

Neh 12:27-47 - Joyfully Thanking God

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Main Point – Respond to all God has done for you in Christ with joyful thanksgiving and joyful giving.

I know when we come to church each Sunday, (SLIDE) we come with many different things on our minds and going-on-in our lives; ups or downs.

You might have come to church today happy, or blah; overwhelmed or weary; with a 100 things on your mind, or encouraged.-----

And when the service starts, I wonder how many of us switch into passive mode?-----

Or when you come to meet with God's people, hear from the God who made you and saved you in Jesus, is it just ho-hum, same old?-----

And in the singing, does hardly any sound comes out from your mouth? (SLIDE)

Or do you engage your mind, and sing from the heart?-----

For when we have a joyful song of praise, it can seem there's many not singing with heartfelt praise and thanks.----- (not so much at 5pm I might say)

Kids, if you can read, do you sing, and sing cos you mean it?-----

Our passage today will I pray, help us to see that we always have reasons to praise the Lord with joy, and thankfulness.

We're nearing the end of the book of Nehemiah, and Andrew will finish with ch13 next week, before we head into Luke's Gospel.

But remember where we've come from. (SLIDE)

The book started with Neh praying in exile.

Then the Persian King gave Neh permission to return to Jerusalem, with a military escort and material provisions to **rebuild the city wall**.

Then with careful planning, prayer, and God's grace, Neh helped organize and unite the Jews, who all took responsibility to rebuild the wall. (2.18,20)

And despite repeated opposition from within and without, the wall was rebuilt.

Rebuilt in just 52 days – ch 6v15, and wide enough for a procession of people to walk on. (SLIDE)

It's staggering.-----

After that these 5th century BC Jews, heard God's word, were convicted of their sin, confessed and repented - committing to obey God (chapters 8-10).

We heard last week that some now live in Jerusalem and some in the other parts.

But today we come to v27, and the dedication of the Jerusalem wall.-----

Remember the wall isn't just about defense from enemies.

It's about defining them as the people of God.

A symbol of their commitment to live separately, distinctly from the peoples around them.

A commitment to live as God's people and worship God as he commanded, approaching Him through the temple, priests and sacrifices.

Rebuilding the wall symbolized their spiritual rebuild and identity as God's people in God's city.-----

We've seen how trust in God and prayer was vital in all of this. (SLIDE)-----

So the wall was rebuilt by God's provision, in answer to his people's prayers.

That's why Nehemiah and the people want to gather to praise God, and dedicate the wall, and set it apart for God's special purposes.

They're saying, God this is your wall, around your city – use it & us for your glory.-----

With that intro we come to my **first and main point, Joyful Thanksgiving. (SLIDE)**

Notice in v27 how the completed wall is the cause of rejoicing, celebration, singing, music, thanksgiving.

They want to celebrate what God has done.-----(**SLIDE**)

The people send for the Levites wherever they live – they're not all in Jerusalem.

Nehemiah & the other leaders are planning a huge musical procession, so you need Levites.

Because for some of them, their job is singing and playing instruments.

In **v28 & 29** you've got singers who come, some of them lived in towns together.-----

Now my name Clinton, means, 'a town on a hill'.

(Kids) I wonder if you know what your name means?-----

V42 tells us the singers, the choirs, are led by Jezrahaiah.

His name means, 'the Lord shines'.

And this choir master wants the Lord to shine.-----

You've got others who play instruments – cymbals, harps, lyres, trumpets.(**SLIDE**,v35)

That's strings, brass, and percussion.-----

Zechariah in **v35**, he's the music team leader.

And his name means, 'the Lord remembered', and God has remembered to be gracious to his people.

[5pm- Zechariah, is a descendant of Asaph – who was a prominent Levite music leader appointed by King David 500 yrs earlier (1 Chron 16.7; Ps 73-83)].

And notice it's Zechariah's relatives in **v36** who play the musical instruments.-----

I do find it amazing how musical gifts can run in families, and carry down generations too. Is that true in your family?-----

[5pm - **v30** says all the people purified themselves, which could have meant ceremonial washing, of bodies and clothes, like in Ex 19.10.

Or it could have involved sacrifices or even abstaining from sexual relationships, to focus on God.

It's a way of saying what they're going to do today has a sacred, God focused special purpose.]

So with leaders, big choirs and musicians, the people go up on the wall.

And **one procession goes to the right, v31-37. (SLIDE)**

I hope the map helps give you sense of where they headed.-----

That first group is led by Ezra the priest n' scribe (v36).

And Hoshaiah (v32), whose name means 'the Lord saves' – and indeed he does; he goes with Nehemiah, and the other procession to the **left, v38-39.**----

Then both processions have gathered in the temple.(**SLIDE**)

Where the music and singing continues.-----

I wonder if they sang a passage like **Ps 147. (SLIDE)** [which you could read later]

[5pm - 'Hallelujah! How good it is to sing to our God.'

And **v2 (SLIDE)**, The Lord rebuilds Jerusalem; he gathers Israel's exiled people.

V7 says, Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; play the lyre to our God.

Maybe they sang **v12ff**

Exalt the Lord, Jerusalem; praise your God, Zion!

¹³ For he strengthens the bars of your city gates and blesses your children within you.

¹⁴ He endows your territory with prosperity; [c] he satisfies you with the finest wheat].-----

But look at how things are summed up in **v43:**

On that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy. The women & children also celebrated, and Jerusalem's rejoicing was heard far away.

Songs and singing, sacrificing n' celebrating.

The original Hebrew more literally reads, and listen out for what's repeated (kids count how many times I mention the word joy):

They rejoiced because God had caused them to rejoice with great joy. The women and children also rejoiced and Jerusalem's joy was heard far away.

'Joy' is mentioned 5 times in the one verse.

You get the point, they were **rejoicing with great joy**, and loud singing.

I wonder when you last did that?-----(**SLIDE**)

I wonder how you go at rejoicing when there's a joyful song at church?-----

Do you engage your heart and mind, and really try to focus on the words?-----

I suggest trying to focus on the truth of the words and not your circumstances, nor your feelings.-----

Please know there's also different kinds of joy.

There's the joy which is light and happy, and makes you smile.

Like we heard in the **kids talk from Psalm 95**, the feeling which makes you want to shout joyfully to the Lord, and sing with gladness.

There's also another kind of joy, for the Christian, that remains deeper down.

The kind of deep abiding joy, even in hard times, is like a contentment, a peace; a quiet and thankful joy.

Either way, God wants us to find joy in the Lord.

More than that, commands us to rejoice in the Lord.

Phil 4.4 says,(SLIDE)

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!-----

And **Tim Chester in the great book, Enjoying Jesus(SLIDE)** says,

Telling someone to 'Cheer up' is a hollow command. People in the midst of loss cannot simply turn on joy as if it's a switch you can click. But Paul's command is not simply 'Rejoice!'; it's 'rejoice in the Lord'.

Find your joy in Christ.

So when everything else goes wrong, remember that you still have Jesus.-----

It's natural to feel sad when you experience loss, but what can bring you through is seeing the surpassing glory of Jesus.

And joy is always available in your glorious Saviour – by reflecting on who he is and what he has done.-----

Maybe you could Pray for God's Spirit to bear that fruit in your life.-----

A passage that has been precious to me when I've endured difficult times has been

Ephesians ch1. Please turn to that.

In the times when I've been weary, discouraged, stressed. When I've been sad, hurting; or struggling with criticism, grief, or worried for those I care about; in all those, Eph 1 has really helped me be thankful and find joy in the Lord.

Let me skim through **Eph 1.3-14** to remind us all of some of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ and through faith in him.

These are things which the believer always has, which our circumstances never change.

Eph 1.3 – and from the NIV, as that's what's in my head and heart:(**SLIDE**)

God our Father chose us before the creation of the world.-----

He loves us.

He has predestined us, to be his adopted children.

You and I, brothers and sisters, are adopted children of God.-----

Personalise it, he loves me; has chosen me, adopted me!-----

In Christ I have redemption(**SLIDE**); freedom, from sin and death and hell.

Freedom from sin's penalty and power now.

And one day, freedom from sin's presence.

How did that come?-----

Through Christ's blood – by his sacrificial death on the cross, in our place.-----

Because of him, I have forgiveness of sins

God has lavished his grace on me.-----

If that wasn't enough, God has revealed his big-picture will to us, which is all about Jesus, who he is, what he has done, and will do.-----

And down in **v14**, when we believed the Gospel we were saved; included in Christ, joined to Jesus, and given the Holy Spirit. (**SLIDE**)

And having God's Spirit is a guarantee of heaven.-----

And new redeemed, resurrection bodies to come.-----

Our Saviour God deserve our praise for all of this, doesn't he?-----

Whether you are 8 years old, 18 or 80, our purpose in life is to (**SLIDE**) glorify God and enjoy him forever.-----[Westminster Shorter Catechism Q1]

And when you meditate on these realities wont it give you joy?-----

It does for me.---

Whatever is going on in life, however dry you feel, the Christian can always find joy in the deep reservoir of Jesus.-----

And that thankfulness and joy should be seen in **our singing**; at home, in the car, and at church.

Maybe listening to more Christians songs will help you find more joy.-----

Because music and songs help us engage emotionally with the truths we are thinking, saying, or praying.-----

It was **Martin Luther**, 500 years ago who said, (**SLIDE**)

I wish to see all arts, principally music, in the service of Him who gave and created them. Music is a fair and glorious gift of God. I would not for the world, forgo my humble share of music... music makes people kinder, gentler, more staid and reasonable. I am strongly persuaded that after theology there is no art that can be placed on a level with music; for besides theology, music is on the only art capable of affording peace and joy of the heart.-----

Thinking about music and songs for us followers of Jesus, **Eph 5** says that by the Holy Spirit, Christians are to: (**SLIDE**)

¹⁹ speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.-----

We are to sing to one another, and to the Lord, with thankfulness for everything God the Father has done for us.-----

And if you serve us up the front in leading us in singing, or in playing an instrument, or at the desk to help us to hear it, thank you.

And I pray you too, will have joy in Jesus, and sing, play or serve with thankfulness in your heart.-----

We come to church to hear God's word, and to encourage one another, but we also come to sing – to one another, and to God.-----

And may our singing come from the heart; and with real thankfulness.-----

Is there **something you need to change** in your attitude before church?

So you can come prayerfully and prepared?-----

Is there something you need to change at church – so you engage better with the truths we sing about? (and I know with little kids or chronic illness it's hard)

Should you sing with more sincerity, or more gusto, more thankfulness or joy?-----

[5pm - Last week we heard about the Jews who got to live in Jerusalem.

And how we will get to live in the new heavenly Jerusalem.-----

Amazingly **Hebrews 13 says** Jesus is our high priest, whose blood and sacrifice brings us into God's people, into God's presence, and into God's enduring city.---

And in v15(SLIDE)

¹⁵ Therefore, through him let us continually offer up to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name.-----

Our praise is a sacrifice we are to give to God - gladly.

Praising God means sacrificing our wants, to focus on him.

Sacrificing our time, because my life, my words, my effort, is to be put into praising God, not myself.

It's a sacrifice too, because to praise God and live for his praise, it'll mean saying 'No' to constantly seeking acceptance or needing to be liked by others.-----]

The Jews in Nehemiah's day praised and thanked God, with music, song, and great joy, because their wall (which wouldn't last) was finished.

When Jesus has saved us now and forever, and blessed us with every spiritual blessing, how should we respond?-----

I hope with music, singing and thankfulness; with rejoicing and great joy.-----]

Interestingly **Heb 13 v16(SLIDE) says**, Praise that comes from the heart and pours forth from your lips in v15, will also pour forth from your hands, from your wallet, from what you have.

¹⁶ Don't neglect to do what is good and to share, for God is pleased with such sacrifices.

Very briefly, point 2 is Joyful Giving.(SLIDE)

Back in Neh 12, on the same day the processions greatly rejoiced in what God had done, we're told in **v44-47** that leaders were appointed to house the supplies for the priests n' Levites.

The offerings, first-fruits and 10% they give.----

Notice that in total, they're giving more than 10% of what they bring in.

Now they did committed to do this back in **10v35,(SLIDE)** as God's word commanded (Lev 27.30; Deut 14.22ff).

And they follow through - they do provide for the Levites, including the priests, singers and other servants.

They provide for them, ch12 **v44** – because Judah was very grateful to the priests and Levites who served.

That word grateful is literally joy.

They gave the legally required portions because they rejoiced over the priests n' Levites, who served them spiritually.-----

Sadly, we'll see next week it doesn't last.

But God's word in the NT commands that Jesus' people provide for those who serve them spiritually too. **(SLIDE-1Cor 9.14; 1 Tim 5.17-18)**.-----

I'm very thankful for all of you who give and give generously to the Gospel and ministry at Bundy, including me.

But I hope you do that out of gratitude to God, for all he's given you, materially?-----

I hope we also give out of gratitude for the ministry of the word, the service of the staff, and blessing of gathering and singing God's praise together in this building.-----

As you're able, I hope you give of your money, your time (your substance), because of your joy in all God's done for you in Jesus?-----

Does joy motivate you to give?-----

Kids there's an offering box there so you can put some of your pocket money or jobs money in it too.-----

Like in Neh 12, I hope we will give, not out of mere duty or begrudgingly, but out of joyful gratitude to God too.-----

I hope you've realized today that God has given us so much.

We have so many reasons to thank God.

The background of the song 10,000 Reasons, is **Psalm 103**, which begins with:

Bless the Lord (or praise the Lord) O my soul,
all my inmost being praise his holy name.

Bless the Lord O my soul and forget not all his benefits.-----

And author of **10,000 Reasons**,(SLIDE) **Matt Redman says**, the song is also a nod to the final verse of Amazing Grace.

But he says the point behind the song is this; 'If you wake up one morning and you cannot think of a reason to bring God some kind of offering of thanks or praise, then you can be sure there's something wrong at your end of the pipeline, and not his. We live beneath an unceasing flow of goodness, kindness, greatness, and holiness, and every day we're given reason after reason why Jesus is so completely and utterly worthy of our highest and best devotion.'-----

Reuben Hill, in 2015 was a college student in London, who was diagnosed with a brain tumour. Surgeons operated on him using groundbreaking technology,(SLIDE) and he had to be awake during part of the procedure, so that they could check that his speech was not being harmed. As the last pieces of his tumour were removed, he sang lines from Redman's song: "The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning, it's time to sing your song again. Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me, let me be singing when the evening comes."

I pray that will be you and I too.-----

Respond to all God has done for you in Christ, with joyful thanksgiving, and giving.

Let's pray