

XIII. Nehemiah in Biblical Perspective
The Memoirs of Nehemiah—Arise and Build
“Revival’s Multi-dimensional Effects and Blessings”
Nehemiah 12
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November 27, 2011 – Morning Sermon

We are in Nehemiah 12 as we continue our progress into this historical book of the memoirs of Nehemiah. In Nehemiah 12 he picks it back up in the first person. Nehemiah 12:27-43 says [27] *And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres. [28] And the sons of the singers gathered together from the district surrounding Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites; [29] also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem. [30] And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall. [31] Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks. One went to the south on the wall to the Dung Gate. [32] And after them went Hoshaiiah and half of the leaders of Judah, [33] and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, [34] Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, [35] and certain of the priests' sons with trumpets: Zechariah the son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, son of Asaph; [36] and his relatives, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them. [37] At the Fountain Gate they went up straight before them by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the Water Gate on the east. [38] The other choir of those who gave thanks went to the north, and I followed them with half of the people, on the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall, [39] and above the Gate of Ephraim, and by the Gate of Yeshanah, and by the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate; and they came to a halt at the Gate of the Guard. [40] So both choirs of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me; [41] and the priests Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; [42] and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader. [43] And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.* The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

We have arrived at a very wonderful passage of Scripture. God’s great work is now culminating in a glorious worship service that has multi-dimensional effects, consequences and blessings. I want to search them out with you but we have arrived at this worship service. It is a revival from heaven. Man sent revival is consumed with the pursuit of momentary, personal, vacuous experiences. It is conjured up by men, programs, personalities and the whole point is to elicit a momentary experience.

While certainly revival brings significant experiences, what is a heaven sent revival that ignites a flame in the church of Jesus Christ that then sets ablaze the Gospel throughout a country? A heaven sent revival is not consumed with a momentary experience although there are significant emotional experiences in such a moment. It is consumed with the effect of the revival, not just the experience of a moment. When heaven sent, God given revivals arrive they are Christ exalting not experience exalting. They are Gospel drenched, Spirit filled, sinner saving, life transforming and God glorifying. It becomes a moment where God's people have become honest with their sin and they come to depend upon the grace of the Lord Jesus that has taken hold of them and now the Lord is not only the giver of their life but the Lord has become their life. The joy of that begins to resound and flow.

One of the places that it is seen is worship. In fact, that is the pinnacle moment of it and we have arrived at that worship service. The question in many of our minds is they are there to dedicate the wall with the two great processions arriving at the temple but why did they begin it a month after the wall was built? Nehemiah has come. They built the wall in 52 days, overcame the adversaries and then they had a month of protracted meetings in God's Word – the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast of Booths. Now they are having the dedication service over a month later than when the wall was finished. Why did they wait that long? Why didn't they have the dedication service right after the wall had been built?

As we have worked our way through this we have realized Nehemiah's objective was not the wall. Nehemiah had asked his brother, Hanani two questions – how are the people and how is the city? He told him the city was broken down, the walls are broken down, the gates are burned, the doors aren't hung and the city is in reproach. Not only is the city in ruins but the people are in ruins. They are bearing distress and shame. Nehemiah knows why the walls are broken down is because the people are broken down. The reason the people are broken down is because they have forsaken the Lord so the Lord has broken the people and when He breaks the people He has broken the walls to remind them that He is their security and they need to be right with Him, not the walls of the city. So the walls are a symptom of where the real problem is and that's in the lives of the people. Nehemiah then begins a project which is to rebuild the walls but his objective is to rebuild the people while rebuilding the walls.

He will use the project to rebuild the wall in order to rebuild the people. In Nehemiah 1 through 6 there is the rebuilding of the wall. Then in Nehemiah 7 through 11 you have the rebuilding of the people. They rebuild the wall and the Lord had blessed them. When they finished that they found out where everybody was and they came on a day called the Feast of Trumpets. On that day they trumpeted the Word of God in a great gathering worship and as they read the Word of God they broke out into small groups. The next day they came to study the Word of God more closely and they began to see that there were whole passages that they had neglected. Even this month was the Day of Atonement and they realized they hadn't kept the Day of Atonement. They had not kept the Feast of Booths and realized all that they had abandoned. So they went through fifteen days of preparation in the Word of God and then seven days in God's Word, praise and study. The result of that was that when the Word of God was preached, there was praise and worship they began to see that they needed God to build them.

The first thing they needed to confess was where their lives were broken down. They began to confess their sins with no spin. They didn't say they fell or slipped into sin or if God was offended by their idolatry they didn't say would you please forgive us. They said this was sin and they saw the sinfulness of sin. They owned their sin and confessed that God had been faithful and they had been wicked. We cast ourselves upon Your grace and mercy. They repented of their sin and turned from it to the Lord and then came this great moment led by the leaders where they made a covenant of renewal and God had revived them. They gave God the glory for His redeeming grace. They called upon Him for His transforming grace and they said "From now on O God You have our worship, our first born, our first fruits, You have everything for we bring it all to You" and they signed their name and said "We are Yours because You are ours." God had visited them with revival. Now it's time to worship. Not only has the wall been rebuilt but the people have been revived. Now Nehemiah is ready to praise the Lord.

The clue is found back in Nehemiah 12:43. It's an outpouring, an overwhelming worship and praise to God. Nehemiah 12:43 says *[43] And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, (Why?) for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.* So the reason they came with great joy to give God praise is because of what God had done in them and to them. God's great work of grace in them now brought them to give Him praise, so let me share this with you from the text.

What is worship? We didn't come up with this. God has given us a heart to worship and He's done a work in our heart for us to worship so this is what pleases Me. Worship is the Divinely-ordained response for those who have been blessed by the work of God's grace and for those who desire to grow in the work of God's grace. In other words, God has done a work of grace in my life and because of that I long to come before Him to give Him praise, glory and honor. God made me. Why did He make me? What is the chief end of man? It is to glorify and enjoy Him forever. Why did He give me breath to breathe and life to live? He gave it to me that I might live for His glory, praise and honor. God has called me to praise Him. Why did He save me? He saved me for the praise and glory of His grace. Why does He sustain me? He sustains me for His glory. God has done a great work of grace in me so how can I with gladness, joy and thanksgiving honor Him?

You might be thinking you're in a tough time right now. The Bible says that if any among you are sick let him sing praises. There is the acid test of when we are able to see the hand of God. It is in the days of difficulty. Here God's people are able to see the hand of God. We see that we're in a broken world with broken walls and broken this and broken that but God has done a great work in our lives. God hasn't finished yet. We have also assembled to give You praise not only because of the work of Your hand of grace in our life but because we want you to continue that work. We want to expose ourselves to that which helps us grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Worship is designed to capture the praise of His people as they gather together and then God determines I will inhabit the praises of My people. So God comes down into the midst of the praises of His people to grow us in the work of God's grace. We'll see that in this text.

What is being said here in Nehemiah 12:43? God has made us to rejoice with great joy. It is God's work. God fulfilled His work. He told us when He gave us this

land that if we went after other God's, blasphemed and profaned His name He would raise up nations that aren't His and He would use those nations to deal with us His people. He raised up Assyria to deal with the Northern tribes and a hundred years later He raises up Babylon to deal with the two Southern tribes. He takes them as He prophesied into servitude in exile for seventy years and His disciplining hand of love was upon them. Cyrus who was prophesied to do it was then appointed by God in the Medo-Persian Empire to set the people free. So they were set free for seventy years and then came back with Zerubbabel and Joshua and rebuilt the temple and the sacrifice but the city still lay in ruins. Now a hundred years later the city is still in ruins so God is doing a work of grace because not only did God take us away, discipline us and then set us free to come back here but He gave us leaders like Zerubbabel and Joshua and gave us the temple and sacrifice back. Then God sent another leader Ezra who set his heart to study, do and teach the Word of God and for fifteen years he labored in our midst teaching, preaching and being faithful.

Then God did another work by sending another man named Nehemiah who helped us rebuild the wall and the oppressors repented of their oppression of the poor. The people who neglected the Sabbath now embraced the Sabbath. We had absented ourselves from worship but now we come to worship. We had stolen from God by withholding His tithe but now we're bringing all those things. Look, God has done a great work in our lives. God has given us great joy. God has done it. Now to God be the praise, glory and honor. God had done a great work to them, in them and through them and they saw it over the scope of decades and hundreds of years. Now they would rise up and declare, "God we have been unfaithful but You have been faithful and done this work in us so with great sacrifices and great joy they lifted up praise to God and God continues to work in them. He even begins to expand it and grow it in their lives.

What happens with that kind of worship? Let me just draw out five things for you that divinely designed worship will always be marked by if it's Gospel worship. That is that God has done a work in us. The first thing you see is God centered Gospel worship is marked by thoughtful preparation. The Scripture says they sought the Levites and brought the Levites. They sought out the choirs and the sons of the singers from the surrounding towns. They came to worship prepared. The leaders and the Levites purified themselves with the ritual cleansings of baptism. They purified the wall, the gates and the people who were prepared to come and worship. This matter of worship, while effusive was not thoughtless. While springing up from inside their heart because of the great things God has done that did not cause them to be haphazard. There is joy and thoughtfulness. They have given thought to their preparation. Look at the choreography as the choirs appropriately go up on top of the walls and march around the walls. They end at the place of God's presence, the House of the Lord.

This wasn't just serendipity people had given thought to this worship that was taking place. They had given preparation to it and arranged those who would take the choir around the south wall and those who would take the choir around the north wall. The last time I was in Israel I anteed up the cost in order to walk on top of the wall. This was not the wall that Nehemiah built. This was the wall that crusaders and Muslims had built since then but I walked around that wall because some of it is in the very same place. You can still walk around today the northern part and the southern part and you can end up at the House of the Lord or where the House of the Lord use to be but now the

Dome of the Rock is there now. I walked all the way around it trying to imagine this passage in Nehemiah as the people are all gathered in the temple and they are looking up to see and hear these choirs. Can't you just hear them singing antiphonally to one another as they meet at the House of the Lord?

As they meet at the House of the Lord for the Word and praise of God you can just see the thought that was put into that. Wasn't it appropriate that they marched on the wall that God had built? See it strong. As they march toward the temple there is the altar again and now they bring great sacrifices to the One true and living God. They raise up their voices with joyful praise and thanksgiving. Deacons, here are your forbearers, the Levites. Just like you they have three responsibilities. The three are the stewardship of God's peoples' resources, the administration of God's people in life and then the gathering of God's people for worship. We call ours the Lord's Day committee. You see the gathering of resources for mercy, their preparation for worship to make sure it happens right for the glory of God and you are standing in their legacy when you do that. That's what they did.

Worship services don't just happen. God gives us a work of grace that causes us to give praise but it's done joyfully, decently and in order. There is both decorum and joy. The joy does not lead to triviality or thoughtlessness nor does the thoughtfulness lead to morbidity and ritual but there is this rejoicing that comes because there has been thoughtful preparation by the leaders. The people have prepared themselves. They didn't just say "I think I'll show up when Ezra starts preaching." No, they came and were able to see this glorious display of antiphonal singing. They were able to participate with praise and thanksgiving before the Lord. It's not something that they haphazardly squeezed into their schedule. They had prepared themselves even to the point of ritual baptisms. They purified themselves to come into the presence of God. There is this thoughtful preparation that takes place all the way through it.

Secondly, God centered Gospel worship is marked by leadership inspiration. When we get to this text, now you know why back in Nehemiah 11 and 12 that there is this list of names of Levites, singers and priests. They are listing the people that stepped up to leadership on the wall. Not only are there leaders there but there are leaders of the leaders there also. Ezra leads one group on the southern wall. Nehemiah leads another group on the northern wall and then they arrive at the house of the Lord. There the leader of the singers has prepared the singers to sing then. All of that leadership is engaged. Notice again it is unmistakable the prominence of that leader. The people are gathered to give worship and the leaders are up on the wall. You can see all the leaders on the wall and they are displaying their consecration and joy before the Lord. We aren't a people who are just wandering but we're a people with leaders who are leading us forward. So there is the presence of leadership inspiration.

Thirdly, God centered Gospel worship is marked by contagious participation. They are drawing them in from all over and not only that the sound of the worship goes out to the far reaches beyond Jerusalem. They could hear them in the environment around them. One other thing I want to mention on leadership is it was not only the formal leadership of Levites, priests, governors and prophets but it was the leadership of men and their homes. Nehemiah 12:43 says [43] *And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; **the women and children also rejoiced.** And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.* The men had led their

families into worship. They brought their wives and children. Fathers and husbands were setting the pace for worship and drawing their people into it. It was contagious because it not only went from the leaders to the people but from the fathers and the husbands to their wives and children. Then all around it was drawing people into the praise. What is going on over there? We hear great singing, praise and glory.

I want to stop here and put in a small little commercial. I'm so grateful for all the preparation that a choir does. They put hours upon hours upon hours. There is preparation that goes in for a sermon and all services that take place in the church. Praise the Lord for what deacons do in preparing for those services. We have medical teams. A man's life was saved because they were prepared just a couple of Sundays ago. We have preparation on ushering where people are helped, encouraged, brought in and made to feel welcome. There are greeter teams and I could just go on and on and on. Praise the Lord for that kind of leadership and preparation that takes place so that we can worship and praise the Lord. We can prepare ourselves to praise the Lord but the amazing thing is we will not come to it unless the Lord draws us with a work of grace in our hearts.

Dare I say, if you want to know a congregation that knows how to worship there are two things to look for. One is there is the eager hearing of God's Word and two there is the non-negotiated congregational praise to God. You don't notice the choir but praise the Lord for them. You don't notice the praise team but praise the Lord for them. You don't notice the liturgist but praise the Lord for them. Hear them sing with great joy and thanksgiving. It's a contagious thing that draws others into it.

Fourthly, God centered Gospel worship is marked by joyful celebration. You can hear it. Seven times in this short little text that I read it said "they came together with celebration, with great joy, great gladness, with great hearts and great singing." They were giving thanks and they began to list all these instruments. Every instrument is brought to the command of the praise of God and the people of God bring the instruments of their voices to praise the Lord. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord and there is this joyful celebration because God had done a great work in them. And it was heard far and wide even beyond Jerusalem. Does anyone hear our praise? Does anyone hear us with the decorum of preparation and the design of God's Word yet the lifting up of praise to God? For the mouth speaks what has filled the heart. It is a joyful celebration and God has done a great work.

Finally God centered Gospel worship is marked unconditional dedication. They dedicated the wall, certainly. They dedicated the gates, certainly. They dedicated the instruments, the sacrifices and all these things but most of all they dedicated themselves. The word 'dedication' really has two meanings that are complimentary to each other. It's like two sides of one coin. The word dedication means to set aside for a holy purpose or it means to consecrate oneself to a holy purpose. So we set aside a Lord's Day. We have been doing this for over 2,000 years, why? It was because Jesus rose and on the first day of the week He appeared to His disciples and they worshipped Him. Then He did two more times that we know of. Then the Apostles gathered people on the first day of the week so we are here to dedicate a great work. The Wall Builder came to save us. We're not just here celebrating walls being built but the Wall Builder, Christ, has come to save us. He is our security, our strength and our great wall.

So this great work has been done by the Lord so now we dedicate ourselves, a Lord's Day, a worship space, the people of God that gather into this place, our lives and

we set ourselves aside to the call of God to be holy. God did not call you or me to be happy. He called us to be holy which is what brings true happiness. I believe if today's contemporary church was to write a new catechism this is what it would be: the chief end of God is to make me happy. No, God has saved me for His glory and He has called me to pursue a dedicated life. He is mine and I am His. This is not what you do to be saved. This is what you do for the Savior who gave Himself to save you. Be ye holy for I am holy. Pursue holiness. Flee temptation. Pursue obedience, why? It is because you love Him and if you love Me you will keep My commandments. I love Him, why? It is because He first loved me. It is because of His work of grace, now I by His grace want to work out what He is working in to my life, for His own good pleasure.

They committed themselves. Man sent revival is preoccupied with an experience. God sent revival is preoccupied with the effect and it is a saved, joyful, committed people of God to the Lord God alone. By the way, you can see the multi-dimensional effects of that in this passage. So what's the result of this worship service? Look at the effect in Nehemiah 12:44-47 which says *[44] 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, for Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered. [45] And they performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did the singers and the gatekeepers, according to the command of David and his son Solomon. [46] For long ago in the days of David and Asaph there were directors of the singers, and there were songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. [47] And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah gave the daily portions for the singers and the gatekeepers; and they set apart that which was for the Levites; and the Levites set apart that which was for the sons of Aaron.*

Do you see the multiple dynamics that are taking place there? They have new leadership in place. There were men appointed over this and that. There is ongoing worship. It's not just one worship service for now the service of the Lord in worship continues. There is the gathering of resources to do the work of ministry. There is the caring for those whom God has sent to lead them. Judah took care of her priests and Levites. There is stewardship where they are bringing in the first fruits and the tithes. Look at all these multi-dimensional effects that have come because God has revived His people and His people have come to give Him praise and glory. So what is the takeaway?

The takeaway is true worship can only be done by God's people and true worship is the pinnacle and the propellant for God's people. Nobody else can worship but God's people. There are all kinds of facsimiles but the only people who can worship are the people of God. Why? It is because you have to have the work of God and the presence of God and without those two you can't worship. Worship when it's done by God's people is the pinnacle of their life and a propellant into life – stewardship, leadership, ministry and mission all flow from it. God's people have come to the living God and He has done a saving work in them so they lift up praise to Him and then He inhabits the praises of His people. He equips them, enlivens them and sends them out. They have great joy as a result of the sacredness of knowing the work of God's grace in their life.

Look at their worship. They didn't just say "God's done a new work so let's reinvent worship." No they said "Let's go back. What did God teach David, Solomon

and let's connect to what God has said worship is. Let's contextualize in the present for the Lord has done a new thing. We'll raise up a new song. Let's go and change everything that's around us." So there is this marvelous worship that is connected to the past, contextualized in the present and changing the future. As it is taking place the people are gathering with preparation. They are prepared to work and leadership is modeling worship and the life. They are participating contagiously drawing other people to the God of glory. There is this celebration of praise to God. They will not be silent or an evaluator of other people's worship. They will be engaged in personal worship.

Worship is a full contact sport. Sport is not a good word. Worship is a full contact experience where I'm thinking rationally, I'm feeling emotionally, I'm acting volitionally and I'm engaged physically and spiritually. God moves in my heart. If I feel the freedom I raise my hands. I lift my voice. From my heart I speak the word of praise to God. We are encouraging one another. All of those things are taking place and I do not see myself as an entitlement of God's work. God has done a work of grace in my life. I will praise Him. I don't see myself as having arrived. I'm not so arrogant as to think God has owed me the death of His Son and I'm not so arrogant as to think that I have arrived. I need to be among His people and with His people. I need to look upon the wall and see leaders. I need God's people to encourage me. I need to hear the Word of grace. I need to be confronted in my sin and encouraged with the Word of salvation.

I need all those things for I can't do this alone. I need the Lord and meet the Lord with His people for the Lord inhabits the praises of His people. That is what I need at the moment. That is what God has called me to give to Him. That's what marks out Gospel worship where God has done a work in the lives of men and women. Leadership flows from it. Stewardship flows from it. Worship flows from it. Ministry flows from it but it flows because God's work of grace has come.

Perhaps you are reading this today searching for that work of grace. You have come to the right place because we want to tell you about Jesus. He has come to save you from your sins. Just a last thought and then we'll close. They marched around a wall, you are the wall. They arrived at the house of God where God's presence was. We are here today not because this is great dedicated space but we have arrived at the house of the Lord. It's you, you are the temple of the Holy Spirit. As Christmas approaches and we celebrate Christ, Emmanuel, God has come and templed among His people. Therefore we come O Christ to you and give You praise. If you're reading this today and you have no praise because you haven't come to Christ then come to the One who came for you. He will save you, do a work in you, and you may join the chorus of God's people. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Will our worship reach far as they hear the joyful sounds beyond Jerusalem, beyond this sanctuary? Jesus saves. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. I pray Father You would do a work of grace in each life reading this. I made an invitation that I would like to restate. When you come to Christ there is no spin. Jesus I come, nothing in my hands I bring simply to the cross I cling. Jesus has come to save you just simply come to Him. Say "Jesus I am a sinner but I've heard the truth of Good News that Emmanuel, God has come to us and is with us. So Jesus I come to follow You." If you made that

prayer please contact us here at Briarwood because we want to walk with you all the way to glory and help you in Christ. Now Father I pray for us who know You. You have already done that work and we've come. God I beg You, may we know the work of grace in our hearts so much that we can reclaim worship, not to our personal preferences but to the Divine design of unmitigated joy rising from the hearts of Your people to the throne of grace and into all the surrounding area. May they hear the praise of our God and may they see the work of God's grace in our life. May they hear the Word of Christ from our lips so that others by faith hearing the Word would come to Christ? O God, fill this place with great sacrifices and great joy for You have done a great work. You have rebuilt not just a wall but these people. We have come not to a house but to Jesus and we have come to praise You in a gathered assembly and with our lives as we scatter throughout this week, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.