

Nehemiah Part 19
A Day of Joy
Nehemiah 12:27-43

One of the most important jobs of the Levite priests was to lead the people in songs of worship and praise to God. This week we will look at the importance of called and appointed musicians and their leading of God's people in joyous songs of worship and praise.

Nehemiah 12:27-43 *And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem **they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem** to celebrate the dedication **with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing**, with cymbals, harps, and lyres. And the sons of the singers gathered together from the district surrounding Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites; also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth, **for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem**. And the priests and the Levites **purified themselves**, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall.*

*Then I brought the leaders of Judah **up onto the wall** and **appointed two great choirs that gave thanks**. One went to the south on the wall to the Dung Gate. And after them went Hoshai and half of the leaders of Judah, and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, and certain of the **priests' sons with trumpets**: Zechariah the son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, son of Asaph; and his relatives, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the **musical instruments of David** the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them. At the Fountain Gate they went up straight before them by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the Water Gate on the east.*

*The other choir of those who gave thanks went to the north, and I followed them with half of the people, on the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall, and above the Gate of Ephraim, and by the Gate of Yeshanah, and by the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate; and **they came to a halt at the Gate of the Guard**. So both choirs of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me; and the priests Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. **And the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader**. And they offered **great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy**; the women and children also rejoiced. **And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away**.*

The Dedication Ceremony.

1. (27-29) Gathering the Levites for the dedication ceremony.

They sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem:

- The Levites had many responsibilities in the life and worship of Israel, but
- **One of the most important jobs they had was to lead the people in songs of worship and praise to God.**
- **To celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing:**
 - Mostly, they did not sing without musical instruments.
 - Here are specifically mentioned **cymbals and stringed instruments and harps**.
- **There are at least twenty-two different musical instruments mentioned in the Bible**, including
 - the harp, the lyre (an ancient guitar),
 - horns, trumpets, flutes,
 - tambourines, drums, cymbals, and bells.

- The Levites were specially appointed to use these instruments to lead the people in worshipping God through singing.

Sons of the singers . . . the singers had built themselves villages:

- There *were also specially appointed singers*.
- The singers in Nehemiah's day had a close-knit bond,
- both by families and living arrangements.

Since the job of these singers was to lead the people in worship of God,

- they had to be good singers; but more importantly,
- they had to be *people of worship themselves*.

There is a huge difference between being a great singer and being a great leader of songs of worship to God.

- *Worship should be excellent, but it isn't entertainment.*
- The goal *isn't* to give the people a good feeling (though that may happen),
- *but to give glory and honor to God.*

People of worship are humble

- They do not seek the spotlight for their own vanity.
- The stage is a place to proclaim Christ and him crucified
- Not to further their popularity and fame

Leaders in corporate worship must be skilled

- It takes skill to be a musician / work / practice / a lifetime of learning
- You must have this skill if you wish to lead God's people in worship
- What are you doing to enhance your skill and ability?
- You have to speak the same musical language (understand and read music)

Not all good musicians can be worship leaders

- If you are singing or playing in the group... you are a worship leader
- Musical ability alone is not enough
- Leaders must be spiritual worshipers of God
- They must live a life of worship

Worship leaders must consider what is best for the gathering

- Musical selfishness has no place in worship
- Musical snobbery has no place in worship
- An attitude of pride and vanity is just plain sin

Songs must be chosen for content and musical quality

- Truth: The lyrics must adhere to scripture
- The songs must be easily "singable" for the congregation
- Selah: a musical expression of worship without words

2. (30) Purification.

Then the priests and Levites purified themselves:

- They did this *first*.
- They could not effectively lead the people in worship of God unless they walked in purity before the Lord.

And purified the people:

- They next did this.
- They brought cleansing to the people the way the Bible said to,
- knowing that only a purified people could really worship and praise God.

Some might silently object here; they may say,

- “I know a person who goes to church and seems to be lost in praise and worship to God,
- and I also know their life is rather impure outside the church walls.
- It sure seems they are worshipping God, but are personally impure.”

Something is wrong there;

- probably, their worship is not a true worship of God in spirit and in truth,
- but instead a “soulish” experience.

All that inwardly moves a person in a deep way is not necessarily of the spirit;

- **it can be of the soul.**
- Only God can divide between that which is truly spiritual and that which is merely soulish.
- If we are not in touch with God, how can we know when we are trying to satisfy ourselves and not God?

Hebrews 4:12 *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, **and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.***

Without purity, we can't worship God in spirit and in truth, as Jesus commanded us to

John 4:24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Psalms 24:3-4 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

We can be made pure and clean before God today, right now, by doing what the Bible says to do - not in following an Old Testament ceremony, but by receiving the word of the New Testament: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
(1 John 1:9)

We must guard against sin.

- Pride
- Ego
- The desire to please

Purity in Christ is what keeps our hearts and motives centered on pleasing God.

The gates, and the wall: Third, their surroundings were purified. ***Purified surrounding help us to walk in purity consistently.*** The homes and offices of many Christians could use a good purification and cleansing.

3. (31-43) Two choirs lead Jerusalem in joyful praise.

Appointed two large thanksgiving choirs: The two large choirs were called **thanksgiving choirs** for good reason. ***All praise and worship must have a strong element of thanksgiving to God for it to be genuine.***

The singers sang loudly.

- They had to be heard, because as glorious as the instruments were,
- the people would follow the lead of the singers in worship.
- God can be worshipped instrumentally.
 - But He is especially honored when we sing together, the praises of His name.
 - 3 major Biblical concepts in a worship gathering
 - Corporate Singing
 - Proclamation of the Gospel
 - Administer the sacraments. Baptism, Communion

God made them rejoice with great joy:

- God did this with the choirs assembled, and the people spread all about.
- They were then overwhelmed with joy and thanksgiving, considering all God had done.

The women and the children also rejoiced:

- This tremendous experience of worship was for everyone.
- ***There weren't some who weren't able to worship.***

The joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off:

- Their worship was a testimony to others,
- and what others heard was not so much the singing itself as the *joy*.
- We often worry about others hearing us sing; but
- ***what God wants to hear and what others should hear is not so much your singing, but your joy.***

Do you struggle to find a place of comfort in a time of corporate worship?

- Do you want the music part to hurry up and be over with?
- What do you think is keeping you from worshipping God in song?

Mat and I in the truck yesterday. (singing along to the radio) Chicago.

Football Games. Seahawks / Saints game: Marshawn Lynch

Fixing the boat. High fives.

All are expressions of Joy. All are extensions of the overwhelming joy in our lives. It is not wrong to have fun, to sing, to shout because we are examples of worship in all we do every day.

Worshipping God is different in that we are not singing a trite love gone wrong song.

- We are singing to the God who has saved us.
- And that is very different than shouting for a guy that runs fast.
- But if you are comfortable giving praise to men for their deeds, shouldn't your praise to the God that saved you be that much more joyful?

But if you don't have a sense of joy when gathering with God's people, why do you think that is?

John 4:24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit **and truth.**"

What is the truth about your life? What is the truth about where you are with Jesus?

If you're a believer and you struggle in corporate worship gatherings... Time to get on your knees and know Jesus.

If you are not a believer... time to get on your knees and know Jesus as well... for the first time.

Psalm 24:3-4 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not **lift up his soul to what is false** and does not swear deceitfully.

The only way to worship God is through the truth of Jesus Christ. The sin exposing / life saving power of Jesus.