

Nehemiah - The Sound of Rejoicing

REVIEW: Today in our study of Nehemiah, we come to the dedication of the wall. Nehemiah has been laboring for 52 days with the people to get the wall of Jerusalem rebuilt, and it is finally time to celebrate! We have actually been studying about Nehemiah longer than it took for Nehemiah to get the wall up.

Before we get to the celebration, it would be important to look back as to what Nehemiah accomplished. Nehemiah accomplished more in 6 months than many people accomplish in a life time. And given that they are about to celebrate, it is important to recap what they are celebrating.

1. First, Nehemiah got permission to rebuild the walls from King Artaxerxes. Remember that this was no easy achievement. The work was stopped once because the neighbors complained to the King. When Nehemiah asked to rebuild the wall, the King had to give up a favored servant to let him go rebuild a decimated province. Yet Nehemiah, through prayer, was able to get the King's permission.
2. Nehemiah developed the plan for rebuilding the walls. Part of it involved securing materials, and part of it involved three days of on site strategy.
3. Nehemiah inspired the people of Jerusalem. They were defeated, having tried to rebuild in the past. Nehemiah was able to motivate them to accomplish more than anyone thought possible.
4. Nehemiah overcame opposition from multiple angles. First opposition from without in the form of insults and threats of violence. Next, he had opposition from within having the rich exploiting the poor. Finally he dealt with threats of underhanded dealings with Nehemiah and his reputation. Through all of it Nehemiah was able to keep his focus on what God called him to do.
5. Nehemiah completed the reconstruction of the wall in just 52 days.
6. Nehemiah encouraged and assisted in a national revival. He realized that a revival was needed and allowed Ezra to take control of that part of the life of Jerusalem. He could have been so focused on the task of the wall, but it shows us where Nehemiah's focus really was at - it was on God. He also could have wanted to direct that and not trust Ezra with leading the revival, but he knew he needed to step out of the way.
7. Nehemiah reorganized and helped repopulated the city by casting lots for who would move into the city. It was not until the people were back in the city that Nehemiah went ahead with the dedication of the walls.

INTRO: Again today we will approach our passage of Scripture thematically. We will pull out the predominate themes in the passage.

As we start, I want you to begin in 2 Corinthians 8:5 (p. 1162).

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- I. This passage in Corinthians is about how this church was giving so generously to the work of Paul.
 - A. They were quite a poor church and Paul was surprised by their generosity
 - B. In this one verse we find a key to spiritual success which will apply in Nehemiah in just a minute
 1. “They gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God’s will.”
 2. There in lies the secret for spiritual success - give yourself to the Lord first
 3. Then you give to others
 - a) For some of you that may have felt burned out over the years, this might apply to you - although it does not apply in every case, but worth asking yourself
 - b) Have you been giving yourself to the Lord first, then to others?
 - c) If not, you may have found a reason for feeling burned out
 4. Let me apply this one other way - this principle of giving to the Lord first, then to others
 - a) For some of you, you are giving to others, but not giving yourself to the Lord
 - (1) You are using others as an excuse not to give yourself to the Lord
 - (a) I’ll tell you, if that has been the order of your life, there will always be something else to get between you giving yourself to the Lord first
 - i) You can easily become overwhelmed with family events, friendships, neighbors, and any number of other fine folks and events in their lives
 - ii) And before you know it, you have so much of your life not giving yourself to the Lord first but to others
 - iii) Here is the awesome part, you can and should give yourself to others - we just need to give ourselves to the Lord first
 - (2) Be dedicated to your family, be involved in the community, be involved in life around you
 - (a) But you give yourself to the Lord first
 - i) Ask God what activities of life will bring Him the most glory
 - ii) Seek His will in Your life for how to engage with all these groups of people so that God gets the glory
 - iii) One of my cousin’s daughters posted something on FaceBook for father’s day about Ken, and in my mind this is one of the greatest compliments a daughter could give

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her father - "Thankful I have a dad that loves the Lord just as much as he loves his children."

(b) Give yourself to the Lord first, then to others

b) And we are about to see this applied in Nehemiah

C. Turn to Nehemiah 12:27-47 (p. 489)

II. [READ v. 27-28a; 30] Did you see the principle at work?

A. Before they dedicated the wall, before they purified the wall, they purified themselves

1. The word dedication has the idea of "to offer or to give"

2. When something, or someone is dedicated to the Lord, it is offered for the Lord to control and use as He sees fit

a) A great example would be Hannah giving Samuel to the Lord

b) There were no strings attached - Samuel was dedicated to however the Lord wanted to use him

B. So the priests and Levites led the way in being purified - makes sense since they were leading the purification process

1. Then the people were dedicated or purified to the Lord

2. Then the gates were purified

III. Now we get to the special worship service [READ v. 31, 38, 40]

A. Here is what is happening

1. All the people are gathered together and split into two groups

2. Half of the people go south, and half go north, walking around the top of the wall - singing

B. So why would they walk and sing around the top of the wall?

1. One of the reasons would be so the people could see, touch and celebrate the fully completed wall

2. Perhaps a greater reason would be to bear witness to the great work God had done, and that He would receive the glory

a) It was a testimony to the world around that God was faithful

b) God had given Nehemiah a task, and God saw the task through, being faithful to Nehemiah at every turn

C. This special worship service begins by marching around the top of the wall, singing, but it ends at the temple with a music festival

1. This is an important order

2. "When the people march on the walls to the Temple they do so *after* having placed the *Temple* once again at the center of their thoughts. The walls thus appear for what they are: not a monument to the strength of Judah—heaven forbid!—but God's gift for the protection and perpetuation of his name in the world."

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3. Every bit of this worship service was about God's faithfulness to the Jews not about how great the Jews are
- IV. We are not given a whole lot of the details of the worship service - they marched, they sang, they went to the temple, they sang more
- A. What is important to note is the spirit in which all of this is done
 - B. The first thing is the singing
 1. What did they sing? Most likely Psalms
 - a) Turn to Psalm 48:12-14
 2. This may be something that you didn't really know
 - a) Singing has always been a feature of God's people in both the Old and New Testaments
 - b) This is something not true of many of the world's religions
 - (1) They may use chants
 - (2) Some religions have their clergy sing (and the fact that does not happen here caused all God's people to say - Amen)
 - (3) Generally speaking, the other world religions are grim
 - (4) God's people are the ones that express themselves in joyful singing
 3. Why? Why do God's people express themselves in joyful song?
 - a) Because we have something to sing about!
 - (1) Yes, the God of the universe was displeased with human behavior
 - (2) But our God loved us so much that He could not stand the thought of us being separated
 - (3) Our God sent His only Son to pay for what we did wrong
 - (4) Our God defeated death and opened the way for life eternal
 - b) That is why we have something to sing about!
 - (1) It is the gospel!
 - (2) It is the one thing that we come back to time and again because we never lose its wonder
 - (a) At least I pray you never lose the wonder of the gospel message
 - (b) If you have, I pray (right now) that God will renew in you a sense of the majesty of the glorious gospel all over again in your heart as we sit here
 - C. The second thing is the rejoicing
 1. Look at verse 43 with me "And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away."

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2. Count them please - how many times is a word associated with joy mentioned in this verse alone? Four in one verse - and in Hebrew, there is a fifth use of the root - That's a lot of rejoicing folks!
 3. Huge contrast to a few chapters ago when the people heard the law and wept over their sins
 4. But go back to that verse one more time - why did they have such great joy
 - a) Because God had given them great joy
 - b) It was not just joy because the wall was done and they didn't have to move another stinkin' brick
 - c) It was not just because they could finally be safe from outside forces
 - d) It was because God gave them great joy - because God proved faithful!
 - (1) Remind you of a NT verse at all?
 - (2) "Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again, rejoice."
 5. The author J.G. McConville says that if this joy seems foreign to us that both Nehemiah and Paul understood, it is because they knew it did not come from how much we have, or how well we succeed. They knew that joy, like love, peace, self-control is spiritual
 - a) To know that kind of joy, that is found only in relationship with Jesus Christ
 - b) To understand why we sing, why we "lift up a shout of praise" - it is spiritually understood
 - c) It is in dedicating your whole self to God first, you mind, your will, and your emotions
 6. Return to the verse one more time - read that last sentence
 - a) The sound of their rejoicing could be heard far away
- V. This was the dedication of the wall in Nehemiah's day
- A. We may not have a wall to dedicate, but we have a long history of this church
 1. We have ourselves to dedicate
 2. We have the ministries of our church to dedicate - like VBS this week
 3. We have the commission of this church to spread the gospel (the good news) to every man, woman and child in our community to dedicate
 - B. So we planned today to be a day of rejoicing
 1. We planned today to lift up our voicing and sing to our King for His faithfulness
 2. We planned today to be a day of dedicating first ourselves and then our church, meaning our ministries to the Lord
 3. And rejoicing, expectantly in what God will do

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- C. Let the sound of our rejoicing be heard far away
 - 1. May people always be able to hear the sound of our rejoicing