

“Rejoice”
Nehemiah 12:27-47
November 26, 2023 | Mercy Hill Church

Big Idea: *One of the marks of a Christian is our joy in Christ and our thanksgiving to the Lord. This (internal) joy is reflected (externally) in the church as God’s people and our witness to the world!*

Theme of Nehemiah: *Rebuilding a City & People for God*

- Chapters 1-7 Rebuilding the Walls of Jerusalem
- Chapters 8-13 Rebuilding (Reforming) God’s People

Introduction

- After the walls had been **rebuilt** (Nehemiah 1-7) and the people had been **reformed** by God’s Word (Nehemiah 8), **returned** back to God through confession and repentance (Nehemiah 9), **renewed** their commitment (covenant) with God (Nehemiah 10), and **resettled** back in the city of Jerusalem, what was next? What was left to do?
 - Not more work to be done – but rather to rejoice, to celebrate and commemorate the rebuilding of the city and the people of God!
 - What good is the rebuilding of the walls and the reforming of God’s people without ultimately celebrating, giving thanks and glorifying (worship) of God? To **rejoice!**

1. Dedication: Joy in Commemorating (v.27a)

- Throughout the Old Testament, God created and commanded certain (annual) rhythms for His people to pause, remember and celebrate (e.g. the various feasts, Passover, etc.)
 - Feast of First Fruits: Leviticus 23:9-14
 - ⁹And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁰“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, ¹¹and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. ¹²And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the LORD. ¹³And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah^[a] of fine flour mixed with oil, a food offering to the LORD with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin.^[b] ¹⁴And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.
 - Feast of Weeks: Leviticus 23:15-22 – harvest of wheat harvest
 - Feast of Booths: Leviticus 23:33-43
 - ⁴²You shall dwell in booths for seven days. All native Israelites shall dwell in booths, ⁴³that your generations may know that I made the people of Israel dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”
 - All these feasts were meant as reminders and opportunities to commemorate (remember) and celebrate the Lord’s goodness to His people!
- In this morning’s opening verse, we see the people of God the dedication of the wall – with joyful celebration and commemoration.

2. Purification: Joy in Holiness (v.30)

- Dedication begins with purification
- Old Testament law required priests, Levites and the people to be purified (holy) for different religious services or events (cf. Exodus 19:10-15 – Israel purified themselves before meeting God at Mt. Sinai).

- Priests & Levites first purified themselves – and then purified the people...along with the gates and the walls (cf. 2 Chronicles 28:21-25, 29:3-24 – King Hezekiah purified the Temple after King Ahaz defiled it).
- Unclear exactly what purification entailed here – very possibly included any of the following: ritual washing of self, putting on clean clothes, cutting one’s hair, abstinence, avoiding contact with anything deemed unclean by OT law, etc.
- Being ceremonially impure (unclean) didn’t necessarily mean one was sinful
 - After having given birth to a child, a woman was considered ceremonially impure (unclean) – but giving birth to a child was not considered a sin.
 - We know Jesus was considered ceremonially impure (unclean) when he touched certain people (e.g., lepers, dead person, etc.) yet Jesus was without sin.
 - Purification was not only a symbolic act but also an outward expression of their internal commitment to God and constant reminder of God’s holiness
- Celebrating and worship of God was both joyful and serious (reverent)
- Psalm 19:8 - the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes

3. **Procession: Joy in Thanksgiving (vv.27b-29, 31-44)**

- Psalm 133:1, Philippians 2:2, Romans 15:6, Acts 4:32
- At the center of this dedication was musical worship – singing accompanied with musical instruments (cymbals, harps, lyres, trumpets).
 - One choir (vv.31b-37) southward in a counter-clockwise direction
 - The other choir (vv.38-39) moved northward in a clockwise direction
 - Stereo-surround sound!
- Both choirs converge end up at the house of God (the Temple) -- at the heart of this musical worship was thanksgiving (vv.27, 31, 38)
 - Not a general sense of gratitude, a “I’m thankful...” but gratitude and *thanksgiving to the Lord*
- **Unity of God’s People (v.43)**
 - Thanksgiving to the Lord with one voice - The two choirs
 - All the Levites were invited to join (v.27)
 - Women and children also joined in (v.43)
- **Humility of Nehemiah (v.38)**
 - Who is the primary leader? Not Nehemiah but Ezra (v.36). Hoshaiiah is one of the choir leaders (v.32) following Ezra. It is possible that Nehemiah led the other choir but the phrase “followed them (the other choir)” (v.38) seems to put some confusion. Regardless, what is clear is that Nehemiah is not the primary leader here – the person in the spotlight.
- Humility and thanksgiving go hand-in-hand – genuine thanksgiving comes from genuine humility

4. **Contribution: Joy in Giving (vv.43-47)**

- Their thanksgiving to God leads to giving to God. Their gratefulness to the Lord leads to their generosity to the Lord in two expressions:
 - 1. The people of God joyfully offered great sacrifices that day to the Lord (v.43)
 - Note: “great sacrifices” || “great joy” (v.43)
 - 2. The people joyfully (vv.44-47) gave their first fruits and tithes as required by the Law for the priests, Levites, singer and gatekeepers (vv.44, 47)
 - Note: “...for Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered” (v.44)

- Scripture makes it clear that their contributions (giving) is connected to their joy(ful obedience)!
- Last week's sermon on Acts 4:32-37 "How the Grace of God Makes Generous People" (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 9:6-7)
- Psalm 107:22 – "And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!"

5. **Proclamation: Joy in Witnessing (v.43)**

- As the people of God rejoiced through their dedication, purification, procession and contribution to the Lord – it naturally resulted in a proclamation to those around them – both near and far!
 - "And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away" (v.43b)
- Joy in witnessing to what God had done in their lives and through their lives!
- The book of Philippians is written by the apostle Paul to the Philippian church. Paul writes this letter while imprisoned as he awaits a death sentence -- yet the tone of the letter is one of joy. Many consider the book of Philippians a letter of joy. Despite Paul's circumstance, the joy he has in Jesus and the faith he has in the Gospel message leads to the spread of the Gospel among all the prison guards (cf. Philippians 1:12-18)!

6. **Foundation: Joy in and from Christ (v.43)**

- Jesus as the ultimate cause or source of their joy
 - Psalm 33:21 For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name
 - 1 Peter 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory
 - Hebrews 12:1-2 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, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
- As we remember the grace of God – most notably through Jesus coming into this world, His death on the cross for our sins, resurrection from the grave, and His ascension back to the Heavenly Father – as the fuel for our joyful thanksgiving and joyful giving – would serve as witness to those around us the beautiful message of the Gospel, who Jesus is and what He's done.

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Reflection Questions

- Do you tend to be a glass half-empty or half-full type of person? How does that influence your propensity to be joyful and thankful? What are some the ways you personally express your joy or thanksgiving – whether to others or to the Lord?
- In the midst of the busyness of life, why is it important to celebrate/commemorate?
- What's the connection between thanksgiving (gratefulness) and giving (generosity)? In what ways have you seen one lead to the other – in your own life or in others?
- How does keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus keep our hearts filled with gratitude and with joy?
- In what ways does your joy (or lack thereof) in the Lord serve as a witness of the gospel in your life to others?