



Series: Nehemiah, Healthy Walls	Reference: Nehemiah 12	Title: Celebrate	Date: 7.30.17
Website Writeup: Chapter 12 of Nehemiah let's us peek in on a great celebration of the people in a service of dedication. Joy, thankfulness, happiness and purity mark this time - let's explore what that means for us.			

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

UPG Prayer of the Day...

Numbering around 14 million, the Hui are the largest & most widespread of China's Muslim nationalities, scattered throughout the country. One of the worst cases of genocide in history occurred between 1855 and 1873 when one million Hui people were massacred. Pray for the Han Chinese among them to develop a heart for the Hui.

Sermon...

Walls are often a sign of separation, control, or domination. The Great Wall of China. The Berlin Wall which came down in celebration in the 80's - sort of the opposite of what we see in Nehemiah. Prison walls. These walls aren't objects of celebration; they symbolize separation. The Berlin Wall was strewn with remembrances of those who had died trying to get over it. The border between North & South Korea is the same. They're an image of control & fear. But the Jerusalem wall was an object of celebration! Let's look...

At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived & were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving & with the music of cymbals, harps & lyres. The singers also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem – from the villages of the Netophathites, from Beth Gilgal, and from the area of Geba & Azmaveth, for the singers had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. When the priests & Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates & the wall. I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. {Neh 12:27-31a NIV}

This wasn't a wall of hostility, rather it symbolized the rebuilding of the spiritual life with healthy gates of ingress & egress to the outside world - the walled city with the Temple symbolized a place where people were free to meet with God. The city had been repopulated, now it was time to celebrate & dedicate the walls & gates together. They proceed with musicians, leaders, officials & all the people in a celebration of revived spiritual connection with God. They sing, make sacrifices, purify themselves & bring offerings.

There are three aspects of celebration in this passage. Number one, they were joyful! (Verse 27, "The Levites were ... brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully.") Nietzsche said, "If the Christians expect me to believe in their Redeemer, they've got to look a lot more redeemed!"



What's the difference between Joy & Happiness? Happiness is about the moment. We enjoy ourselves & feel happy. Joy's deeper & long-lasting. Joy looks back appreciating the past, as well as the present & future, not because we're merely happy in the moment but because we feel an overall security & gratitude in life - we recognize the work of God in us. Joy focuses on the acceptance, faithfulness & promises of God. Happiness is fleeting. Joy's enduring. Happiness depends on outward circumstances. Joy transcends circumstances holding to our right-relationship with God & purpose in Him. Happiness is circumstantial & is tied to externals. Joy wells up from within unfazed by circumstances. Happiness fades. Joy lasts. The Jews were happy they'd accomplished the work & joyful in their position with God.

Secondly, they sought purity! (Verse 30, *"When the priests & Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates & the wall."*) Purification's necessary to truly celebrate. We can't talk out of the side of our mouths. The life of the Christian journey dictates, if we're going to truly celebrate with joy, purity's necessary.

Psalm 24 says: Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands & a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol, or swear by what's false. He will receive blessing from the LORD & vindication from God his Savior. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face O God of Jacob. {Psa 24:3-6 NIV}

You don't set your table with dirty dishes. You can't have intimacy with the wife you cheat on. You don't drink water which is cloudy or unclear. And God's work's hindered by dirty vessels! We need to seek purity in our lives allowing God to cleanse us. Purity doesn't save us, but we live as if it were that important in order to participate in the building of God's Kingdom out of gratitude for His grace. So we metaphorically use the Dung Gate (remember from weeks back), the gate they used to expel the garbage from the city which was followed by the Fountain & Water Gates; where we're filled with the Holy Spirit & God's Word again - to expel those things which clog up our relationship with God. We can't lose our relationship with God, but intimacy & usefulness are hamstrung when we're unwilling to have the Spirit cleanse & fill us.

How do we purify ourselves? It's not by ritual, but simply by confessing our faults & *believing* God's forgiven them. Private confession is usually not our problem, it's the second part of that statement which gives us trouble; we don't believe God forgives us!

Remember from last week, in the Christian life it always comes back to my heart - I have to deal with my own stuff. Yet, more importantly I have to remember, I can enter the Holy of Holies due to Christ's sacrifice for me with boldness now. There's no guilt or shame attached to me any longer - I can't blame-shift, hide, or avoid these things in my life. But, due to grace, I can simply walk into my heavenly father's presence & unload it on him. Why is that? (books - switching records) He's there to take those burdens, to forgive & cleanse.



John says: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all iniquity,” {cf, 1 Jn 1:9}*. True of us all in Christ. We find forgiveness, purity & purpose if we’ll simply confess & rejoice in his grace.

Thirdly, thankfulness is always part of true celebration. (Verse 31: *“I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks.” {Neh 12:31 NIV}*) They were thankful for Nehemiah’s leadership, for the Kings permission to work, protection, unity, cooperation, strength & provision! Thankful for what God had done in & through them. Are we thankful? Do we count blessings or negatives? We’re trained to grumble & complain, to insist on something we don’t have, instead of being grateful for what we do - we live in the Entitlement Zone. Spiritually mature people are thankful people (story of lumber yard guy). Joyfulness, purity & thanksgiving - three aspects of mature celebration in Christ.

Continuing on, Nehemiah divided his choirs to march around the city. *One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate. Hoshai and half the leaders of Judah followed them along with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, as well as some priests with trumpets, and also Zechariah son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, and his associates – Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani – with musical instruments prescribed by David the man of God. Ezra the scribe led the procession. At the Fountain Gate they continued directly up the steps of the City of David on the ascent to the wall and passed above the house of David to the Water Gate on the east. {Neh 12:31b-37 NIV}*

They began on the western side of the wall, went down around the southern end of the city & up onto the eastern side where they approached near the Temple. *The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction. I [Nehemiah] followed them on top of the wall, together with half the people – past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, over the Gate of Ephraim, the Jeshanah Gate [the Old Gate], the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate. At the Gate of the Guard (which is the Inspection Gate or Judgment Gate) they stopped. {Neh 12:38-39 NIV}*

This process of walking around an object, or land, was a way of claiming a thing for God. Abraham was told to walk around the Promised Land & God would give it to him. We’ve prayer walked our neighborhoods over local homes & businesses in order that God would deliver this area for his glory. I’ve walked & prayed over the area. My wife has. Something we should continually do.

Then the choirs join in the Temple for a service of thanksgiving. *The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God; so did I, together with half the officials, as well as the priests – Eliakim, Maaseiah, Mijamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah with their trumpets – and also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam and Ezer. The choirs sang under the direction of Jezrahiah. And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because*



God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away. {Neh 12:40-43 NIV}

Even the kids are involved as a vital component of the Church. Everyone giving thanks for what God's done. These sacrifices were thank-offerings prescribed by the Law. There's a correspondence to this in the life of believers today. It's spelled out in these words from the book of Hebrews, *Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Heb 13:15-16 NIV)*

or in Romans 12:1-2, *Therefore, I urge you brothers (& sisters) in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Our lives are a sacrifice of praise. Praise & sharing, expressing our thanksgiving to God for his grace & provision in individual lives & community. Praying continually, giving thanks in all circumstances! It should be known we're praising & sharing our lives in what God's doing in them behind the scenes! Six:Eight has a vibrant prayer ministry. We often practice these things together. The Holy Spirit's moving among us - life change is happening! Those are things we don't always see, but need to hear; it's encouraging to hear we have reason to be thankful!

The final account in the chapter is the great offering which was taken at the service in the Temple. *At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, first-fruits and tithes. From the fields around the towns they were to bring into the storerooms the portions required by the Law for the priests and the Levites, for Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites. They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did also the singers and gate-keepers, according to the commands of David and his son Solomon. For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the singers and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. So in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, all Israel contributed the daily portions for the singers and gatekeepers. They also set aside the portion for the other Levites, and the Levites set aside the portion for the descendants of Aaron. {Neh 12:44-47 NIV}*

There are three important aspects concerning these offerings. (1) They were given with pleasure: (*"Judah was pleased with the ministering priests and Levites."*) The Scriptures tell us that our offerings should be given cheerfully - a thankful heart gives generously. We have the story of a widow who gave two small coins as her offering & Jesus said, out of her poverty she'd given more than anyone else. God's looking for us to give cheerfully out of a heart of thankfulness for our passive position of grace in him - realizing, giving is a spiritual act acknowledging He's using his Church to move the kingdom forward.



Dr. H. A. Ironside used to tell the story of an old Scotsman who put in a gold sovereign into the offering bag at church by mistake when he meant to put in only a shilling. When he realized his mistake he tried to get it back. But the usher pulled the bag back saying, “Nope, once in, always in!” The Scotsman said, “Ah well, I’ll get credit for it in glory.” The usher replied, “Nope, you’ll get credit for the shilling!” since that’s all he’d intended to give.

(2) These offerings were also given, “*according to the command of David and his son Solomon.*” David & Solomon lived 500 years before Nehemiah, this had become tradition by the time Nehemiah led this celebration. It required the singers & gatekeepers, to perform the service of purification. All the people working there, ushers, musicians, leaders, etc., were to be purified before they performed their duties - that’s why we pray every Sunday before the service. We’re not here to draw attention to ourselves, or to be driven by selfish ambition & vanity. This service of worship & Word is to hone our focus on Christ.

What we look for in leadership here are people who are faithful, available, teachable, service-oriented & others focused (**FATSO**). People who can be counted on to show up & engage. Having the time to serve, because even if you have all the gifts & right motives to use them, if you’re not in the room, you don’t have the credibility/time to do the task. People who are open to being led themselves into further growth. Who’ll do whatever’s needed for the Body (greeting, sound, video, teaching kids, etc.). People who don’t need a position to minister to others, but do it naturally because they know they’re blessed to be a blessing. People who come in to our community not seeking a ‘position’ or demanding major changes without understanding our decision process & character as a community. Rather, we look for those who realize relationship is key & minister to people. People who show themselves to be humble & growing themselves. Whose inner spiritual life is reflected outwardly with others - since if you’re not honest about your own need for growth, how can you lead someone else? Those who have the same attitude as John the Baptist in reference to Jesus, ‘*He must become greater, I must become less*’ & naturally follow Jesus when he says, “*feed my sheep*”. Skills & experience are secondary to spiritual maturity; spiritual maturity is synonymous with humility & necessary for good leadership.

The hardest person to deal with in church is the prideful person who believes they know better & have something great to teach everyone else; critical & demanding without understanding others & the faith-community including its history & development. Who don’t foster discipleship relationships, but rely on their skills & knowledge instead of the Word & the Holy Spirit’s leading. Those who are project instead of people oriented.

I see very little of those who just want to be recognized here at Six:Eight! The Community Group leaders, Vinny & his team, greeters, teachers & everyone else who serves here, serve with a humble heart - God’s pleased with that! When I see my kids acting selfishly, they’re still my kids, but I’m not pleased. But when I see them serve others I’m overjoyed. God’s the same when we serve out of humility & love.



(3) In the closing sentence, it says, *“They also set aside the portion for the other Levites.”* This was in contrast to their past behavior when they’d been taking advantage of each other - now, as a result of this revival of Spirit among them, they’re caring for those who couldn’t be there, who were busy serving in other areas. They were not individualists, doing their own thing, They were a faith-community like us, acting as one.

If you could picture each one of us as a separate tool in the Carpenters bag. Jesus comes to his workshop to build his kingdom. He reaches in the bag pulling out saw, wood, a hammer, screws, screwdriver, glue & all the other things he needs to build! How far would he get if he didn’t have a hammer? How well would the kingdom hold together without the glue or nails? We’re all vital to his ministry purpose of reaching the nations.

In the end, we too must celebrate with joy, in purity & with thanksgiving to God! Give with pleasure, serve with maturity & care for each other in community. We too must surround this geographical area with prayer, dedicating it to the Lord. We realize how important each one of us are as we move forward as a faith-community.

Maybe God will write a chapter about us in history. *Maybe it would sound like this: “Six:Eight gathered in small groups & on Saturdays expressing their joy together at the grace found in their relationship with Jesus. They prayed, confessed & sought purity in a heart of gratitude before the Lord, seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit & ministered to one another out of humility & love. They were moved to thankfulness & joy in their worship services. When they took a walk, or jogged around their neighborhoods, they prayed for God’s Kingdom to be established with joy. They used Kingdom Opportunities through their Community Groups to pray over & share with their neighbors. As a result, God moved mightily among them producing life-change & seeing others come into the family of God!”*

We have community Movie Nights this summer, let’s be praying for relationships & the Holy Spirit to move among the people we encounter there. Maybe we show up with thankful hearts in purity & with joy. Let’s be praying for the development of & our role in Community Groups beginning in the Fall. And for our influence & kingdom work in this local community for the coming year.

Community Group Leader Questions:

- I. Begin your time by thanking God... (approximately 15 minutes)
 - A. for his grace found in the Cross of Christ.
 - B. Ask people to think & pray through other things they’re thankful for.
- II. Take your group on a prayer walk around the neighborhood! (approximately 1 hour)
 - A. Map out your neighborhood, print out specific prayer requests & even names of people you want to pray for beforehand having those ready for your group
 - B. If weather doesn’t allow, then do this over a map from your meeting place