

A TIME TO CELEBRATE

Nehemiah 12:27-13:31

1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, opened with 84 grand pianos, on various levels of huge stage, playing simultaneously. An amazing fete, requiring incredible coordination to keep everyone playing together with a unified sound.

Israel's worship leaders produce their own celebration (Neh. 12). They don't have all the technology to coordinate it.

But their celebration requires similar coordination to create unified sound of praise for what the Lord has done. Every conceivable form of verbal and musical praise is included.

This is a day of great celebration!

Israel's back in the land, the temple's rebuilt, the walls are back in place.

When physical reconstruction is complete, They direct their attention to *SPIRITUAL* reconstruction.

1st step in *spiritual* reconstruction:

commitment to listen to God's voice,
and do *whatever* God says.

They put that commitment in writing
–they “sign on the dotted line”

Commitment: with God's enablement, ***we'll do God's will!***

We asked you to write an agreement with God;
to list issues He wants you to deal with.

After Israel's *written* commitment,
it's time to *celebrate what God has done*.

City's coming to life—Urban renewal
–homes rebuilt; businesses developing
Their stimulus plan worked!

Spiritual reconstruction is part of the plan.

Though walls were finished,

this celebration had to wait for *spiritual* reconstruction.

They aren't ready to celebrate until spiritual rebuilding is done.

God's people commit themselves to obey God's law.

Now, at last, they're ready!

DEDICATION OF THE WALLS 12:27-13:3

It's a dedication service.

With walls done, they commit their city to God.

Preparation of the people—gathering and preparation

12:27-30 *At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres.²⁸ The singers were brought together from the region around Jerusalem...³⁰ When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall.*

Nehemiah's an effective administrator, concerned for worship.

He wants them to praise God, using music and gifts.

The people have cause for joy before the Lord.

Not all the problems are solved.

There's still much to accomplish.

But there's ample cause to praise God for what He *has* done.

They bring together singers and musicians

to praise Him for His blessings.

Before celebration, priests and Levites purify selves.

Their hearts must be right before the Lord.

Swindoll: "Holiness precedes Happiness"

The people gather; priests and Levites purify themselves, the people, gates and walls.

Celebration of two choirs 12:31-43 *I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right ...³⁶ ...Ezra the scribe led the procession.³⁸ The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction. I followed them on top of the wall together with half the people...⁴⁰ The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God; so did I, together with half the officials,⁴¹ as well as the priests...⁴² ...The choirs sang...⁴³ 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.*

Notice focus on JOY—on CELEBRATING!

This was a spectacular display of worship.

Two great choirs rejoice and sing praises to God.

2 companies are called "*thanksgivings*"

=> they're the embodiment of what they're singing.

One "thanksgiving" goes to right; other to left.

Eventually both "thanksgivings" stand in God's house.

We're not very good at saying "Thank you."

We're much better at crying "Help!" when we face a crisis.

When things are going well, ...

We tend to forget about God.

We tend to say, "Thanks, God, I can handle this!"

Instead of responding with gratitude,

because every good gift comes from God—by His grace.

We're like the little boy coming home from a birthday party.

Mother asked: "Bobby, did you say "thank you" for the party?"

"I was going to, but a girl ahead of me said, 'Thank you,'
and the lady told her not to mention it. So I didn't."

William Law: Would you know who's greatest saint in the world?

It is not he who prays most or fasts most;

it is not he who gives most alms, . . .

but it is he who is always thankful to God,

who wills everything that God wills,

who receives everything as an evidence of God's goodness,

and has a heart always ready to praise God for it.

People are ready to celebrate;

to praise God for what He's done.

They spread out on top of the wall—half to right; half to left.

Ezra goes with those on right side; Nehemiah goes to left.

This isn't a sad and solemn occasion; they're filled with **joy**.

Too often OUR worship is a very **solemn occasion**.

We miss out on the **JOY of worshiping** God!

Whole area around Jerusalem is filled with noise.

—a noisy, hilarious crowd, happily praising God together.

Something like noise outside a football stadium;

you hear cheers for miles!

[L.A. Coliseum 78,000 men at a Promise Keepers' rally.]

Neighbors are used to shouts of crowd at sports events.

They never heard a shout like that shout of praise!

Shout from Jerusalem is even more enthusiastic!

They have a great time praising God together

for what He's done for them!

Do WE take advantage of opportunities God gives US
to make a Christian raucous together?
–to make a **joyful noise** to the Lord?

Ps. 147:1 *Praise the Lord.*

*How good it is to sing praises to our God,
How pleasant and fitting to praise him!*

103:1-2 *Praise the Lord, O my soul;*

all my inmost being, praise His holy name.

Praise the Lord, O my soul; forget not all his benefits. [lists them]

Spurgeon: Once lectured for being too light-hearted in the pulpit.
With a twinkle in his eye, he responded,

“If you knew how much I hold back, you’d commend me.”

Their rejoicing stands out when we remember how often
Israelites weep, remembering sin and failure.

God has brought restoration;

they have cause for joy –cause to celebrate.

Joy used 5 times in v.43. [4 in most English versions]

#5 = “God caused them to **rejoice joy**”

Jezrahiah is their first leader (42)

His name means “Yahweh shines forth”

That’s his role—to make the Lord shine forth!

God is the Source of their joy. (43)

One of the more scholarly commentaries observes:

Noise of women and children spreads the word!

[Gratitude and enthusiastic joy leads to generous giving!]

Appointment over storerooms for contributions

12:44-45 “At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the
storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits 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. 45 They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did also the singers and gatekeepers, according to the commands of David and his son Solomon.”

They name people responsible for storerooms for offerings.
47 “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.”

They’re excited to have priests and Levites
 to give their offerings to.

[Kemmerer—lamenting no pastor to give for; excited for one]

Separation from foreigners 13:1-3 On that day **the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people** and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God, 2 because they had not met the Israelites with food and water but had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them. (Our God, however, turned the curse into a blessing.) 3 **When the people heard this law, they excluded from Israel all who were of foreign descent.**

As they read the law, they learn that no foreigners are to participate in their worship; they separate from them.

Deut. 23:3-6 No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation. 4 For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired

Balaam ... to pronounce a curse on you. 5 However, the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you. 6 Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live.

This is a time of celebration for God's people.

Pagan foreigners don't belong there!

Not an exclusion from salvation.

Refers to exclusion of Ammonites and Moabites
in their role as Israel's enemy and corrupter.

("The daughter of a foreign god")

Mal. 2:11 *A detestable thing has happened in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.*

Foreigners could become part of Israel, as proselytes,
but then they're no longer "foreigners".

"Foreigners" identify with their old people, their gods.

They never turn to Yahweh, the true God.

They tempt Israel to leave Yahweh to follow their gods.

If like Ruth, *the Moabitess*, they turn to Yahweh,
they can always join God's people.

Ruth became an ancestor of Messiah!

After years in exile, they have to start at the beginning.

They come ready to listen; to obey God's commands.

Two dangers in following the law:

1. Pharisaism — keep the letter; avoid the spirit!
2. Extremism (legalism) — go beyond the law;
make your own rules! —impose *man-made* rules!

This generation avoids both erroneous directions.

They catch the Spirit;

They're committed to do what pleases God.

They're EXCITED about what God has done for them!

A GRATEFUL HEART:

* SINGS JOYOUSLY –celebration heard for miles!

Do WE sing *with JOY* because of what He's done?

* GIVES GENEROUSLY –Grateful, hilarious, sacrificial

* OBEYS TOTALLY –Faithful, committed obedience

Years ago a Christian paid a high price for a slave.

He told the slave: "I bought you to free you from bondage."

He gave him papers to guarantee his freedom.

Slave in amazement. "Am I really free? May I go wherever I wish?"

"I bought you so you could be free from your chains forever."

=> **"My joy will be to stay and serve you the rest of my life."**

That's what gratitude to God is all about!

He's done so much for us that we praise Him joyfully,
give to Him generously, and obey Him totally.

Israel responds in gratitude

when *they* just get *their old city* back.

How much more has God done for us?

How should WE respond in gratitude?

How much more should we celebrate? ... give? ... obey Him?

Their joy was heard for miles. *How about ours?*