

Nehemiah Series Slide

Drop some knowledge... Decibels measure the intensity of sound.

- Whisper is about 30dB
- Normal conversation is about 60 dB.
- A lawn mower is about 90 dB.
- And a loud rock concert is about 120 dB

We come to a couple of noisy chapters in the Bible in Nehemiah 11-12. There is singing and shouting and instruments playing... large crowds of people!

As we consider this text, I want you to wrestle with this one question: Can your joy be heard?

“Can Your Joy Be Heard?”

Nehemiah 11-12

Recap: Exile. Nehemiah. Permission to Rebuild the Wall. Recruitment. Opposition. Determination. 52 Days. Rebuilding of the People through Covenant Renewal.

Now: The time has come to dedicate and celebrate. In chapters 11-12, the people gather to dedicate the wall and celebrate what God has done. As we are going to see, they were excited and overjoyed about God and his work. This led them to resound with praise. Their joyful worship echoed across the hills and plains of Israel.

As we read the key sections, I want you to listen for the indications of celebration.

Text Displayed (11:1-2; 12:27-43)

The Point: When you see the goodness of God, respond in worship and let your joy be heard!

Joy (v.43)

Read 43 again!

- Joy is a positive emotional response to a perceived good.
- The terms “joy” or “rejoicing” are used five times in verse 43.
 - Scholars point out that the authors of the OT use the word joy in four different theological contexts. Three of the four are found right here: 1) worship and festivals; 2) in response to the character and work of God; 3) the joyful anticipation of future salvation. (The fourth: the joy of the wicked over the affliction of the righteous).
 - They rejoiced over their sacrifices.
 - Why? Because God made them rejoice with GREAT JOY! Our joy comes from God. You may remember Nehemiah 8:10 “for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” Whose joy? God’s joy? Or our Joy? Yes! Both! Our joy that is actually his joy! This is made explicit right here!
 - Everyone was in on it: women and children also REJOICED!
 - And here is the summary statement, the key phrase of these 2 chapters from my perspective: “And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.”

“That day they offered great sacrifices, an exuberant celebration because God had filled them with great joy. The women and children raised their happy voices with all the rest. Jerusalem’s jubilation was heard far and wide.” (Eugene Peterson, in the Message paraphrase)

[Two people responding to the same good in two different ways but both experiencing JOY!]

T: What do we learn about joy from Nehemiah 11-12?

1. Joy overflows from devoted worship. (11:1-12:30)

Nehemiah 11:1-2

- Context: Nehemiah 7:4-5 - When the wall was finished, he knew the work was not done. He knew the city was underpopulated, vulnerable to attack and not thriving in the ways God envisioned.
- But... while the city should offer protection and opportunities for prosperity, it did not. It was dangerous and undesirable.
- That's why they had to basically institute a lottery system to see who would move into the city. (Verse 1)
- Verse 2 indicates that some of these in verse 1 or perhaps others volunteered to move into Jerusalem.

What is happening? They chose God's desires over their desires! And the people bless them.

Here we have a picture of holy devotion.

After all, Jerusalem was the holy city, the place where God chose his name to dwell, the epicenter of worship for the people of Israel.

The common understanding of holiness is to be set apart, treated as sacred. God is holy. His holiness is his otherness. This is surely present here, but often we can think of holiness as separating from but not necessarily devotion to.

Some scholars (e.g. Peter Gentry) argue that the central meaning of holy is "dedication, devotion or commitment."

Look at how these holy men who move into the holy city are described.

- 11:6—"valiant men"
- 11:8—"men of valor"
- 11:14—"mighty men of valor"

Verses 11:3-12:26 provide the specifics concerning the repopulation efforts.

Who Does the Repopulation of Jerusalem Involve (11:3-24)?

1. The lay families (11:3-9)
2. The priests, who serve as the spiritual leaders and attend to matters of worship in the temple (11:10-14)
3. The Levites and temple servants (who assist the priests by leading prayer and praise), as well as the gatekeepers (who provide security for the city). (11:15-24)

In verses 25-36, the villages outside Jerusalem are listed where 90 percent of the population lived outside of Jerusalem.

Once again, we see, everyone has a part to play. Some are repopulating the city. Some are leading worship. Others are working the fields to provide food for everyone.

Finally, in chapter 12:1-26, we have a list of the leading priests and Levites from the time of Zerubbabel (who we read about in Zech & Hag). They came back with the first wave of exiles 100 years before Nehemiah. They rebuilt the temple. Now, in the time of Nehemiah, the wall is rebuilt. The point here is to show the continuity of priestly service through a very difficult period of Israel's history.

If all else fails, we must worship our God!

This brings us to verse 27 of chapter 12... (dedicate and celebrate)

Read 27-30.

27 - If it's from you, it's for you! God, you did it. Now, we do it for you!

This is worship: revelation and response. Worship is our response to what we value the most.

Look at how they respond:

- Verse 27: bring the Levites from everywhere. Asaph 11:17
- Why? To celebrate with Gladness, with thanksgiving, with singing.
- To elevate their excitement they bring then cymbals, harps, and lyres.
- Everyone in the surrounding areas are pouring in for the festivities!

We need to see Christians excited about God again! He's still good!

But our worship must come from a place of purity. (V. 30)

T: Joy overflows from devoted worship...

2. Joy holds hands with glad gratitude. (12:31-43)

- "Thanksgiving is a major theme in this passage. It appears again in verses 31, 38, 40. In verses 31, 38, the Hebrew word translated "choir" refers specifically to a "thanksgiving choir." One of the main purposes of this event is to express thanks to God for all he has done to restore the community. The rebuilt wall is seen as part of his work and plan." -Nykolaishen
- And look at this wall... verse 31 & 38 says these choirs are marching on the wall. This is the same wall Tobiah said in 4:3 that a fox would knock it down if it jumped up on it! HA!
- I love the strategic offering of thanksgiving here.
 - Ezra leads a choir to the south.
 - Nehemiah follows the choir moving to the north.
 - And together, they circle the city... singing and playing and praising and thanking God.
 - They surround the city with the praises of God!
 - Where do they meet up? At the temple. As Nykolaishen points out: "The scene thus connects the temple, the people, and the Jerusalem wall, each of which has been a focus in the restoration of the Judean community (temple, Ezra 1-8; people, Ezra 9-10 and Neh. 8-10; wall, Neh. 1-6)."

Story: Josh and Jessica (Issac and Titus)

Partnership between thanksgiving and joy. They go together.

Think about it: What is thanksgiving? When do we say thank you? We are grateful. when we receive something we do not deserve... when someone does something kind for us.

- Chesterton - "gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder."
 - Happiness - a compliment (gives you a word of encouragement), a simple kindness (opens the door for you), let alone, major generosity or acts of service... What happens? We get feelings of happiness to that perceived good!
 - Wonder - wow. I don't deserve that!
- That's what these songs of thanksgiving were doing!
 - 36 - David the man of God.. (Also in v 24)
 - Read Psalm 138

What reasons do you have to thank God? In the past week...

- God, thank you for my family.. car ride
- God, thank you for my friends... Seth teachable moments/ cinnamon rolls
- God, thank you for fun... and rest..
- God, thank you for the opportunity to seek your face.
- God, thank you for the opportunity to serve people and pray and fast for specific needs in our church family.

Look at verse 43 one more time! Read 43

This is what turns up the volume of your joy!

Look at what he's done for you...

"When I think about the Lord, how he saved me, how he raised me, how he filled me with the Holy Ghost, how he healed me to the uttermost... When I Think about the Lord... How He picked me up and turned me around, How He set my feet on solid ground

It makes me wanna shout! Hallelujah! Thank you, Jesus! Lord, you're worthy, of all the glory, and all the honor, and all the praise..."

T: Joy overflows from devoted worship. Joy holds hands with glad gratitude. Finally...

3. Joy inspires intentional obedience. (12:44-47)

How does it inspire? Look at 44...

- They did what? Appointed people to collect offerings. (Over the storerooms, contributions, firstfruits, and tithes,.
- Why did they do it: "for Judah rejoiced over the priests and Levites who ministered."
 - It's not so much the people, but what the people were doing. They were leading the worship of the nation! They were fulfilling God's commands again!!
 - Their focus is not people. Their focus is God. Their focus is worshiping God with everything they've got!
 - All of this was happening according to the instruction of David, the man of God (also mentioned in v.24 & 36). Look at verse 45-47. All of this pointed to God fulfilling his covenant promises to David (see 1 Chronicles 25).

Here's the point for our consideration: They acted because they rejoiced.... They obeyed God's voice because they knew it was more pleasurable than any other path!

Joy gives birth to joy... community. Obedience. Blessing...

- Seek God daily w passion and joy.
- Serve others with intentional love...
- Workplace....

They developed a new taste... Expulsive power of a new affection (CHALMERS - "The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new affection.")

This what Lent is about... examples...

When you look back on your life (could be the past week or past decade), what steps of obedience have you taken that brought you the most joy?

- How did you love the people around you?
- How did you serve?
- Who did you love? Who did you serve?
- Where were you?
- What did it look like? Were you breaking a sweat? Organizing various elements of a project? Working in tough places?

Joy... just thinking about it makes you want to go back doesn't it?

Why? Joy inspires intentional obedience

Mt 13:44

Conclusion

We have a greater privilege... To serve the true temple... the true city of God. The church of Jesus Christ.

If they poured their whole heart into it, how could we any less.

Let's let our joy be heard!