

## The Joy of the Lord; Nehemiah 8:9-12

### I. Nehemiah

A. Cup bearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia, around 445 BC

B. A little history

1. Israel is taken into captivity by Assyria around 721 BC
2. Judah is taken into captivity by Babylon around 589 BC
3. Persia defeated Babylon around 539 BC
4. King Cyrus released Israel from captivity around 538 BC
5. The temple was rebuilt around 515 BC
6. The threat of genocide was defeated by Esther and Mordecai around 474 BC
7. Ezra led released captives back to Jerusalem around 458 BC

C. It is probable that Nehemiah had been born in Susa

D. With that in mind, listen to Nehemiah's lament

1. Nehemiah 1:1–11

### II. Lament

A. A passionate expression of grief and sorrow

B. How do we feel about the state of Christianity today?

C. Nehemiah looked back to Jerusalem and lamented over the state of God's people and city

D. Jerusalem was a very important city to Israel and to God

1. Psalm 9:11; Sing praises to the Lord, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds!
2. Amos 1:2; And he said: "The Lord roars from Zion and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds mourn, and the top of Carmel withers."
3. Matthew 23:37; "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"
4. Revelation 21:9–11; <sup>9</sup> Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." <sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup> having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

E. Jerusalem is still a very important concept today, but not the geographical city, the spiritual city (which is the Church)

1. Revelation 22:1–2; Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

F. The church has healing for all the nations, the healing blood of Jesus that cleanses each one of us from our sins

G. Do we lament over the lost just as Jesus did over Jerusalem?

H. Does the state of the world bring us to our knees in tears?

I. The state of Jerusalem brought Nehemiah to tears, but also motivated him to work  
III. To The Work!

A. Nehemiah 2:1-8

B. To be sad in the presence of the king could have ended Nehemiah's life

1. Persian kings never allowed sadness in their presence.
2. Nehemiah was justifiably afraid when the king asked about his sadness
3. And Nehemiah was asking to leave the king's presence by going to his home city
4. "The monarchs of Persia operated on the theory that merely to be in the king's presence and enjoy his favor was sufficient to give perfect joy and happiness to the heart of any person." G. Coleman Luck

C. But even with the threat of death, he still presented his case to the king

D. God blessed Nehemiah's plans to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the wall

E. Nehemiah 2:11-12; <sup>11</sup> So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. <sup>12</sup> Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode

F. "God put into my heart"

1. How often do we put off or even completely ignore these strings that tug at our hearts
2. We often dismiss that God has put anything in our hearts as subjective and unverifiable
3. Here we see very clearly that without talking to Nehemiah at all, without giving him a vision, God had given Nehemiah a task
4. We should not be too quick to dismiss these tasks we have in our heart
5. We can easily verify if they line up with God's word
6. Ephesians 2:10; For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

G. Nehemiah quickly motivates the people to work, but I would like to point out the prevalent attitude of the people

1. Nehemiah 2:17-18; <sup>17</sup> Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision." <sup>18</sup> And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, "Let us rise up and build." So they strengthened their hands for the good work.
2. Nehemiah 4:6; So we built the wall. And all the wall was joined together to half its height, for the people had a mind to work.

H. "Let us rise up and build," "the people had a mind to work"

1. For me it is often, "let us rise up... and go to the fridge,"
2. Or "I had a mind to... watch TV."

I. We must rise up and work in the kingdom, not just in our jobs

J. We must have a mind to work in the kingdom, not just in our jobs

K. Nehemiah and the people finish the wall in just 52 days (including the gates)

L. But I don't think that is the real lesson here

IV. Our Joy

A. Nehemiah 8:5–6; <sup>5</sup> And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. <sup>6</sup> And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

1. The people recognized the holiness of God through the book that Ezra read, they stood up in reverence and respect

2. The people had a yearning to understand what was written, so much so that Ezra assigned people to move through the crowd to explain the Scriptures

3. Nehemiah 8:7–8; <sup>7</sup> Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. <sup>8</sup> They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

B. This is how important it was to them that they understood what God was telling them.

C. They reinstated the feast of booths and all the people were rejoicing! (8:17)

1. On the first day (8:2)

2. On the second day (8:13)

3. On the 24th day!

4. Nehemiah 9:1–3; Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. <sup>2</sup> And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. <sup>3</sup> And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the Lord their God.

D. This is so serious that they make a contract... in writing

1. Nehemiah 9:38; “Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.

E. Signing your name to a contract is serious business

1. We sign our checks and credit card receipts as a promise to pay

2. We normally don’t take other forms of promises as serious as we do those we sign our name to

3. Our signature means we understand and will obey the terms of the contract or promise

F. Is God’s word that important to us?

G. Have we “signed our name” to the promise?

1. When we die in the likeness of His Death and are raised in the likeness of His resurrection, we have “signed our name” to the promise!

2. Romans 6:1-11

V. The Joy of the Lord

A. Lamenting over a lost world

B. Working to shine the Light of Jesus to a lost world

C. Rejoicing in the Word of God, Jesus, His Son