

God's Renewed People (Nehemiah 11-12)

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Date: 17 November 2024

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[0 : 0 0] so I'll be reading from the NIV and feel free to follow along so this is Nehemiah chapter 11 verse 1 to 4 now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten of them to live in Jerusalem the holy city while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns the people commanded all who volunteered to live in Jerusalem these are the provincial leaders who settled in Jerusalem now some Israelites, priests, Levites, temple servants and descendants of Solomon's servants lived in the towns of Judah each on their own property in the various towns while other people from both Judah and Benjamin lived in Jerusalem so then we go on to list descendants of Judah and Benjamin and priests and so on and then we'll skip ahead to chapter 12, Nehemiah 12 and we'll start from verse 25 Mataniah, Begbukiah, Obadiah, Meshulam, Talman and Aqab were gatekeepers who guarded the storerooms at the gates they served in the days of Joiakim son of Joshua the son of Josedach and in the days of Nehemiah the governor and of Ezra the priest the teacher of the law 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 the musicians were also brought together from the region around Jerusalem from the villages of the Natophetites from Beth Gilgal and from the area of Geber and Asmaveth for the musicians had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem when the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially they purified the people, the gates and the wall

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 toward the Dung gate Hoshiah and half the leaders of Judah followed them along with Azariah, Ezra, Meshulam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemiah and Jeremiah as well as some priests with trumpets and also Zechariah, son of Jonathan the son of Shemiah, the son of Metaniah the son of Maikiah, the son of Zachur and the son of Asaph and his associates Shemiah, Azrael, Millalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nathaniel, Judah and Hanani with musical instruments prescribed by David, the man of God Ezra, the teacher of the law, led the position at the fountain gate they continued directly up the steps of the city of David on the ascent to the wall and passed above the side of David's palace to the water gate on the east the second choir proceeded in the opposite direction I followed them on top of the wall together with half the people past the tower of the ovens to the broad wall over the gate of Ephraim the Jishanah gate the fish gate the tower of Hananel and the tower of the hundred as far as the sheep gate at the gate of the guard they stopped the two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God so did I together with half the officials as well as the priests

Eliakim Messiah Minnanamin Micaiah Elioni Zechariah and Hananiah with their trumpets and also Maasaiah Shemaiah Elazai Uzi Jehohanan Malachi Malachi Elam and Ezer the choir sang under the direction of Jezeriah 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 at that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for their contributions first fruits 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 they performed the service of their God and the service of purification as did also the musicians and gatekeepers according to the commands of David and his son Solomon for long ago in the days of David and Asaph they had been directors for the musicians and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God so in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah all Israel contributed the daily portions for the musicians and the gatekeepers they also set aside the portion for the other Levites and the Levites set aside the portion for the descendants of Aaron and that is the word of God so we welcome Pastor Sam up to the stage

Afternoon everybody thanks for reading that for us nailed those names you could have read them all I reckon you could have read all of them I'd encourage you all to come to equip I will be there so you can come and find me and have a really good time learning how to understand tricky passages like Nehemiah with lots of names so as we come to this passage let's pray together Heavenly Father we thank you that you are a God so worthy of our worship and praise we want to thank you for the testimony of David and for his faith even in suffering we thank you how we see your faithfulness we thank you how we see a life lived in worship and trust in you and as we come to Nehemiah 11 we just pray you would work in us that same worshipful heart and seeking of you in every situation of life and so please fill us with joy and great praise not only today but for the rest of our lives in all ups and downs and difficulties so please work this in us I pray

Amen You have to excuse me I've been a little unwell this week In the last three chapters of Nehemiah you guys have been reading about really a revival that took place in God's people God's word has been read and listened to all day they've confessed their sins they came together and they made this commitment this binding agreement that they were going to walk in obedience to God here is a renewed and restored people city built, temple built there's a real sense of purpose and passion for God's people at this moment and today this revival resounds in chapters 11 and 12 with these choirs bursting forth in praise coming from all over the country to worship God but it's a worship which is also shaped deliberately ordered and directed by God so we're going to learn about a true good worship from people who have been revived and restored by God we all know that our own passions and desires can be fickle one day we're really excited for a project for a habit, for a commitment

[7:18] I'm going to wake up every day and run and then that passion just fizzles out after one bad sleep it's the same with our faith our passion can fizzle out some days we feel really excited and close to God and other times further away some people go through years of actually distance from God how do we remain passionate for God full of a daily life of worship to Him what keeps you passionate about God are there habits or practices that you know are so important to your life of faith to keep your faith strong do you know how God wants to shape your life and order it so that you'll remain excited and directed towards Him or on the flip side have you noticed that sometimes you struggle to live well as a Christian what do you think you're missing in those times what causes you to be weak in your worship daily worship

Sunday worship of God here we are taught in Nehemiah 11 how to take a renewed, restored life and set it straight continually worshipping God we're not always going to be super excited we will have ups and downs but how do you stay more on the up more excited and joyful consistently serving and worshipping God that's Nehemiah 11 and 12 here to help us these two chapters they're filled with many many names but they are actually quite a climactic moment in the history of God's people so Israel they've had these three waves of exiles who have returned from captivity to the promised land the first was in the time of King Darius recorded in Ezra 1 and 2 I think you guys have done Ezra as a church the second wave was led by Ezra during the reign of King Arxerxes recorded in Ezra 7 and 8 you guys have looked at that and the third by Nehemiah recorded in chapter 1 and 2 of Nehemiah this took place over 90 years during this they've rebuilt first the temple then the walls they've done this all while facing opposition, discouragement and economic struggle and it's all come together for God's people and now they're repopulating Jerusalem and worshipping him in his temple it's a wonderful moment so we learn about worship at this high point for God's people first I want us to see that

God's people must worship in God's place I'll look at verses 1 and 2 of chapter 11 now the leaders of the people lived in Jerusalem and the rest of the people cast lots to bring 1 out of every 10 to live in Jerusalem the holy city while 9 out of 10 remained in the other towns and the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem Jerusalem at the time must have been a bit uninhabited it seemed that it wasn't the place to live perhaps a bit run down and rubble and now and perhaps because of your family and tribe when you came back you wanted to return to your tribal lands and the property and the farming that you could do there you wanted to live there perhaps that was better and whenever you're looking for a house or your dream house you always have things you want a nice backyard for our kids that's what I want no stairs to climb up and down that's what I want because I'm getting old and I've got kids close to church that's what we should all want close to church perhaps you want like a gaming room

I don't know what you want in your house but we care about the place that we're going to live and God's people with their newfound passion for God are able to relocate their whole lives and repopulate Jerusalem some go willingly in verse 2 but the people also come together united and they put it into God's hands by casting lots for who should live there they are ready and willing to go and live wherever God wants them wherever he asks them this is their newfound revival being directed and when someone is born again they need to go straight to the right place straight to other Christians to God's church and if you decide to move anywhere you should always prioritize moving somewhere where you will have a church to encourage you God would move your life where he can shape your Christian faith and where you can worship to the right in the right place you see in Jerusalem this was more than just a re-population project though this isn't just any city look in verse 1 there it calls and in verse 18 it's called the holy city holy because this is where

God dwelt with his people separate and set apart for God in these chapters we have lots of references you may have heard to King David and to his son Solomon that's because David was the one who first established Jerusalem as the capital city he brought the ark of the covenant where God's presence had gone with them he brought it and rested it there in Jerusalem David wanted to build a house for God a temple there in Jerusalem God come and live here with us in Jerusalem but God gave that privilege to his son Solomon and when the temple was complete they celebrated and sang and the glory of the Lord filled the temple with such power that it knocked people off their feet this was the place where God's people were going to dwell with God this was the holy city of Jerusalem where sins were atoned for and offerings of thanks were given where people all around Israel traveled regularly to celebrate and remember God if God sits in heaven then his feet touch the earth in Jerusalem it was the most important place the center of the physical universe and that's why it shouldn't surprise us that we have these lists of names and genealogies there in chapter 11 which trace their families and their heritage back through Israel's history and in particular we have highlighted the family trees of priests and Levites who were going to serve in that place in that new temple

[14 : 00] God keeps God cares about that temple in verse 10 and following in verse 15 this holy city of Jerusalem in this place in Jerusalem in this commune with God they were being restored and encouraged it was not just about repopulating a city it was about setting Jerusalem up as the central place of worship to the one true God this revival is centered on God's designated place at that time in Jerusalem in his temple today when God revives our hearts he brings us not to Jerusalem anymore but to his people and to his church so that we can be shaped and the fire of our faith kept ablaze Hebrews 10:24 says let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good works not neglecting to meet together as the habit of some but encouraging one another and all the more as we see the day drawing near we don't need to head to

Jerusalem anymore we live now with one another to encourage one another in the reading of his word the confession of our sins and the walking in obedience to the Lord Jesus our task now is not to repopulate Jerusalem but to fill the whole earth with followers of Jesus meeting in churches to praise his name this is the right place to be to encourage your worship of the one true God church is the place to be so we have the repopulation of Jerusalem the setting up of Jerusalem as the central place of worship and then we have an account of the worship that God desires from his people verse 27 to 43 it's full of joyful praise the praise that we would just love our hearts to be filled with bang as well as our feet hit the floor each morning a heart of joyful thankfulness towards God the list of names that are given in chapter 12 they fill out the account of who was there to worship and then we have two choirs represented that sing praise to God in verse 27 of chapter 12 and as you follow those verses from verse 27 of chapter 12 you see that these two choirs walk in opposite directions around the top of this wall this new wall

Ezra that great teacher leads one of the choirs around and Nehemiah the other and they meet back at the front of God's house to offer sacrifice to him note there in verse 30 they are purified made clean set apart holy priests a holy people holy walls and gates ready to be used for God and at such a moment you wonder at such a moment why we have to read this list of names and I've thought about that a lot through the book of Nehemiah do we really have to read all these names out so I've been thinking about their significance when we preached through Nehemiah Nehemiah was quite administrative you can tell and it shows in the way he writes what he prioritizes how he serves God's people God has a need for Nehemiah type people within his church God cares deeply about these records of people God cares about individual people that they would praise him he cares about each one of these names we're even told that he is a book of life where our names are written in it he cares about names he cares about these records he cares about these individuals but I also had this recent experience where I realized another reason why lists are so important we have a thing at our church called Guess Who's

Coming to Lunch where you put your name down and they jumble everybody up and they send you to someone's house you only find out whose house and who you're going to have lunch with on the morning when you arrive at the house it's a wonderful time the fellowship that happened as Christians came together and talk about life and faith the food that's enjoyed Anna she makes the best lasagna ever Anna's my wife the fun that's had one group did last time we did it did some rifle shooting with a 22 another Dulcy a 94 year old she was at the time told a story of how she was left on the side of the road in her night nighting gown and caught a ride with a biker and it's just all this fun and fellowship happens when you get together over a meal there's lots of good experiences from those days but there's one view of that day that only a couple called Max and Anne have they're the administrators so they view that day not as funny stories or food or a fellowship but they view that day first as a list a list of names of hosts and how many people they're willing to have in their home a list of names of attendees and the food they can bring and their family size and by arranging those lists of names we have this wonderful time of fellowship stepping back into Nehemiah we have the arrangement of people in these lists the longer list are those who are arriving and serving in the holy city of Jerusalem in chapter 11 in a much shorter list in verses 11 25 to 36 of those who didn't live in Jerusalem but we have these arrangements so that in

Jerusalem they could all come together and worship and sing and praise God with a new wall a temple a new people in Jerusalem God uses these lists to bring about his worship joyful worship at our church there's probably like 20 or 30 mundane lists of people so that we can worship who's cutting the grass who's doing the cleaning who's moving the chairs who's on sound who's doing music who's taking care of all the things in the background right I'm sure you have those lists here as well and out of those lists come this wonderful worship and fellowship and look at the worship that is enjoyed because someone organized it it's characterized by joy just look there at verse 34 of chapter 12 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 you see what

[20 : 53] Nehemiah wanted to get at joy was had in worship it's a joy that comes with sacrifice for their sins as we've seen they were purified it's a joy that came because they were forgiven and it's a God focused joy it came from God he had made them joyful but it's also directed to God verse 27 and 31 it was full of thankfulness to God for what he had done that's what's highlighted and their sacrifices were not only for forgiveness but of great thanks and praise and offering gifts to God we've already read you've already read that in Nehemiah that the joy of the Lord is our strength it was a joyful worship that they had even through the gloom and doom that experienced in rebuilding this war through all the struggles they had gone through here they are a joyful worship I don't know about you but personally

I really do need to fight for joy each day to be thankful to God for what he has done and let his joy fill me I'm a bit of a pessimist my wife will tell you this and she's more optimistic which is good but I'm easily prone to discouragement and I can't create my own joy very easily I need God's joy I need to be reminded of him and looking to him perhaps for you it's outside circumstances not about creating joy but outside things can just really get you down and cause you to struggle as a Christian we turn to God and thankfulness we ask for him to fill us with his joy and in that way we can become the most joyful people in our street we as Christians have the brightest future we have the most to be thankful for and we know who to be thankful to this is a joyful thankful God directed worship that is key to living a consistent life of faith and if you are particularly self aware you'll realize that before you fall into sin often the first thing that goes is your joy in God and in sinning what you are doing is kind of going after a fake and shallow joy rather than pursuing the one true God so I know you normally have groups after this service perhaps you could ask one another are you finding joy in God where and how are you finding joy in God and encourage one another more and more towards that there's certain people at my church who often just bring me joy on a

Sunday morning when I talk to them about how excited they are to be there how thankful to God they are they encourage me often I feel a bit distracted at church I'm kind of conscious of something that I need to do during the service or someone I need to talk to and actually I can lose a sense of the great joy encouragement and God directed praise that is meant to happen as we gather with one another perhaps for you around your dinner table you can be more actively thankful with your families thankful to God the Christian life is a joyful life a thankful life of worship to God to keep this joy and worship alive God's revival in us to keep that encouraged we need to be with one another we need to be in God's place encouraging thankfulness and joyfulness to God but finally I want to also point out that our worship is to be particular and shaped and channeled we see in these verses the setting up of order to worship by God's people in and through

Nehemiah a couple of places I want you to notice this order first of all in verses 1 to 26 of chapter 12 there we have these more detailed records of the priests their heritage their place names where they were recorded and at what time so just an example verse 22 of chapter 12 in the reign of Darius the Persian they were written in the book of Chronicles it's also a record of the priest who had returned first with Zerubbabel and Jeshur so that everything was ordered these are very detailed very clear and they're recording these we might wonder I'm sure like me you look at them these are strange these are very strange but they're recording and remembering this because God had set apart a particular tribe and group of people within Israel to be priests a particular bloodline who your parents were mattered were they from the tribe of

Levi were you related and they are acting in keeping with that order and command from God you see God wanted a particular type of priest he wanted worship to happen in his temple a particular type of way to do that they needed to know who were the Levi where are our priests and so here they are keeping an ordered record directing their worship according to how God had asked them and then in verse 44 of chapter 12 there's this gathering of tithes and it says that it's in accordance with the law in verse 45 the singers served in keeping with the commands of David who worshipped first in Jerusalem in verse 47 they distributed food as they had committed to in the covenant from chapter 10 in accordance with the law of Moses Nehemiah he takes this renewed revived people and he gives their life and service of God order in keeping with God's word now the family heritage and mosaic law are removed from us but what we learn is that we don't set up our own way of doing things they couldn't set up a temple in any city or ordain just any priest or use any tithe in any way they liked their revival passion didn't just shoot out in all directions

[27 : 22] God wants to take our passion and joy to worship and set it within good boundaries with the order that he has given this is a really perhaps hard but important message for you as younger ones within an older church sometimes those who are older than you will hand down to you traditions about how you should worship and you can ignore them and perhaps that's not how you want to but sometimes you'll be handed down instructions from God's word about the right way to listen to worship and you need to listen to that because God cares about how we worship what we sing how we sing what we do together what we don't do together he's given us very particular things to do and we should prioritize them he has given us orders for how to run the church a leadership structure for us to submit to and look to he's actually told us how to restore conflict or how to go through personal conflict together as a church he's commanded us to do these activities of prayer and singing and preaching and reading the word and communion and baptism and he wants us to make those the priority not something that we think would be really helpful or useful but he's given us instruction for his word our passion even being spirit led isn't a free for all

God wants us to worship him with joy but in keeping with his word directed by his word so as we look at Nehemiah 11 and 12 we see God wants us to be people of worship he wants to take our hearts being revived being born again and direct them to worshipful praise we have learned that it's worship that needs to be encouraged by being in God's place at that time it was Jerusalem now it's the church the church and all churches over this country so please do make receiving and giving encouragement in this church a real priority that you would be built up stirred up as one of God's people together God wants us to have a worship that's directed to God and joyful and thankful that we would be made holy by the Lord Jesus that we have been forgiven by him reminded that we have been set apart to live holy lives do spend time in thankfulness to God for all that he's done in your life he fills us with joy as we do this and God has a worship for us that he wants to direct and channel and foster in accordance with his word so we're always seeking to honour

God's word and do what he calls of us not what we think might be best these are some of the things that will keep you a restored revived Christian joyfully worshipping not always jumping up and down but not walking away not having some of those deep lows that you often experience but a consistency before God because you're with his people because you're doing as he's asked and because you're constantly seeking him in thankfulness and joyfulness let's pray heavenly father we do just pray that you would set our hearts on fire for you to worship you to praise you to delight in you lord as you've shown us here in these verses please do encourage us to worship you in this church to encourage one other and stir one another up lord please do help our worship to be always directed to you please do come and fill us with joy remind us of all the things we have to be thankful for to you and lord please help us never to stray from your good commands to us about how we should worship but always foster a loving obedience to you and the way we go about praising you so please

I ask encourage each person here that they may continually worship you in Jesus name amen