

really enjoying life are always in demand. Teachers who are happy have no trouble getting students. A genuinely happy salesman will get writer’s cramp filling orders. Waiters who are happy will fill their tables and their tip jar. There was (V.43) “great joy” and God was the source of their joy. There was a parade going on and I can’t imagine it being a solemn long faced march. It was more like a Disneyland light parade. The men and women and children were all participating and rejoicing in God. They were loud. Yes, Loud. People around caught the sound of joy and wanted to know, what was happening in Jerusalem.

Have you ever gone just a bit late to a Friday night football game at Joe Albi Stadium? You had to park a long way off because the spots closest to the entrance were already gone, but as you walked toward the stadium you heard the roar of the crowd inside and you wondered, what did I miss? Is my team winning? The people outside could hear the excitement, the joy of what was happening in the city.

God had given them a motivation to rejoice. Against all the odds makers in Judea, the wall had been completed in just 52 days. As followers of Christ here at Northview church, of all people in Spokane, we have a reason to celebrate. Lives are being changed. People are growing and maturing and being discipled. Marriages are being strengthened. The good news is being preached. The poor and hurting and cared for. The spiritually dead are finding new life. In God’s presence joy is inevitable. God gave them great joy. It’s a gift from God.

Could there be something deeper than happiness; that emotion that bounces up and down depending on the circumstances of life? It’s joy in the Lord. Get right with God. Make sure that Jesus Christ is the center of your worship. The joy of the Lord springs from a pure and holy heart. Go all in. There will be little joy unless you take the plunge and jump right in. That is where the adventure begins. Jump in and celebrate what we have in Christ. In Christ we have freedom. In Christ we have forgiveness of sin. In Christ we are accepted and valued.

Perhaps God has been tugging at your heart for a while. Are you ready to get right with God and experience the joy with going all in? You might pray this prayer with me. God, I’m a sinner. I realize the consequence of sin is death. I’ve felt the effects of that sin in my life for a long time. I’ve been running my life on my own. I have worshiped many other things at the center of my life other than you. There has been something that’s been missing. God I accept what Jesus the Redeemer has done for me when He died on the cross to wipe out my sin debt. You have promised to purify me. I ask you Jesus to forgiven me from all my sin and purify my heart. I

want to experience the deep and lasting joy that comes from a relationship with you. Jesus I’m all in.

“Deeper Than Happiness”

Sermon Series: Nehemiah



Catalog No. 374

Nehemiah 12:27-47

Pastor Norm Schwab

June 24, 2018

When Erin graduated Magna Cum Laude from San Francisco State University, we were all excited to celebrate her achievement. My parents drove down for the event. Family all joined us for a big dinner celebration. The commencement ceremony was held in the big football stadium under a sparkling blue sky. I was excited to hear the words of wisdom from a well-known speaker. What would he say to hundreds of graduates ready to embark on a new life and career? His inspiring message of challenge and hope - “Don’t worry, be happy”. It’s tough out there and worrying about it doesn’t solve a thing, so don’t worry and be happy. Point number 2 - Happiness is a choice and more fun than worry, so don’t worry, be happy. No matter the circumstances, even when our landlord says the rent is late, and might be forced to litigate, don’t worry, be happy. Even if we’ve got no friends and got no style, don’t worry, be happy. All your worries they make your frown, you got to turn them upside down. Don’t worry be happy.

The problem with his message was the distinct lack of motivation. He says happiness is more fun than worry, but I know a lot of folks who enjoy worrying. They get great pleasure from worrying even if it’s not healthy for them. Some people trust on the circumstances of life to bring them happiness and it doesn’t always come their way. They are caught in the limbo of, “If only I had...a home that looked more like that picture. If only I had a body that looked more like that magazine. If only I had a husband who would start meeting my emotional needs. If only I had a wife who would meet my physical needs and respect me. If only I had that job or that salary. If only my children would start listening to me. If only my parents would start listening to me. If only I had confidence like her. If only my parents would stop fighting. If only I could have a really good friend. If only, if only then I would be happy.

Have you ever felt yourself getting battered back and forth like a plaything of circumstance? When good things come in, you feel happy, when difficult things flood in, you are so down. Could there be something that is deeper than happiness? Oh, I love the feeling of happiness. It’s great, it’s just fickle. It doesn’t stay around. It doesn’t last. Could there be something that raises us up above the waves of storm and cradles us warmly when the sun comes out? It has to buoy us with motivation that is far stronger than happenings. I would like to suggest this morning that what we are actually looking for is joy. Joy has strong arms that hold tightly to the anchor when the storm waves blow and when the calm breeze caresses.

So where does true, deep, lasting joy that seems to be so elusive today, come from? I would also say that **our joy is tied to worship**. Hang with me here. Everybody worships something or somebody. If you want to know what you worship, think about what you have placed at the center of your life to make you happy. That is what we worship. Some people put stuff, things at the center of their life to make them happy. Some put security, or health, or comfort, or adventure, or a relationship, or a pleasure or addiction at the center of their life to make them happy. Some put exercise, sport, reading, food, career, kids, even church at the center of their life. Thoughts of these things we have placed at the center of our life to make us happy consume a huge percentage of our brain time. We think about it all the time. The problem is when our security is in jeopardy, when we lose our job, our health becomes uncertain, the kids rebel, our bodies rebel and the church disappoints...we struggle with our balance because we have placed those things at the center of our life, we have worshipped them.

Think with me about Job in the Old Testament. God allowed Satan to strip away the things he might have been tempted to worship; kids, lands, homes, position, influence, health, security and in the end Job declared, “I know my Redeemer lives and in the end He will stand on the earth.” Job wasn’t happy about what was happening to him. He wasn’t happy about having all those great things stripped away from him. Job didn’t understand what was going on, but he wasn’t devastated even when the worst of life hit him in the mouth because he put his trust in the Redeemer. If I put Christ my Redeemer at the center of my life; If Christ is the One I worship; I will experience something even deeper than happiness. I will experience a surreal joy that defies explanation of the events that are swirling around me. When the circumstances of life deflate us, extract our dreams and threaten to steal our hope, we still can, perhaps even better, worship our God. Sometimes we can get so focused on the rubble around us that it’s difficult for us to even see God and celebrate and worship Him. But that joy what comes in spite of the circumstances, comes when we worship God.

This morning we read about a group of people who have faced an uphill battle to rebuild the wall around their city. There was constant conflict from within and without the wall determined to discourage and discredit the workers. Yet during an economic recession and a city in rubble the people realized it had to be God behind them finishing the building in just 52 days. It was time to celebrate, to

give thanks, to worship God. If you are feeling devoid of joy and your worship is flat, I want this passage to put a spring back in our step. I want us to see how the people in Nehemiah chapter 12 walk back to a vibrant worship of God and thus their joy is restored as they dedicate the wall to the Lord. Read with me excerpts from our passage this morning in Nehemiah 12:27-30.

The people have gathered together from all the city and all the surrounding towns to dedicate the new wall. Six times in this passage it refers to the peoples' joy or gladness. They used music, singing, cymbals, trumpets, stringed instruments. It's quite a little combo they've assembled. It's loud. People can hear their celebration from a long way off. The city is coming back to life and they want to celebrate with joy what God has done for them. They have recruited the best band, best singers in the land, but they first want to make sure they first **get right with God**. Verse 30 says, "the Levites purified themselves; they also purified the people, the gate and the wall." They separated themselves from uncleanness as they anticipated this worshipping party. Holiness came before happiness. Purification proceeded the parade. For is it possible to experience true happiness without first moving toward holiness? Have you ever tried to worship while hanging on to some sin in your life? It's impossible. If you want to experience that kind of joy, make sure you are pure before God.

Back under Old Testament law, even walls and gates could become ceremonially defiled. It's probable that the walls and gates were cleansed by sprinkling the blood of a sacrificed animal. Now in post New Testament days, Jesus Christ has paid the penalty of our sin and is the perfect and complete sacrifice. Christ can provide forgiveness of our guilt to all who ask Him for it. For one to have a truly happy heart, one must first get right, and pure before God. Holiness precedes happiness. Purification proceeds the parade. Are you right with God?

Some people want happiness without the righteousness bit. Some are fooled into thinking they can cruise through life and be happy without the holy part. Imagine someone on Dartford Drive has been in a terrible accident...It's ugly. One of his legs is twisted and pulled out of its socket. The bone is fractured and sticking through the skin. He is rushed by ambulance to Holy Family and yet tells the doctor in the emergency room, "Doc, just give me some drugs so I can smile again and get some sleep." Crazy! Who would not first want to have his leg fixed? Yet, millions today want sedation without righteousness, want happiness without holiness. First set the leg socket back into place so that healing can do its work.

Joy comes into our life, not just because the present moment pleases us and the circumstance is to our liking, but because our heart is right with

God. Joy comes knowing we are accepted by God, we are valued and forgiven by God, we are welcomed as his children. Joy depends on accepting and knowing what Christ has done for us. The joy of the Lord in our strength.

Psalms 24:3-6 asks, "Who may approach the presence of the Lord? He who has clean hands and pure heart." Some are nervous around the word 'purity' fearing it describes a self-righteous kind of person. But it's really like washing the dishes. We would never set dirty dishes out on the table for our family to eat on. We constantly wash the dishes because they need to be cleaned to be used. So also, God doesn't work with dirty dishes. He wants to use us so He works to clean up. How do we purify ourselves today? Confess our sin. Admit it. Anything that goes against God's clear direction is sin. Don't hide it. God forgives and He restores what He has forgiven. Psalm 51, "Create in me a clean heart, Oh God, and renew a right spirit within me." Before the singers sang a note. Before the first shout of joy, before the parade began, they made sure they got right with God.

Read verses 31-43. It's quite a parade they planned. What a great time it must have been. (V.31). The whole group of singers and instrumentalists met at the Valley Gate. Does that sound familiar to you? Back in chapter 2:13, That was the place where Nehemiah, when he first rode into town, began his midnight inspection of the wall. It was so broken down with so much debris in the city he couldn't even ride his donkey. Nehemiah was brought full circle back to the place of brokenness at the Valley Gate which has now been rebuilt and restored. Isn't that where some of our most impactful celebrations have taken place? Where our brokenness has been rebuilt and restored. Perhaps God has brought you back full circle and even strengthened that which was once laid desolate. That is truly a reason to celebrate. Amen?

The verses here describe the groups splitting into two choirs. One led by Ezra heading counter-clockwise and Nehemiah led the group that went around the wall clockwise. Why did they get up on top of the wall for the parade? Couldn't they have just all met where they ended up anyway - in the temple courtyard? Well, perhaps it was a strong rebuttal to those who months earlier taunted the strength the wall saying that "if even a light-weight fox jumped up on the wall it would fall over." Nehemiah says, "Well ok. Then let's have a parade right on top of it. The whole city will walk along it. Archaeological excavations prove Nehemiah's wall around Jerusalem was about nine feet wide. They climbed the stairs, banging cymbals, blasting trumpets, singing and playing and marched around the town. Perhaps it was like two groups of loyal fans at a game shouting and singing back and forth. "We've got spirit yes we do...we've got 'The Spirit' how about you???" God is out in the field and they are

celebrating His performance on their behalf. What a witness to the surrounding world that God had done a great work and He is to be glorified. Because the walls and gates were being dedicated, it made sense for the people to see and touch them. It all belongs to God and it is to be used for his glory. When Abraham in Genesis 13:17 was told by God to walk around a piece of land, it was in a sense claiming it for God. We are giving you this Lord for Your use and your control. When we dedicate our children we are saying, God this is your child, you use them as you would. When we broke ground on our new church addition last Wednesday, we were saying God we want this ground, the building that will be here to make a difference for your kingdom and give you great glory. We shouted out loud so all the neighbors could hear. Hey, those people are enthusiastic. Something is happening over there. Have you ever walked around a situation and claimed it for God? I wonder what that would look like?

These people experienced the joy of worship not only because they got right with God, they also sacrificed, they gave themselves "whole heartedly to God". **They were all in**. Worship will involve giving of myself, my treasure, my time, my talent, my preferences, sacrifice of my pride. It is not worship if it costs me nothing. There will be a "great sacrifice" (V.43). This makes us squirm, but it also exposes what we worship. God knows it's best for us to worship Him and worship involves sacrifice. Worship is an act of giving up something valuable for the sake of something even more valuable. For example, we give up our time to spend it together with the body of Christ. When we give up our money to help the hurting, we give up something valuable to us, for the sake of something even more valuable. When was the last time you really worshipped God? I'm not asking, "When was the last time you went to church, or listened to a sermon or read your Bible?" When was the last time your heart was so hungry for God that you expressed unrestrained praise and glory to Him who deserves so much more? Worship is an overflow of the heart that is all in awe of who God is and what He has done. The real issue is not how much we have, but what we do with what we have. It reveals what or who we worship. Am I truly worshipping God alone?

Worship is sacrificial and costly. The idea of a sacrifice in the Old Testament is that an animal is first killed, then its body is placed on an altar and consumed by fire. The animal is all in. In Romans 12:1 it calls for those who follow Christ not to give their life, but to be a living sacrifice. What creature still alive would stay on an altar until consumed? No, the rebel against God would never go near that altar, but would scoot right off that altar when it got too hot. God wants us to put self, pride and will on that altar and burn it off. It brings great glory to God and it's really best for us as well. God I am giv-

ing you my very self for your use and control.

II Corinthians 8:5 says, these worshipping believers "first gave themselves to the Lord... and then they gave hilariously, joyously to God." II Corinthians 9:7 says, "They gave not begrudgingly or under compulsion out of duty, but joyfully and thankfully." In the last few verses of this chapter it shows an intentionality to their giving for the upkeep of the temple worship and care for the priests and singers. (V.44-47) the people were filling up the storehouses and the offering plates were full. Why? Because they were worshipping and rejoicing in the Lord. It is the joy of the Lord that crowds churches and inspires songs of praise and thanksgiving. The joy of the Lord springs from a pure and holy heart. Where is your heart?

Could there be something deeper than happiness? It is the joy of the Lord and stands far stronger than fickle circumstances, things or people we put our trust in that can change on a moment's notice. It is the joy of the Lord that is our strength. **So celebrate!** Take time to celebrate. Northview's founding pastor Glenn Johnson kicked off his commentary on this section, recalling when they dedicated this building we are now worshipping in to the Lord. He recalled that the two years of financial sacrifice and hard work were forgotten when they were all celebrating the thrill of what God had accomplished. There was great joy in Northview. Do we take time to celebrate and shout for joy what God has done for us?

German philosopher Nietzsche wrote, "If Christians expect me to believe in their Redeemer, they have got to look a whole lot more redeemed!" We do have something to motivate our joy and happiness far more than a catchy little tune that tells us to don't worry and be happy. We know that our redeemer lives and in the end He will stand on the earth! So celebrate. Without the genuine reality of the risen Christ in our life there can be no deep, forever joy. The people remembered how God had been faithful in the past. "Great is Thy faithfulness. Morning by morning new mercies I see. All I have needed thy hand hath provided. Great is thy faithfulness Lord unto me." Eyes to see God's provision come from a thankful heart that is not dependent on how much stuff we have. Have you noticed that when doing something that fills you with joy, encouraging someone, helping the hurting, going on a mission trip, sharing the good news...we instantly rejoice. It is the natural and spontaneous response of being used by God! Psalm 33:1, "It is so perfectly fitting for the righteous to praise the Lord."

Their joy had impact. Look at verse 43. It doesn't say their songs were heard from far away... although they probably were. It says their "joy" was heard from afar. How far is your joy heard? That joy is contagious. Chuck Swindoll writes, "If you smile and sing and laugh, you will have no trouble infecting people and making friends." People who are