saul who was this “celebrity king”, if you will. The first thing – this is point number one, and then I’m going to give you the sign number one in just a minute. Here’s the Biblical point: #1: that unity brings economic order. Unity brings economic order. As soon as the tribes aligned with David they had enough power to take over Jebus. They took over the city of Jebus and it becomes the city of David or Jerusalem. So this economic, now stability and order comes to the people of Israel, because now their hearts are unified. It’s a great story. The previous stories the narrator sets up Mephibosheth and all of Saul’s descendents and this war and some powerful stuff and just too long to get in to in this setting, but it all sets up and now they come together in unity. That you can only have economic stability when there is unity. You can only have economic stability in the marriage when there is unity in the house. If you’ve got two individuals opposing each other economically, that’s a disaster in that family, same thing in a church, same thing in a nation. Unless there is unity, there

will be economic disaster. David is now going to be king. The people have seen the light. He is about thirty-seven years old. He was king at thirty but not over everybody. But now they've suffered so much and all this mess, they are saying: now please come and be our king, but remember that God told you to be a shepherd. Be nice to us. We know you're setting up your monarchy here, but please be nice to us, and so, this dividing of the house. Trouble, our little Cairn Terrier, our little dog, is now ten or eleven years old. She's just really cute. If you think of Wizard of Oz, that's Trouble, her name is Trouble. It fits perfectly. But, Trouble gets fixated on stuff and you have to kind of snap her out of it. She can be head on a walk and all of a sudden a bee flies by. And all of a sudden she is distracted by the bee. She will chase the bee for hours if you let her. She will just go and I will be like hey, hey, hey, hey and you have to snap her out of that. And it's as if now the stuff happening in our world is getting everybody's attention. Everybody's paying a little more attention. Maybe things aren't quite as stable as we thought. Life is not static. Nothing just stays the same. We are following the great shepherd. We are in line with what he wants and should be. So I think it's time that we as Christians arise from the banquet table of blessing that was handed down by our grandparents and say: you know what, we've got some work to do. We've got to rebuild the house of God. We've got to think about what the future looks like, and we've got to think about who's going to be walking and living for Jesus two decades from now if we don't step up and face the crisis that's in our nation. And the answer humbly, dear friends, is not found in some great leader, or some great Messiah who's going to come in with a good idea. The answer is found in "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves." But we don't want to humble ourselves because we want church our way. We want to do things our way. But now that there is a crisis, now were open to say God let's do it your way. God is starting to get our attention all over the country. We've got to be bold in bad times and believe our God is overseeing all of this. So a sign #1: follow the leader God puts in place. For seven and a half years Israel didn't and waited while Judah was blessed under David's leadership. Follow the leader God puts in place. God has provided for his people shepherds to lead them. If you are following a shepherd that God has chosen, you will be blessed if you unify under them. I didn't expect an amen. II Samuel Chapter 6. Because we are a democratic society and we think that is higher up than the Bible. But that's alright. That can come down too. II Samuel 6. Then we see the ark is coming in. David wants to move the ark and we've talked about this. If unity brings economic order, track with me here, it's the prophet. That the prophet who knew what to do in bad times. I am telling you, by the Spirit of God, that God has spoken to me. I have a word for this body and that is that we have got to become a 24/6 church. And the seventh day we rest and celebrate the ministry that we have been doing six days as week. That we get the mindset not "what's the church going to do for me?" but I AM the church, what am I doing for myself? How am I going to bless myself by getting in alignment with what God is doing? I'm telling you it's a word and I don't need any affirmation. I know it's a word. God has sent the answer to this church. God has sent the answer. The economic answer is right in front of us. If we will abandon everything we have and go with God in what God wants, we will see the good hand of the Lord and the fruitful reproduction of ministry and many, many, many souls coming in to the kingdom. Anyway, the ark comes in. #2 – that God's presence brings validation, safety and blessing. So the first one is about the prophet and we could talk a long time about it. And the second one is about the priest. This validation. Israel had a shepherd, the safety in following David. But remember, David made a mistake. Keep watching. You're going to see us make mistakes. But what I hope that you will always see is us bouncing back and saying: God is with us. God is helping us. Here is the mistake we made, we are back on

track. David makes a mistake and for ninety days, for ninety days, he is humiliated in front of the whole body, the whole nation. He has waited to be king, ready to be king, killed the lion and the bear and the giant, but he makes a mistake with the ark. But God and his mercy teaches him what he wants to teach him. There is safety in following. The unity of the tribes is seen in allowing David to try and bring back the ark. Even though it was the right thing to do, the right effort, there are all kinds of reasons why David did, I've talked about that. But, at the end of the day the people waited on leadership and David then gets it right. And blessing comes and he gives them all oatmeal cookies to celebrate it while he dances before the Lord, despite it all. So, the key thought is, the difference between Saul and David, is that faith is relational. You will have faith in God if you know Him. You will have faith in God if you know Him. If you don't know Him but know of Him, that's what we call religion. When you hear about that and your faith will weaken and buckle in bad times. The way to survive a bad time is to know there is somebody bigger in charge, somebody smarter, some body greater. Sign #2: that you are on your way to know that the best days are in front of you. Sign #2 is this: that there is a growing awareness of God's personal presence in your life. My heart beats fast sometimes pastor when I think about it. I think the Lord's getting ready to do something in me or through me, or on my behalf. And that heart even races. That personal expectation that God is gonna bless. And then last, Chapter 7 talks about, and I could read so many verses, but I want to get the main point. Pressure put David in God's will. Pressure put David in God's will. And that's point # 3, biblical point number 3. The first one was unity brings economic order. The second is that God's presence brings validation, safety and blessing. The third here is that pressure put David in God's will; prophet, priest and king. David certainly is king here. Political legitimacy comes to the nations. That the kings who knew he is authoritative. They knew, first of all, Jerusalem now is his city. They become powerful in that now. Now they have the ark of God in the center of everything going on, God's presence is with them. They are undefeatable at this point, and it shows in the next chapters. And even peace comes to the land. But pressure put David in that spot. David takes a city. David tries to get the ark and fails and then recovers. The thing that we want to learn from David's life and the scriptures are very kind to David because they want the people reading this to know, because David would have had his bad days too I'm sure. But the thing you see about David on his bad days, you can read in the book of Psalms. Some of those Psalms are written by David and he would pour his heart out to the Lord. On some Psalms: sick 'em, get my enemies God and track them down. Other Psalms it would be like: Lord, you are my shepherd, I shall not want. You are going to take care of me. You are going to take care of me. And then it's like: yeah, I abide under the shadow of the almighty, you cover me. So the growing crisis that is hitting the U.S. church has brought a great revelation to us. We maybe haven't been about the king's business as intensely as we should have in the last decade. Now I love you First Assembly, but many of you are still struggling with a stiff neck here and there. Because you need to hear the word of the Lord, and a I release you from the fear of earthly shepherds. I release you from that fear, earthly shepherds that might hurt you or ask you to put your trust in somewhere else. I am saying: the Lord sent me to you. Now I don't know how bad you were before, that He had to send me, and I can't apologize for your behavior, but you must have done some bad things to deserve me. I don't know what you did. I don't know what you did. But we have been sent with the word of the Lord. I think that one of the reasons why God hid my wife's calling was just so he could call her right here and tick off a bunch of people. That God will speak through who He wants to speak through, in the name of Jesus. I think God wants to show you He wants to speak to this culture and this generation, and He is speaking outside the box of your religious

idea of who He is. He has such a revival and a move of His spirit that wants to come to this triad area, that you can't even fathom in your mind. And you are the ministers, you are to be equipped, you are to be responsible. You don't carry a score card here on Sundays. I'd carry a scorecard Monday through Saturday and see what you are doing for God and say: now let's stop that and now let's get busy. That's what a shepherd does. Picture in your mind, I saw it in prayer, in your mind. I've got it in my office – the big shepherd staff with the hook on the end, or, the corporate briefcase. America wants to follow the corporate pastor, briefcase guy who has a plan. First of all, he has to be a guy because women aren't allowed to lead. Just a thought. So, we have our corporate briefcase right here, and the church would rather align and look at the book reports on all of that and all of the little papers that go in that. But David was more of use to a stick with a crook on the end. And when the sheep were going the wrong way, he would jerk them by the neck – get over here, we're going this way. So I looked at that thing this week. It doesn't have any fuzzies that are real warm and soft on the end of it, because that's not what a shepherd was. The sheep would be happy if you could get them to some green grass. But we've eaten all the green grass on one day out of seven. All the grass is all dried up. Now what we've got, a mud puddle, we all jump up and down on Sundays and call it rain. That ain't rain. That's a mud puddle. We've got to move. He is saying move. You've got to go with me. I'm at work on Monday and Thursday. Get involved with what I'm doing in the kingdom. Get involved, all of us as ministers, getting involved with what God is doing. So, the best is yet to come. Sign #3: that you are allowing the pressure, even in your church, you are allowing the pressure to bring humility to your life, to bring humility to your life. Oh God I love our church but I hate that guy. It's good, you don't need to like a shepherd, you just need to follow one. That's good. That's good. There are people watching online. We've got a lot of people watching online. Maybe some are watching online that are supposed to be back in this building, but that's another thought. We were at a church service recently, Darla and I were in July, and it came out as a church in transition, you could tell. And they are a few years ahead of us. And the reason I knew it was because of the usher. I told this yesterday to the usher team and the greeters that we met with. You could just tell that this whole transition happened. The worship singers were all ages. I mean they were just singing and clapping. On each song they had a different step that they did, but they were free. But there was this one dude in the choir that I resonate with the most. He always went the wrong way whenever everybody else went this way. He just didn't get it but he was trying. He was like: this is my church and I've been in the choir for thirty years and I'm gonna try to do this. They sang the four same songs we had sung earlier in the month and I was smiling at Darla. But then after the first song, the curtain kind of pulled back a little bit, and this worship leader came. He was about six. He was just real young. No he wasn't. He was twenty-five. A big place, a way bigger church than us. He comes out and he is playing the first song and all of a sudden I realize I'm irritated. You know why I'm irritated? He was wearing a sweatband. I don't know why that bothered me. Take the sweatband off buddy, this is church. But I'm not saying that to anybody. I'm not saying take the sweatband off, but in my spirit I'm like "get the sweatband off!" But I'm smiling, I'm singing, I'm clapping, and the Holy Spirit says: that's how some of your people feel. The enemy tricks them. They look at one thing they don't like, they fixate on that like Trouble, your dog, they fixate on that, and they can't shake it. And I said God I repent. I'm telling you it was a mindset. By the third verse in that song, I wanted to go up and take the sweatband off for him. I'm like: praise the Lord, I'm a pastor, praise the Lord. It's just good to be in the house of the Lord. Get the sweatband off. That's what is inside of me. And the Lord showed me my evil heart. I said "God, I'm sorry, let him wear two sweatbands next time."

And do you know the next three songs so blessed me, touched me as I sang praise to God and I got the sweatband out of my heart. Now what's that about? That's about chasing a bee when you're out on a serious walk. That's about getting distracted about something irrelevant. It was a great little object lesson that the Holy Spirit had to teach me. We are all easily deceived. The Lord wants us to smile. The Lord wants us to be joyful in our giving. So the ushers are ready to come. They will stand and get ready. I'm gonna say – we're gonna take the offering and give it to God and then you're going to applaud like crazy and worship Him. You ready? Here we go! We're going to take the offering and give back to the Lord today (applause). Amen! David smiled because he got his city. David smiled because the ark made it home. And David smiled because God said "I'm gonna build you a legacy. I'm gonna build you a house." It's an amazing, amazing transition. Do you know that Jesus has defeated your giants? Maybe it's not Jebus the city, but Jesus defeated your giants. Do you know that Jesus has placed his ark inside of you, his very presence, the presence of the Holy Spirit inside of you? And do you know that Jesus has invited you to come to his house later on and be a part of his legacy? And that's why we give today. I want you to give. If you're wearing a sweatband, go ahead and pull it off and put it in the offering bag because I've just made you feel horrible. But I want you to give with a grateful heart to the Lord and just say: Lord, it's only a dollar, it's only five dollars, or whatever, but I give this Lord because I love you and it's an honor to be a part of what you're doing. *Lord, I am thankful for everything. Now speak to us in the remainder of this service in a way that would please and honor you and that the angels would smile over us today. In Jesus name, Amen.*

Darla Rakes

Renew Part 17

The Best is Yet To Come

August 21, 2011

Well good morning. I guess it's my turn now. I feel like tag team sometimes here. I guess that's kind of what it is. The Genesis series coming up – I can kind of see where God is taking us now, this whole thing we're moving in to. We've really been studying and preparing for that series. Genesis, the whole thing, of course, is about a new beginning, literally the beginning of life, and then you're not very far in to Genesis before we need restoration, redemption and all those sorts of things because of the fall of man. The Lord is about bringing us in to unity. And so much of what pastor is saying about it is what David was trying to do is to bring the people in to that place of unity. And I think it's a time in our church we are to come in to a place of unity in order to do what God wants us to do. Well, yesterday morning I woke up and I see you did too because you're here today, so you woke up again too, right? But I did, I woke up yesterday morning, and I don't know if you've ever had this kind of happen but I woke up and the words were in my head: the joy of the Lord is your strength. The joy of the Lord is your strength. The joy of the Lord is MY strength. So I'm thinking about that and I'm like "okay, Lord are you speaking to me?" Because I don't normally just wake up with words in my head, but sometimes you know. And I was like okay. And I had thought about all week, I kept feeling the Lord was wanting me to talk about joy, so when I woke up with that I was like "okay, let's go find this in the book of Psalms, right?" Because that does sound like it would be Psalms, the joy of the Lord is our strength. I mean just an automatic. So I'm thinking Psalms right away. And so I'm in my morning prayer time, looking up to find the joy of the Lord is my strength, and it's not in Psalms, which is sheer shock to me. And I'm like well this is really interesting. You know God is kind of

mysterious. I mean He really is. When you really get in to following the Lord, I'm telling you it's neat. He likes to surprise and do all kinds of little things. And so, I found out that was actually in Nehemiah. Now this is really, really interesting because I don't know how many of you are really big time in to the book of Nehemiah, but you probably have the general idea that, if you've studied it at all and been in church very long, that Nehemiah was about the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. I need to get the date but I know it was like somewhere in 500 and something BC. And he is just a layman but he gets a real heart, for he knows the Lord wants him to rebuild the walls that had been destroyed and torn down. The gates had been torn down to Jerusalem. They had been just wiped out. What had happened is the Babylonians had come and taken the people, taken the Israelites in to captivity, and they had been in captivity for like seventy years, but in Nehemiah's day that was all over. But the walls were still in ruins and they needed to be repaired. They needed restoration. And I'm thinking: God this is just so interesting. You are just so neat. That you would just say that the joy of the Lord is my strength. So I had to go and find this in Nehemiah and read it for myself, my curiosity. You know you have to know where this is. They had just completed rebuilding the walls. It took them fifty-two days to rebuild the walls and they were completed on October 2nd, which I also find interesting, because it was kind of like fall, and we're moving in to the whole Genesis new beginnings thing in the fall. In fact, we start September 18th. Please don't miss this series. I know that God is going to do a work in your lives. I'm telling you, the stuff that he has given us is straight from Heaven. It's for this church at this time. I'm so excited. It's even hard for me to focus knowing this is coming. But the Lord gave me this in Nehemiah. And you don't necessarily have to turn there. I will read you the part and then I will read it to you. Nehemiah Chapter 18:9. Nehemiah is the governor now. Ezra is the priest and scribe, and the Levites, who were interpreting for the people. Okay, now, you have to get the picture. Ezra, they had come together for the first time in a gathering. The walls are built. The people had not been together and they were all together. It was men and women and children that could understand. They had come together to hear the book of Moses read, the laws read. So they had come together. And Ezra was going through explaining it to them and telling them what the word meant, and it had been so long since they had heard the word and been together in a place of worship. So, they had come together. But when he is reading it the people are mourning and weeping. I mean just you know boo-hooing. And he says this to them: "don't mourn or weep on such a day as this, for today is a sacred day before the Lord your God. For the people had all been weeping as they listened to the words of the law." Now you'll have to get this. This was now the 8th day of October. For the Jewish people, this was kind of like the seventh month in the year which is strange to us. The seventh month in the year for them was like a new year. They would consider that almost like we would consider New Years Eve kind of thing. So they are coming together for the first time in a new gathering with the walls all built and it's like the day of celebration because it's New Years day. And this was a day of atonement for them. The new year beginning, but it was also a day of atonement because it was the 8th day of the month, and the people had gathered there to hear the law and it's just so interesting. But instead of celebrating they're mourning. And I think that's, well you know, that's like that in a lot of churches when people come together. Have you ever gone to a church and it's kind of like a day of mourning, you know? And you're like wow this is really sad. And I think sometimes maybe we think when we come together that we have that idea that the Lord wants us to be really sad when we come together. But I find this so interesting because it's the day of atonement on the 8th day, that they're supposed to be celebrating on the day of atonement. Now in the Old Testament that would be the day like where the priest had like made sacrifice and your sins were

gone, you were clean and pure before God. For us, the day of atonement, in the New Testament, would be like when Christ took our sins and like we're clean and we're purified by his blood and we celebrate the atonement because of what Christ has done for us. So, it's kind of strange that they're mourning. And in verse ten of Chapter 8, and Nehemiah continued and he says "go and celebrate with the feast of rich foods and sweet drinks and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before the Lord." Well you know the word sacred kind of thinks you should be sad, right? I think sometimes when you think of sacred on Sundays, we kind of have the idea of a long face. But then he says "this is a sacred day before the Lord; don't be dejected and sad," and here's the word that I woke up with, "for the joy of the Lord is your strength." And I read it in Holman's and I love the way Holman's says it: "do not grieve because your strength comes from rejoicing in the Lord." This is the day of atonement, and for us, we are going to take communion in a little bit, so it like totally connects. I'm like, God like put this together today which like makes me crazy. And I found out Rob brought a word this morning to the choir and it was the joy of the Lord is your strength. And I mean, God just kind of orchestrates things here and I didn't know that the communion thing, and the Nehemiah and the restoration and all of this ties together. A new beginning for your life, and I think it's a new beginning for this church. It's a rebuilding of your life, but what happened with the people is when they were hearing the word of God, what they were doing was mourning about what was. It doesn't say exactly what all they were mourning about. But you know when you're hearing the word you're supposed to be there celebrating and I don't think they knew to celebrate. I think they were hearing the word of God and they were going: we have been through so much. We have been through so much and we're so tired and we're so weary. And then, even ourselves, we start looking back at our failures. We look at our failures and we're going okay, that's defining my future because I am looking at how I messed up and how I grieved the Lord in my life. And God's going - no, no, no, no, no, no - day of atonement. We're not looking at your failures right now, we're thinking about restoration and we're thinking about what I'm going to do in your life, and we're thinking about the future and what I have for you. This is a day of celebrating! And I'm telling you God has ordered this day for this people here. Whether you are a visitor or what today, you didn't just happen in. God is saying to you: my house is a place to rejoice, and what I did for you on the cross is a day of celebration, because I took away the sins of the world through Him. And what you've done in the past and all those failures, don't come in here mourning about those. Leave those behind and go after the new life that I have for you. And as a church, I feel like God is saying prophetically to us: quit looking at the past failures. Quit looking at how long it has taken to build the walls back. They're built back. The gates are up and now we're ready. We are against the enemy, we're safe. That's why the put the walls up first you know, to keep the enemy out. We've got that built. Now God's saying: there are new things to do. We're just now getting started. It's a new beginning, a new start for your life. So don't mourn and don't weep and don't look back at what was. And don't even wish for the past, because what I have ahead of you is so much better. Amen? Amen. Now, we're going to do communion but we're not going to do it mourning. Because today, the Lord doesn't want us to be sad for what he has done for us, for what he did was good and it was to bring a celebration in our hearts and joy in our hearts in knowing it's taken care of. My past is taken care of. It's done. I'm just going to say a prayer over you but then we are going to sing and then we are going to take communion together the way the Lord wants it done today. *Father, I thank you for the forgiveness of my sins and God I thank you for the forgiveness of your people's sins. And God, I thank you that you have wiped out and blotted out all of our failures personally in the past and all of our failures as a church in*

the past. And God, you are saying there's a new day and the new day that you have is good and we are to celebrate what is to come. We are to celebrate in advance of what you are going to do in this city, God, by faith God. We are to celebrate what you are going to do in our lives God. And I thank you God. I thank you for this day of communion in which we will not be sad and mourn, for you have said: the joy of the Lord is our strength. So we're going to be strengthened by being joyful today in You. In your name we pray, Amen.