Enduring Enemies

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[0:00] Welcome to Built on God's Word, the preaching and teaching ministry of Highland Park Baptist Church in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.! Evan George teaches on Nehemiah 6, verses 1-14.

Nehemiah 6, as you're turning there, I want you to think about this. What comes to mind when you hear the word endurance? What comes to mind when you hear the word endurance?
Any immediate thoughts? What comes to mind when you hear the word endurance? Strength. What else?
Or the act of enduring? Say that again. Suffering well, yes. Any other immediate thoughts? Endurance. Endurance. What might be implied by the word endurance? What conditions might have to be true for us to describe it as a level of endurance?
[1:10] Yeah, this level of continual effort to keep going seems to necessitate some level of difficulty. You might think of a runner facing some resistance, whether that's internal or external.

It could be external obstacles or maybe inner weariness. Difficult terrain or maybe discouragement. Maybe when you hear the word endurance, a particular Bible figure comes to mind.
Or someone you may know personally. Maybe it could be a level of overcoming. A continuing on. But as we continue to think through endurance this morning, I would invite you to consider what does endurance, specifically through difficulty and opposition, look like in your life?
What does endurance look like in your life right now? Over the last two weeks, we have covered Nehemiah's chapter 4 and chapter 5. And in this larger section within Nehemiah, we see this continual theme of opposition.
So we get to chapter 4 and there is external and internal opposition. There's more internal opposition as you get into chapter 5. And here in chapter 6, we'll see more opposition.
[2:25] The opposing efforts and conflicts have been both from external parties, so non-Jews, and internal parties, the Jews themselves. And when we think about the, if we read chapters 4 and 5, really the opposition has been to God's people more broadly.

Like the way it's spoken about, the opposition is against the corporate body of God's people more so. Today in chapter 6, we'll see that really the enemies of God lock on to Nehemiah.
And it's more targeted for Nehemiah himself. Nehemiah, of course, their godly leader, who's come from being the cupbearer to the king in Persia. Who's come, because of what God has placed on his heart to do, to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem.
To rebuild Jerusalem and ultimately to reform God's people. As he continues in this effort, as he's done so faithfully of what we've seen, really the enemies seem to target him specifically.
So, what we're going to do, I'll read Nehemiah chapter 6, verses 1 through 14. And then in your table groups, I'll let you answer that first discussion question.
[3:25] So, if you want to take your hand out and on the back. So, discussion question, in what three ways do the enemies target Nehemiah? And what do you notice about how Nehemiah responds?

So, what three ways do they target Nehemiah? And what do you notice about how Nehemiah responds? And if you get some bonus time, you can think about, you know, how, why does he respond that way?
And how does he not respond? So, follow along as I read, and then I'll let you answer that discussion question in your groups. Now, when Sanballat and Tobiah and Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies heard that I had built the wall and there was no breach left in it, although up to that time I had not set up the doors and the gates, Sanballat and Geshem sent to me, saying, Come, and let us meet together in Hecathirim in the plain of Ono.

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But they intended to do me harm. And I sent messengers to them, saying, I am doing a great work, and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?
And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner. In the same way, Sanballat for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter in his hand.
[4:35] In it was written, It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel. That is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports, you wish to become their king.

And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem. There is a king in Judah, and now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together.
Then I sent him, saying, No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind. For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, Their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done.
But now, O God, strengthen my hands. Now when I went into the house of Shemaiah, the son of Deliah, and the son of Mehetedabal, who was confined to his home, he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple.
Let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you. They are coming to kill you by night. But I said, Should such a man as I run away? And what man such as I could go into the temple and live?
[5:36] I will not go in. And I understood and saw that God had not sent him. But he had pronounced the prophecy against me, because of Tobiah, and Sambalat had hired him. For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid and act in this way in sin, and so they could give me a bad name in order to taunt me.

Remember Tobiah and Sambalat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess, Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, who wanted to make me afraid. So go ahead and discuss that question one, and we will come back together as a group.
So we see at the start, there at the beginning of chapter 6, Sambalat and Tobiah and Geshem. Remember these are non-Jews who are within the Persian government and ruling over areas around Jerusalem.
We've already seen them oppose the work back in chapter 4, and even earlier they've set themselves against God and against his people. There in verse 1, we read that they had built the wall.
There was no breach left in the wall, but they had not set up the doors to the gates. You can sense this level of, okay, the work is nearing completion. This is starting to be about the last time that it's going to be easy to target.
[6:50] Because once it's fully finished, it's going to be much more difficult to get in and out. So there in verse 2, we start to see some of the ways. So what was the first way or maybe the first attempt that the enemies make at Nehemiah?

Yeah, they try to lure him to harm. So there in verse 2, Sambalat and Geshem sent to Nehemiah. So they sent a messenger saying, Come and let us meet together at Hecophirim in the plain of Ono.
At the end of verse 2, he says, But they intended to do me harm. So Nehemiah discerns that they're attempting to do him harm. And we see, how does Nehemiah respond there?
It's a great dad joke, if anybody wants to say it. He responds with a no, or an oh no. Get it? Yeah, plain of oh no. Yeah, anyway. Sorry, it's there. You have to say it. So these officials, they recognize the rebuilding efforts continuing. They start to now target Nehemiah more specifically.
[7:53] So if you go back and look at the other opposition, it's more for all of the Jewish people. But here they're really pinpointing and targeting, focusing in on Nehemiah. Verse 3, So Nehemiah responds and sends messengers back to them.

I'm doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come to you? Now a question. He says that he's doing a great work. What makes the work that he's doing great?
What makes the work that he's doing great? Yeah, exactly, David.
I would argue that from an external, just a worldly perspective, someone might say, well, really cup bearing was the great work that you were doing. That was really important. That was really powerful.

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You were in a very powerful position directly in relationship with the king. And here you're just kind of rebuilding this rundown Jerusalem place, putting a wall back together. What's really the great work?
[8:56] And what I would submit to you is what David said, is that what makes a work great is who's called you to do it. The person who's told us to do it and who we're doing it for.

And ultimately, what defines that is the Lord. And so whatever work that the Lord has called us to do, that is the great work we are to do. And you'll notice that that is not directly tied to the actual activity or content of the work.
That great work can be homeschooling children. That great work can be serving behind the scenes within the local church. That great work can be witnessing to a co-worker. Whatever it is, the work the Lord has put before us that he's called us to do, that is the great work.
So Nehemiah says, I'm doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you? And then you'll notice they don't stop there. So they repeatedly send for him.
They're in verse 4. And they sent to me four times in this way, and I answered them in the same manner. I found this interesting because sometimes things will persist in our lives.
[10:03] Well, there will be multiple occurrences, and that might make us think that, hey, maybe the Lord's trying to tell me something. Maybe the fact that this is continuing to happen is a signal to me that maybe I should go and meet with him.

But I think we see here a prime example of when the Lord has made it clear that this is something is unwise or it's against his word, that no matter how many times the opportunity arises, the right answer is still no.
Okay, so they continue to send for him. In the same way, Sambal, for the fifth time, send a servant to me. But notice, this kind of transitions from this first attempt at Nehemiah to the second attempt. What would you say is the second attempt that they make to target him? They're in verse 5. Yeah, thank you, Reed.
And notice, is that a closed letter or is it an open letter? It's an open letter. So it's not one that's just privately sent to Nehemiah. It's one that is to be read and read in front of everyone, like publicly.
[11:09] And to Reed's point, we know they lie about him. They slander him. So they present plausible falsehoods to describe what's happening. In verse 5, In the same way, Sambal for the fifth time sent his servant to me with an open letter, so public, not private, and in his hand.

And in it was written, It is reported among the nations, and Geshem also says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel. That is why you are building the wall. And according to these reports, you wish to become their king. And you have also set up prophets to proclaim concerning you in Jerusalem. There is a king in Judah, and now the king will hear of these reports. So now come and let us take counsel together. Now you'll note that the falsehood is particularly plausible.
Because if you go back and read the history of Jerusalem, they have rebelled against kings before. We can count up two times that they rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, when Babylon was ruling over Judah. And so this is a very plausible, very believable story.
But as Reed mentioned, we know it's altogether not true. So then we'll see, notice how Nehemiah responds there. So they still want him to come and take counsel together.
[12:18] And in this, when they first reach out to him in the first attempt, what's implied is, hey, come meet with us on the plain of Ono, almost like a peace summit, or like some sort of council, where we can discuss things together.

They want to do him harm. But really it's almost like a flattery, appealing to his pride of like, okay, we know we opposed you, but we want you to come meet with us, that we can take counsel together, that we can figure out a situation.
They actually want to do him harm. But it's almost playing to any potential pride or ego that Nehemiah might have. He rejects that altogether. Here now they slander him publicly, and we'll notice his response.
There in verse 8. Then I sent to him, saying, No such things as you say have been done, for you are inventing them out of your own mind. So Nehemiah just flatly denies the accusation, rejects the falsehood clearly, and then he kind of adds some context here for us in verse 9.
For they all wanted to frighten us, thinking, their hands will drop from the work, and it will not be done. But now, O God, strengthen my hands. Let's say that this falsehood is believed. What would

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be the potential consequences for Nehemiah and for Jerusalem and Judah?
[13:29] Yeah. Exactly, James. Thanks for sharing that. And that's exactly what Nebuchadnezzar did. When Babylon was ruling over them, they rebelled, and Nebuchadnezzar sent troops to destroy Jerusalem.

That's what has happened. They know that has happened in their history. So, potential death is what awaits them if that's believed. Okay? So, what do you notice about Nehemiah's response? So, he rejects it, but then what else do you notice about his response? What do you notice about Nehemiah's response? Yeah.
Thank you, Emily. Yeah. He says, Lord, O God, strengthen my hands. What does that tell us? That tells us he fears God and what God has called him to do more than he fears man or the possibility of what may happen if these rumors are believed.
Right? We almost seem to continue what we saw in chapter 4, this theme of prayer and action. I think it also implies the fact that he says, O God, strengthen my hands, is that he's continuing in the work that God has called him to do. You'll notice a few things that he didn't do.
[14:43] He didn't go and track down every single person to try and make sure that they knew that was a falsehood. He didn't pray that this persecution would be removed.

I found that particularly interesting. I think for me, I would have been quick to say, Lord, would you just remove Samballot and Tobiah and Geshem from the situation? Like, could we just not have the difficulty?
That would make things a lot easier. But it's interesting that what he says is, not remove them, but Lord, strengthen me in the midst of this. Don't remove the trial. Sustain me and strengthen me to persevere, to endure in what you're calling me to do.
For many of us, myself as a frontrunner, I often will pray to be removed from the trial or removed from the circumstance rather than, hey Lord, help me to learn what you want me to learn in this. Lord, help me to endure in a faithful way in what you've called us to here.
So I think we see that Nehemiah is quick to not depend on himself, but the Lord. So there's a trust in the Lord to handle the details, to handle the situation. He's continuing to persevere what the Lord has called him to do and entrusting the outcome to the Lord, asking the Lord to strengthen him.
[16:09] Any other observations there before we move on to the next one? Or any other thoughts? Okay, so in those first two, if you want to flip your handout over, the two kind of sections I think we see today in the text are, number one, enemy opposition overt efforts.

Overt efforts. So you'll notice these efforts, they're public, they're more obvious, both of them. The second one, number two, that's going to be enemy opposition covert efforts.
Covert efforts. So these first two attempts, they're more obvious, they're more public, they're overt. I think this last one is covert. First, they try to lure him to harm, and they do that repeatedly.
Second, they lie about him publicly. And now we get to, what do you see as the third attempt there, beginning in verse 10 and through the rest of this passage?
What do they seek to do? Yeah, they essentially try to lead him into sin. So there if we pick up in verse 10, now when I went to the house of Shemaiah, the son of Delaiah, the son of Mechdebel, who was confined to his home, so we see this prophet, the prophet tells him, hey, let us meet together in the house of God within the temple, let us close the doors of the temple, for they are coming to kill you.
[17:36] They are coming to kill you by night. So we see that they've continued to seek to do Nehemiah harm, physical harm, to kill him, to threaten him, all these different things. Here we see a prophet, so one of the Jews, one of the people in Jerusalem, telling Nehemiah, someone, a prophet, who is someone representing God, who's communicating God's word to God's people, or at least supposed to be, is telling Nehemiah, hey, they're coming to kill you, let's meet together in the house of God, within the temple.

And then, what do we notice, how does Nehemiah respond? What seems to be clear to Nehemiah? Yeah, thank you for that read. Any thoughts on, how would Nehemiah have known, that God had not sent this guy?
Yeah, absolutely. If you were to turn over to Numbers, chapter 18, this is what it tells us. And with you, bring your brothers also, the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may join you, and minister to you, while you and your sons, are before the tent of the testimony.

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They shall keep guard over you, and over the whole tent, but shall not come near, to the vessels of the sanctuary, or to the altar, lest they and you die. They shall join you, and keep guard over the tent of meeting, for all the service of the tent, and no outsider shall come near you, and you shall keep guard, over the sanctuary, and over the altar, that there may never again, be wrath on the people of Israel.
And behold, I have taken your brothers, and the Levites, from among the people of Israel. They are a gift to you, given to the Lord, to do the service, of the tent of meeting. And you and your sons, with you, shall guard your priesthood, for all that concerns the altar, and that is within the veil, and you shall serve.
[19:20] I give your priesthood, as a gift, and any outsider, who comes near, shall be put to death. So that's in Numbers, speaking about the tent of meeting, before the temple's built.

What God makes clear, is that, he had the Levites, this tribe of Israel, who were particularly granted, the service, of the temple. And so, Nehemiah, does not have the right, he's not a Levite there, to get to be able to go, into the temple, and live.
So you have, a prophet, who's telling him, hey, you should go, into the temple. And what Nehemiah knows, is that God's word tells me, I can't do that, I will die. And the way he's able to understand, that this prophet, is not telling him, true things from God, is that it contradicts, God's revealed word. Now a few things, to think about. To know this, Nehemiah would have had to, know God's word. And so how can we know, if things that are being told to us, are true, if they are really from, the Lord?
Well, the first and easiest check is, does it match God's word? Is it in contradiction, to that word? The Lord will not, contradict himself. And so whether it be, Paul, or a prophet, or an angel, or a vision, or someone here, a Sunday school class leader, an elder, a pastor, whoever it is, regardless of what they tell you, if it's not, in accordance with God's word, it's not from God.
[20:48] Paul makes this argument, in Galatians, that if he was to come, and proclaim a different gospel to you, that didn't match, God's revealed word, you would know, that's a false gospel.

So Nehemiah, as Reed mentioned, he discerns that, okay, this, something's off here. There in verse 11, but I said, this be Nehemiah, should a man such as I, run away, and what man should I go, into the temple and live, I will not go in.
So he notes that, he doesn't think God actually wants him to hide, to cower away in fear, from the enemies, and he also knows that, he shouldn't go into the temple. Verse 12, and I understood and saw, that God had not sent him, but he had pronounced the prophecy against me, because Tobiah and Sembao had hired him.
For this purpose he was hired, that I should be afraid, and act in this way, and sin. And so they could give me, a bad name in order to taunt me. And, another thing to see here is, Nehemiah, he understands the threat is real, they're coming after him, but he would rather faithfully follow the Lord, and die, than knowingly sin.
And I think he makes us pause for a moment, and just consider like, the seriousness of sin, the gravity of sin. In that, Nehemiah, he fears transgressing, or sinning against God, more than fearing death.
[22:14] He would rather die, than sin. And it really challenges, maybe the depths to which, we understand our own debt of sin, against a holy God. And I don't say that to discourage anyone, I just say that to remind us, of any sin and all sin, the gravity and the weight of it.

That that's what Christ was doing on the cross, was paying our debt for our sin, for us, because of his great love for us. And that we as a people, as Christians, as those in Christ, are not a people who continue in sin.
And that's not just, maybe, things in our earthly world, that we might perceive as a heinous sin. All sin is heinous. Right? Socially acceptable sins, are still sin.
And so, even if the earthly consequence changes, for the sin, that doesn't mean it's not sin, before a holy God. It doesn't mean that, that's not the same sin, that Christ was nailed to the cross for.
So they try and lead him to sin. Here we see Nehemiah, endure again really. There in verse 14, he prays to the Lord, remember, Tobiah and Sambalat, O my God, according to these things that they did, and also the prophetess, Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, who wanted to make me afraid.
[23:29] So you hear him, playing to the Lord, this is a wicked act, this is sin that they've done, they've sinned against you, I entrust this to you, that you will enact justice, that you will render just judgment.

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He doesn't try and take it into his own hands, he entrusts himself to the Lord. And so again, he goes back to the Lord. That's the end of the verses, that we have today, but if we read ahead, we see that he continues the work.
So he continues, to persevere in, faithful obedience. A few thoughts, here in this section, is that, what the Lord has called us to do, what he asks us to do, there's a way for us to get to do that, without sinning.
Like what he expects of us, does not require us to sin. And so, that would be another way, that Nehemiah here would know, hey, what the Lord has called me to do, he doesn't need me to sin to get it. Or he doesn't need me to sin, to accomplish what he wants me to do.
There's a path, of faithful obedience. I think another thing is that, as Nehemiah continues, to faithfully follow God, the fact that there was, a false prophet, to Nehemiah, does not change, Nehemiah's view, of who God is.
[24:42] As we think about ourselves, there's the reality, we've probably been hurt, by a Christian before. We've probably been, led astray, maybe by a pastor, or an elder, or someone who, claimed to know Christ, who was influential in our lives.

And I think one of the helpful takeaways, is that, God's people, ought to reflect God well. We ought to be people, who point others to Christ well.
The reality is, we all fail at that. In particular ways, where people who represented Christ, who have done wicked things, and harmed us, or hurt us, the reality is, that does not change, who God is. The character, the promises, the person of Christ. It doesn't change, who God is. So here we see Nehemiah, though you have a false prophet, that doesn't make him say, ah, well, now I'm no longer going to follow God.
Because, that somehow defines, or determines who God is. It also doesn't change, what God expects of Nehemiah. We all probably have a level of church hurt.
[25:40] But that doesn't change, what the Lord, asks of us to do, to be a part of the body of Christ. That might be an example. So a false prophet, did not change Nehemiah's trust in God, nor should a faithless pastor, or Christian, change ours.

When leaders of God's people, fail and commit wicked acts, that doesn't change, the person, character, or promises, of our Lord Jesus Christ. It doesn't change, what he's called us to do. And certainly, in those situations, we certainly want to, continue to run to Christ, and run to other, faithful brothers and sisters, to walk alongside, with us.
Okay. If you flip back over your handout, you'll see that main emphasis. I think what we see here, is a theme, as Nehemiah is really enduring, the efforts of the enemy.
So he's enduring these enemies. Then we start to see this theme, of godly people, of Nehemiah specifically, enduring enemy efforts, by fearing God, above everything else. I think we see that theme, throughout it. When we open, thinking about endurance, in our lives, I think in this passage, we see Nehemiah endure, in this picture, that godly people endure, enemy efforts, by fearing God, above everything else.
Here, I think we see Christ likeness, modeled, and Christ foreshadowed, as Nehemiah endures, and fears the Lord. There was a recent, Desiring God article, that I think really helped, explain, the fear of the Lord.
[27:04] So I'll read you, a quick excerpt from that. So scripture makes clear, that for those, in right relationship with God, the fear of God, is a particular kind, of delight in God.

A foolproof, pleasure, that ruins us, to the allurements, of sin, and leaves us, in quaking awe, before the king, of all things. To fear God, is to be fully alive.
For saints, as for Christ, holy fear, is an affection, of awestruck, adoration, and it keeps us, fixated, on the Lord. The word fear, qualifies the kind, of affection, we should have, in the presence of God. Michael Reeves, has this helpful quote, it's on the back, of your handout. But it says, the living God, is infinitely perfect, and quintessentially, overwhelmingly beautiful, in every way. His righteousness, his graciousness, his majesty, his mercy, his all.
And so we do not, love him aright, if our love, is not a trembling, overwhelmed, and fearful love. In a sense then, the trembling fear of God, is a way of speaking, about the intensity, of the saints love, and enjoyment, of all that God is.
[28:14] So often times we hear, this idea of like, fearing the Lord, or a fear of God, and that's not a, cowering in terror, you know, hiding under the bed, because he did something bad. It is this reverential awe, of how great, our God is.

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And I think, there Michael Reeves, kind of helpfully, couches it. I think the, here we see, Nehemiah, in this fear of the Lord, motivate, and sustain, his endurance.
And I think it should, ours as well. We read in Isaiah chapter 11, of the Spirit of God, so the Holy Spirit, being a spirit, of the fear of the Lord.
And we also see, that Christ himself, this anointed one, this Messiah figure, in Isaiah 11, three, be described as the one, whose delight shall be, in the fear of the Lord. And I think those are passages, that really lead Michael, to describe the fear of the Lord, that way.
The scriptures help us see, that God's own delight, in himself, as within the Trinity, we see that language, of fear of the Lord. Here, Nehemiah is a great, godly example of endurance.
[29:16] Christ himself, is the ultimate example, of endurance. We could, I think, show, like in this passage, if you took each of these, attempts on Nehemiah's life, you could parallel, and match them, to attempts on Christ's life.

Right? The enemies, certainly tried to come, after Christ, in each of these ways. One way, I would want to focus, in our last minute, is if you go to Hebrews 12, it tells us this, therefore, since we are surrounded, by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside, every weight, and sin, which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance, the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder, and perfecter, of our faith, who for the joy, was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated, at the right hand of God.
As we strive, for obedience, and endurance, we certainly fall short. And so we look to Christ, just as Hebrews 12 tells us, and when we fail, we look to him, for his forgiveness, and we repent, and we rejoice, as we know, that he's faithful, to forgive our sin.
And we rejoice, that our salvation, is not based upon, our endurance, or our obedience, but upon his. And I think we see, the quintessential, the ultimate, picture of endurance, is Christ Jesus himself, and how he endured, the cross.
Two quick points of application, and then we'll pray. One, is there anything, that is distracting, or deterring you, from what God, has called you to do? We saw in that first attempt, Nehemiah remained focused, on the work at hand, rather than going, and meeting with, those enemies.
[30:49] He was focused, on what he was called to do. How can you persevere, or how can you endure, and better focus, on what God, is calling you to do? Second, do you fear the Lord, more than anything else?

More than sin, earthly pleasures, approval of others, control, fill in the blank? How can you grow, in your fear of the Lord, in your fear of God, in a faithful way?
Okay, let's pray. Father, we praise you, for Christ Jesus, thank you for, sending your son Jesus, to save us, from our sins. Lord, we'll be reminded, of the seriousness of sin, and the depths, the depths of the debt, that was paid, on our behalf, not because of anything, we have done, or could do, but because of your great love, for us, because of who you are, oh Lord.
And I pray that you would, cause us to, run with endurance, to endure, the efforts of the enemy, to persevere, in what you're calling us to, right now. Lord, that we would, get to faithfully, and joyfully, obey Christ, in all of life, for the rest of life, even now, in the varying circumstances, and difficulties, that we may be, walking in.
Lord, I pray that you'd, help us to fear, to delight, to, love you, as Nehemiah, says back in chapter 4, our great, and awesome God. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.
[32:22] To learn more, visit us in person, or see the website, at highlandparkbaptist.net. Thank you.

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