

# The Lord Was Their Joy

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Nehemiah 12:1-47

November 19, 2023

## Introduction

Now we arrive at the moment this morning in chapter 12. The day has come for the dedication of the wall to the Lord. This dedication was a reminder that God had rebuilt the wall. The Lord was granting to them a new beginning. The strengthened walls reflected the Lord's strength in their lives. As they were turning to Him in renewed faith, as they were heeding the Word and confessing their sins, God was rebuilding them from the inside out. And now it was time to dedicate and celebrate.

The celebration was marked by two things:

### I. They worshipped with great sacrifices

- “And they offered great sacrifices that day (verse 43).” What were the sacrifices they offered? First, they prepared themselves. They purified and dedicated themselves to God. “And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall (verse 30).”
- While we're not given the specifics of what that purification looked like - the priests and Levites ceremonially dedicated first themselves, and the people, and even the wall and its gates. Some commentators suggest there were ceremonial washing of garments, a sprinkling on the walls an agent of purification. Regardless of what it looked like, the intention of it was to draw to peoples minds that this was a time of dedication, of consecration to the Lord. This is critical for God's people!
- The dedication of the wall would have meant nothing if the hearts of the people were far from the Lord. Because God looks at the heart, He's interested in what's going on inside of us. How we come to church is so important to the Lord. If our hearts are far from Him – that's His primary concern. Man looks on the outside, but God looks at the heart.
- And the people of Israel prepared themselves. They were prayerful. They had spent time hearing and responding to the Word in ch.8--repenting of sin and renewing themselves to the work of God's house. At the end of chapter 10 the people declared “We will not neglect the house of the Lord (Neh. 10:30).”
- Among other things that means coming prepared, with our hearts full of gratitude and thanks. When we gather – God is looking at our hearts. He looking for hearts that are eager for Him, hungry for His work--eager to worship and obey His Word. That's how God's people honor Him – when they come to Him with open hands, with an eagerness to hear from Him, and respond to Him.
- They prepared themselves for meeting with God What other sacrifice did they bring? They renewed their giving. “On that day men were appointed over the storerooms, the contributions,

the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them the portions required by the Law for the priests and for the Levites according to the fields of the towns (Verse 44).”

- On this day of dedication, God was giving a new start. And part of that new start was the renewal of the tithes and the offerings.

## **II. They worshipped with great joy**

- “And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced (Verse 43).” This was a whole assembly of the people of God, united in praise. What a glorious thought! Each person – men, women and children - rejoicing with great joy!
- What did this look like? They rejoiced in song. Two choirs of singers got up on top of the wall and marched around the wall. The wall was wide enough for people to walk on it--and strong enough to support a great mass of people. Again, the Lord had built this wall. Their enemies had said a fox couldn’t even get up on it without it falling down. Look what the Lord had done! The choirs were on the wall “with musical instruments (verse 36).”
- Ezra was with the one choir, going south on the wall. Nehemiah was with the other choir, going north, in the opposite direction. The sense of it was that the praise of God covered all of the city in Jerusalem. In verse 43 it says that “the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away”
- It is fitting that God’s people worship Him in song. It’s right that God’s house be filled with people giving thanks to their Lord. We sing with joy because we have been redeemed by God. He has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. He has taken our place, suffered the punishment of God’s wrath against our sin, and brought us as forgiven children into His family. When we recall all that God did to save us, crushing His own Son for us – that moves us to rejoice.
- What was the source of their joy? The source of their joy was the Lord and the Lord alone! God was the source of their joy. For the Christian – God is the source of our joy. When we give our hearts fully to Him, He gives us joy that rises above our circumstances. We will have troubles in this life, dear friends, but do we have to wait until all our troubles are gone in order to have joy? No, we can have joy today, even in the midst of troubles. How? Because the Lord Himself is our joy.

## **Conclusion**

- God was doing a new work among His people. He was giving them a new hope. They were consecrating themselves to Him and to His work. They declared that they would not neglect the house of God, but joyfully bring their tithes and offerings. They would prepare themselves for worship and consecrate themselves with joy to the work of the Lord.
- And GOD MADE THEM GLAD! He made them glad in who He is. He is the faithful One who does not change, who fulfills His every promise, who never abandons His people.
- The best reason for rejoicing is because God has given Himself to us in Jesus Christ. By faith our sins are forgiven. Our future is secure. Our hope is certain. Even when all the possibilities seem to be exhausted, God will accomplish all His purpose. Let our hearts rejoice and be glad!

### **Questions for Discussion/Application:**

- Consider taking time to read chapter 12, verses 27-47 out loud. What observations/insights do you have from reading the text?
- Jeremy pointed out that before the people of God celebrated, in worship, they prepared themselves by purifying themselves. He then reminded us about the importance of preparing our hearts for Sunday worship. What are some of practical things we can do to prepare ourselves and our families for the Sunday gathering? What can we do Saturday evening and Sunday morning to prepare our hearts for worship?
- The source of the people's joy in this narrative was who God is and what God had done for them. And the same is true for us as believers. Our joy, most fundamentally, ought to be rooted in God Himself and what He has done for us. What do you think can keep us at times, from experiencing God-centered joy in our lives?
- How can regular contemplation and meditation on the gospel produce joy in our hearts?
- What are some of the things we can do practically to "preach the gospel to ourselves" every day?
- What is biblical joy as distinct from a sort of pollyanish positivism?
- As we prepare ourselves for the Christmas season, how can we ensure that we keep our primary focus on rejoicing in Christ?
- Consider taking time to pray, asking God to bless our Sunday gatherings when we come to worship the Lord together. Also consider praying that God would help us to keep our focus on Christ in the Christmas season ahead.