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Celebration

Nehemiah 11-12

Let's All Celebrate!

Well here we are at the “end” of the 85th Legislative Session. It seems that for most people here at the capitol the end of session elicits a mixture of emotions. It brings about a relief that it is complete; a sadness that it is over; a realization once again of the huge responsibility everyone at the capitol has had in shaping the future of Texas; a frustration at what did not get achieved; and hopefully a joy and gladness for all that was accomplished.

From our study through the Book of Nehemiah, I think it is safe to say that the people of Jerusalem felt a similar mixture of emotions. However, in the midst of all of these emotions, it is important to take time to celebrate what God has done.

Many times we call out to God for help in difficult situations; but then forget God and only focus on what WE achieved when we get to the other side of the difficult situation.

Many times we call out to God when we need help, like for wisdom during a tough time. But when we get to the other side, we tend to become proud of what WE did rather than acknowledging God's work in and through us and the situation.

The people of Jerusalem accomplished a great feat, rebuilding the walls in just 52 days. But Nehemiah, as their leader, wanted the people to remember that God was the One Who worked in and through them to accomplish this great work.

Chapter 11 lists the families that would actually be living in the newly walled city of Jerusalem. The Levites and Priests were also detailed--their lineage and claim to the priesthood was important and needed to be verified. The listing of these families goes on into **chapter 12**.

Then in **Nehemiah 12:27** Nehemiah had the Levites, who had settled in various towns around Jerusalem, join the others in the holy city for the ceremonies to worship God for what

He had done. And they also dedicate the rebuilt wall. So **chapter 12** is basically the end of the story even though there is an epilogue in **chapter 13** that we studied last week.

So now the people are celebrating...and what an amazing celebration it was!

27Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps.

Nehemiah divided his choirs to march around the city.

31So I brought the leaders of Judah up on the wall, and appointed two large thanksgiving choirs. One went to the right hand on the wall toward the Refuse Gate.

He lists who went where and says **“35and some of the priests' sons [went] with trumpets—**

And he also mentions that some went **“with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them.”**

Then Nehemiah explains how each group proceeded around the walls of the city.

37By the Fountain Gate, in front of them, they went up the stairs of the City of David, on the stairway of the wall, beyond the house of David, as far as the Water Gate eastward.

38The other thanksgiving choir went the opposite way, and I was behind them with half of the people on the wall, going past the Tower of the Ovens as far as the Broad Wall,

39and above the Gate of Ephraim, above the Old Gate, above the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate; and they stopped by the Gate of the Prison.

40So the two thanksgiving choirs stood in the house of God, likewise I and the half of the rulers with me;

Maybe this choreography was inspired by the story of Joshua and the taking of Jericho...or maybe it was Nehemiah's memory of that moonlit ride he himself made around the city when he first arrived. Regardless his inspiration, it made for a memorable experience for the people celebrating.

In **verse 41** Nehemiah says the celebration also included **trumpets**. And in **verse 42** he says that **“singers sang loudly with Jezariah the director.”**

And in verse 43 he says that,

⁴³Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.

What a great occasion! All the members of the various families, men, women and children, rejoicing together at what God had accomplished in their midst. Together they offered sacrifices as an expression of thanksgiving.

There were a couple of elements of this celebration which we would do well to include ourselves.

Celebrate with True Joy

First we read that they came to **“²⁷...celebrate the dedication with gladness.”** The word for gladness is the Hebrew word, **שמחה** (seem-hah) which means “joy or jubilation.”

Joy is not the same as happiness. These people were happy, but they were also joyful. Happiness is liking the present moment because it pleases us. Joy appreciates the past, the present, and the future, not because the circumstances are pleasing, but because the heart is right with God.

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These people were happy because the wall was finished. They had achieved their objective. But they were joyful because God had helped them to finish it. They were co-laborers with Him. His hand was involved in their labor. Aware of God's love and acceptance, they therefore were joyful and wanted to celebrate joyfully.

Celebrate with a Pure Heart

In order to truly experience joy one must also be able to celebrate with a clean heart and clear conscience. Verse 30 states,

“³⁰Then the priests and Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, the gates, and the wall.”

Many people seem to be afraid of this word, *purity*. They think it describes a goody two-shoes, self-righteous kind of person. But purification in the Christian life stems from the same philosophy that motivates us when we wash dishes. We wash dishes frequently because they ought to be clean. We do not want to eat off of or serve our guests with dirty dishes. Likewise God desires clean “vessels” to use for His work.

How do we purify ourselves? It is not by ritual but by confessing our sins and receiving forgiveness from God. Then trust that God cleanses you, that He forgives you, that He has restored you to His favor. This is what fills the heart with joy.

Celebrate with Thankfulness to God

Another important element of celebration is Thankfulness. These people were thankful. But they weren't thankful just to be thankful. The object of their thankfulness was God!

You can well imagine what they were thankful for. They must have been grateful indeed for the godly leadership of Nehemiah. They were thankful for God's moving of the king of Persia's heart that permitted this whole project to come into being. They were grateful for God's protection that watched over them as the wall was being rebuilt. They were grateful for the wisdom of God that allowed them to overcome their enemies, for the spirit of unity and cooperation that prevailed, for strength to labor, and on and on.

APPLICATION

Here at the end of session we should be thankful as well. It is so easy to grumble and complain, to insist on something we do not have, to focus on that instead of on all we do have. One of the first signs of growing, maturing followers of Jesus is that they begin to give thanks to God for what He has poured into their life; for the opportunities that are before them; and for the present blessings and liberties that they enjoy.

Let us end session well by celebrating what God has done with Joy, a Pure Heart and Thankfulness.

Shalom!

