

# Nehemiah 12

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 24 January 2021

Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] Do you open your Bibles to Nehemiah chapter 12. And I want to speak to you tonight on joy.!

Old Testament religion is gloomy. Do you hear that? I hear that often. That's a little bit Old Testament. As if the Old Testament is a completely different book. But this chapter tells you that's rubbish.

That's nonsense. It's about happiness. It's about pleasure. It's about joy. And it's summarized for us in verse 43. Can you see it? Look how joyful this verse is.

There's five references there, aren't there? And they offered great sacrifices that day. And they rejoiced. For God had made them rejoice with great joy.

Do you get it? And the women and children, if you missed it, they rejoiced. And just one more. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away. In that little verse.

[ 1 : 18 ] They rejoiced. They rejoiced with great joy. They rejoiced. And the joy was heard far away. It couldn't be clearer. It's a picture of the people of God.

It's a picture of the people of God in Nehemiah's day. It's a picture of the people of God in every age. And that the church of Jesus Christ should be a happy, rejoicing people. You know that verse, Philippians 4, you rejoice in the Lord always.

Again, I say it. Rejoice. And they were happy because of what God had done for them. And the Lord has done great things for us. And the Lord has brought great joy for us.

To us. And God has answered their prayers in Nehemiah 12. And he has blessed them. And so I want to try and tease out three things in this joy.

And to see how this can apply to us here tonight. So first of all, you've got the joy, I think, of recognition. The joy of recognition. And that's verses 1 to 26.

[ 2 : 19 ] And I don't know what you think of those verses. You may well have been very relieved that I didn't read them. In your daily Bible reading, you see the list of names like that at the start of chapter 12.

And you just think, oh, it's a bit tedious. And maybe you think, it's just pointless, isn't it? A list of names of people that we don't know about. Many of the names are repeated from previous chapters.

And we might ask ourselves, oh, what are these names to do with the rest of the chapter? What are they to do with the dedication of the walls? But actually, there's something really tremendous.

Tremendously touching about this list of names. Because verses 1 to 11 are the list of priests. Of the Levites who returned from exile in 538 BC.

For Nehemiah, these are people from 100 years ago. They came back with Zerubbabel. And their names are written in the first LM verses.

[ 3 : 25 ] And in verses 12 to 26 is a list of the people down to the days of Ezra, 96 years later. In 444 BC. And so in other words, verse 1 to 26 of this chapter is a list of the leaders of God's people for nearly 100 years.

Here's the point. These names were included in the account of the dedication of the walls. These names, they're included in the account of the dedication of the walls.

Most of these people are dead and buried. They're gone. Some of them have been dead for generations. They'd never lived to see the dedication of the walls.

Most of these men have passed. They died when there was a pathetic, weak and ruined city. Most of these names experienced great difficulty and hardship and weakness.

They saw very, very little happening. You can look at the impact of their lives when they died and say, well, they had very, very little impact. Very little achieved.

[ 4 : 41 ] They prayed. They prayed. And they prayed. And they prayed. But there seemed to be no answer. And they died amidst the ruin of the walls. But they'd been faithful.

And they'd kept the flame of devotion alive. And they trusted God. And they'd handed on the word of God to the next generation.

And so for generation after generation after generation, they saw nothing. They experienced only weakness. They saw little blessing.

But they'd been faithful. And when the work was finally completed, God said, I want their names in Nehemiah 12. I want their names to be read out on the day of triumph.

On this day of triumph and dedication. And so God includes in the role of honor on this day of triumph individuals who so easily could have been forgotten. Who in past weakness and apparent failure had been staunch and true and steadfast.

[ 5 : 55 ] And God was saying to the people of Nehemiah's day, those people are part of today. They too played their part. They belong to this people.

Those people who maybe are dead and buried. But were faithful. They share in the work of today. Their prayers, their witness, their faithfulness kept the worship of God alive in difficult and dark days.

And when the day of triumph comes, those nobodies receive recognition. And so actually it's tremendously touching, isn't it?

To read of the names of these people. They passed from the earth previous generations, but their descendants remember them. We will remember them. We will not forget.

And they honor them. And they recognize them. And they've been, if you like, the foundation of the builders. When a building's completed, you don't see the foundation, do you?

[ 6 : 58 ] You don't notice it. But where would the building be without foundations? The joy of recognition. And I think that's a really tremendous encouragement to you and I today.

For God's people who may be in the same situation. Who may be in the same situation as these previous generations in Jerusalem. There are many of God's people who are living in discouraging circumstances.

Some of you tonight who are listening to me are living in discouraging circumstances. There are many people in churches up and down this land.

And they're in small congregations. If you think IPC is discouraging, you should go to other parts of the country. There are many people today in the UK. And they're Christians.

And their responses are, the people around the churches are unresponsive. And it feels like for years and years and years, there's really little progress being made.

[ 7 : 58 ] And little blessing. And nothing much seems to be happening. But those people are faithful. And they keep working for God in a time of discouragement.

And it may be for us tonight that there's areas of your life, or certainly there'll be areas in your future, where you're placed in a situation like this. A position of discouragement. Maybe tonight your prayers don't seem to be answered.

And nothing seems to be happening. And maybe you feel it's always been the case like that. This church has gone through, when you read the history, our denomination has certainly gone through times like that.

Where there have been very discouraging times. And times where nothing seemed to be happening. And people kept praying. And stuck with it.

And stayed faithful. But many people live and die without seeing much. But without those people, the times of blessing would not have come.

[ 9 : 03 ] We're familiar, aren't we, with the period of the great Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther. Calvin.

The Greats. Cranmer. Nicholas Ridley. Latimer. John Knox. Giants of the Reformation. We're familiar with that.

But we all too easily forget that for the previous century and a half, before the Reformation, there were Protestant martyrs. There were men and women who were witnesses.

Who were preachers. Who clung on to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And many of them were martyred. And they seemed to live and to die in vain. They were snuffed out. But they didn't live and die in vain.

And God is telling you and I, through this chapter, chapter 12 of Nehemiah, that such people are not forgotten when the blessing comes. And at the last, they will not be forgotten.

[10:08] We can look back at this church, through the good times and the hard times and the difficult times, when nothing seemed to be happening. We're just like this chapter.

Just discouragement. And then days of blessing come. God's people are enriched. And God says to us, I want you to remember those people who have been part of this city.

I want you to remember the people who have prayed and worked and slogged. And you recognize them. And you recognize them. And you honor them. And you remember them with thankfulness. You keep going. You keep building. In depressing circumstances, you keep building. And God sees it. And God sees it. And the day of recognition will come.

Don't overlook those 26 verses. I think it's a great chapter to imagine the tone of it. It's a great chapter to imagine what it would have been like there.

[11:13] That you had a grandfather talking to his grandson. And when the name was read up, let's pick a name, Mariah. In verse 12.

Yes, I remember Mariah. Let me tell you about him. He was gentle. He was kind. He used to give me an apple. Or he'd give me sweets after the service.

He tells his grandson about these men who lived and worshipped God so long ago. To the people listening, they wouldn't be dead men's names.

They'd be full of meaning to the people. The joy of recognition. Secondly, the joy of completion. Look at verses 27 onwards. And we're told of the kind of ceremony of dedication.

I think it's great to visualize it in your own imagination. Try to hear it. First of all, there's careful preparation, isn't there? Verse 27, the Levites are brought in.

[12:15] Party organizers. And they celebrate joyfully this dedication. And they're joined by the singers, the choirs, the presenters. Verse 30, they purify themselves.

And they purify themselves ceremonially. The gate. The wall. And then what happens? There's this double procession. So if you think of a clock face. All right?

Think of a clock face. And the people are gathered at 7 o'clock. All right? They're gathered at 7 o'clock. And they split into two groups. And one group heads clockwise.

clockwise. Up towards 1 o'clock. And the other group goes anti-clockwise. Down and around again. And they both meet at 1 o'clock.

All right? That's a rough sketch of what the temple looked like. Imagine it like a clock face. They start at 7. And the two groups go in different directions.

[13:14] And they end up at 1 o'clock. That's what this chapter is telling you. They move around the walls. Two groups. Hundreds and hundreds of people walking on the walls.

And each group is led by a choir belting it out. And one group is with Ezra. And the other group is with Nehemiah. And as they walk along the walls.

The choir leads the singing. And all the people join in. Just imagine that. Hundreds and hundreds of people. Slowly walking around the walls. Singing and praising God. And you would be able to see. The other group on the other side of the city. Just about. You'd certainly hear their voices. Echoing across the city. You'd hear the praises of God.

And the praises of God. Literally goes around the city. Marching triumphantly around the walls. And then they go into the temple. For a service of worship.

[14:14] And so they travel around the walls. You can imagine Nehemiah. Can't you? Singing and praising God. Leading them. Do you remember the last time Nehemiah. Walked around the walls. Do you remember that?

It was chapter 2, wasn't it? And I can't help thinking that Nehemiah. As he travelled around the walls. Rejoicing with these people. With generations upon generations of people. Singing and praising God.

I'm pretty sure I know what he was thinking. He was thinking about the last time. That he walked around the walls. At night. With a donkey. And two or three friends.

Just after he'd come to Jerusalem. With tears in his eyes. And he stumbles in the darkness. There's this depressing ruin. And his heart failing him for fear. And his mind perhaps filled with discouragement.

And he sees how much needs to be done. That it's worse than he'd ever dreamed. And now he's going around the walls again. And it's been finished. And the work is completed.

[15:16] What a difference. What a difference. Of what God has done. That Nehemiah had been given a vision. By God. And he'd persevered.

And he'd overcome opposition. And he'd rallied the people of God. And he'd made the effort. And there were times. When it seemed absolutely hopeless. Do you remember chapter 4 verse 10? The people of Judah. The strength of the labourer. Is giving out. And there's so much rubble. Nehemiah. We can't rebuild the wall. This is hopeless. We're going to give up.

We can't do this. But they didn't give up. And they'd held out. And they held on. And they kept plodding. I'm speculating of course.

But I can't help thinking. That Nehemiah. He must have contrasted. Must need in his mind. That first time. When he went round the walls. And now this joyful. Triumphant day.

[16:14] The job's been done. And there are times. In our Christian life. Aren't there? Where we felt like. We've stumbled in the darkness. We've been discouraged.

At the broken walls. That may be in your personal life. That might be in your commitment to God. Certainly often the case. In a family isn't it?

We can be so discouraged. There are relationships. That we have. And they break down. And break our hearts. And then we come to the service of God. And it can so often be so discouraging. And church life can often be hard. And there are ruins. And there's rubble. And then to top it off. There's your own weakness. Isn't there? And this chapter is telling you.

And this chapter is telling you. That if God gives you something to do. And you give yourself to do it. With all your heart. And with all your soul. I do want to say this. You will see that work completed. Either in this world.

[17:14] Or the world to come. So think of it. Maybe the work of your own sanctification. Your own growing. To become more and more like the Lord Jesus.

And it's often really discouraging. Isn't it? If your heart's like mine. If you use that picture of a wall. It can be like a ruined wall. With lots of gaps and rubble. And the ruins of the day. And yet we do know.

That there will come a day. You want there. When we will walk around the walls. Of our own soul. If I can use the image. And you will see it completed. And finished. And you will praise God. It may be your witness.

It may be your responsibilities. In your family. It may be your work in our church. And God says here. The work will be completed. And there will be. Times of discouragement.

Hold on. He says. Keep working. I've just read a book. By Doug Wilson.

[18:15] Called. Productivity. It's just a great title. Isn't it? Productivity. That's what we need to be. About as a church. Productivity. I'll lend you the book. If you want to.

What did they tell you not. But there will be. Won't there. There will be. A harvest. There will be. A completion.

Those walls. That were once ruined. That you stumbled. In near despair. And the day will come. When your heart. Will burst. With joy. And praise. And worship.

Because of what God has done. And until that day. You just keep plodding. What a difference. Between Nehemiah. In chapter 2. Making his way. Painfully. Through the ruins. And Nehemiah. Striding. Dancing. Joyfully. Filled with thanksgiving. The joy of completion. And God gave him. A work to do. And Nehemiah.

[19:11] Gave himself. To that work. Wholeheartedly. Against all the odds. And against all the enemies. The work was completed. And how will you feel. When your work is completed.

When the race is run. The joy of recognition. The joy of completion. And then lastly. The joy of proclamation. The joy of proclamation.

And there's a great little hint. In this passage. What about the baddies? What about Sambalat? Do you remember him? What about Tobiah. And Geshen?

What about the enemies? What about the surrounding nations? What did they think? What about the people. That were so furious. With Nehemiah. What did they think of us? What impression. Did they have.

On this day? Well there's a great clue. Isn't there? In verse 43. Can you see it? Verse 43. Right at the end. And the joy.

[20:06] Of Jerusalem. Was heard far away. It's one of those statements. That's got. Far more. Behind it. Than just those little words. Isn't it?

It tells us something. Their singing was very loud. Of course. Tells us their singing. Was enthusiastic. And happy. It's always a good sign. But it tells us something. Far more than that. That it was known.

Far and wide. That God was among his people. So the sound of rejoicing. In Jerusalem. Could be heard far away. And all the people. In the surrounding area.

They were talking about it. God had done something. Something amazing. Something beyond expectation. That God had again. Filled his people with gladness. And their gladness. Couldn't be contained.

It spilt over. From the inside. To the outside. And the sound of rejoicing. In Jerusalem. Could be heard far away. Here was their witness. And that is the key.

[ 21 : 03 ] Isn't it? To successful witness. What is the key. To growing churches. What is the key. To being able to speak to people.

About the Christian faith. It's this. Isn't it? That people are overflowing. With excitement. And joy. Because of what God is doing for them. And they're excited.

About God. And they're thrilled. With God's word. And what they're learning. In God's word. And God's kingdom. And they see God's son. Very clearly. And they love him.

And they love God's people. God's church. And that overflows. And so it wasn't planned. And Nehemiah. Didn't get the people together.

And says. Listen. We need to have a real impact. On the heathen nations. Around us. We need to stick it. To Sambalao. And Tobiah. And so what we're going to do. Is we're going to have a service.

[ 21 : 59 ] And I want you all. To sing very. Very loudly. That would be so fake. Wouldn't it? No. What's happening in Nehemiah 12. It's quite obvious.

Isn't it? That it's natural. And it's spontaneous. And the people were so happy. And so exuberant. In their gladness. I love Psalm 126.

Don't you. Come with me. Just to Psalm 126. You've got this lovely. Lovely. Kind of vignette there. It says.

When the Lord restored. The fortunes of Zion. Verse 1. We were like those. Who dream. And then our mouths. Were filled with laughter. And our tongue.

With shouts of joy. And then they said. Among the nations. The Lord has done. Great things for them. The Lord has done. Great things for us.

[ 22 : 51 ] And we are glad. And so we need to say. Don't we. That this cannot be worked up. And it cannot be programmed. And it cannot be organized.

And it cannot be faked. And it cannot be. Replaced by kind of slick publicity. And it cannot be produced. By church growth seminars. What Nehemiah 12 teaches you.

What Psalm 126 teaches you. Is this has to be a spontaneous. Natural. Working of the Holy Spirit. In a human life. And again.

That's the key isn't it. That is the key to the Christian life. When we're most enthusiastic. About the Lord Jesus. That will overflow. And it will lead. To discussions. With others. It's certainly true corporately.

The most healthy churches. Are churches. Of enthusiastic people. There's an excitement. That God is with them. That God is present. And that produces.

[ 23 : 52 ] Infectious joy. It seems to me. That it's such a thought provoking verse. Isn't it? The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem. Could be heard. Far away.

And my prayer is. That that would be true in our lives. Than in our homes. People would. Would say. That family.

On the street. They're a Christian family. There's something different. About them. That the sound of rejoicing. And worship. And devotion. And praise. That other people.

Would hear it. And see it. And certainly. What I pray. And what you pray. About our church. That we would be. Enthusiastic.

About what God is doing. Amongst us. That we might be. Excited. At what he may do. And what he can do. Eager to say to others. Come and see.

[ 24 : 50 ] Here's something great. Here's something wonderful. Come. Come to our services. You won't understand everything. That's going on. But you will hear something. That can help you. Come.

Come into our fellowship. Come. Come and meet these people. That have had their lives transformed. You're lonely. You will find people. If you come here. You can't talk to them. At the moment. And you've got to leave straight away.

Within about a minute and a half. But they will love and care for you. As soon as they're allowed by the government. And you're struggling as a parent. Well. Well. Actually. Bring your children to church.

Because. They'll be taught the ways of the Lord. And they'll be given a framework. A biblical framework for living. It's the joy of proclamation. And so I think.

I'm not a prophet. But I think there are people in our community. Who by God's grace. Are beginning to search. And they want to know God. I think at the moment. There is a greater openness.

[ 25 : 49 ] Than there's been. Well. Than I can remember. And they will go. To where they hear. That God is. And where they hear.

That. They can find God. I'm working through Mark's gospel. With some guys at the moment. And I was struck again. Chapter two. Verses one and two. That it says. When Jesus entered Capernaum. The people heard. That he had come. And so many gathered. That there was no room. Left. Even outside the door. The people had heard.

That he had come. And that's what we want people to hear. Don't we? Are people hearing. That Jesus Christ. Is at work in IPC. Is the sound of rejoicing.

In Jerusalem. Being heard far away. And once. That begins to happen. Growth will happen. Very very quickly. Let's pray.

[ 26 : 49 ] Let's pray.