

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben Kuerth on Nehemiah 12:27-47 on August 16, 2015 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Nehemiah

Today's Focus: Dedication and Celebration

"Meet Me at God's House!"

- 1. To survey what God has done**
- 2. To celebrate the sacrifice that Jesus made**
- 3. To get excited about how we can serve**

When I was a boy there was a special place we'd go to play hoops. So I'd call my friend's house. Of course I'd talk to his mom first—because there weren't any cell phones and you always had to get to know your friends' parents—and I'd say, "Hey, meet me at the court." Some of my best memories were on that blacktop court with my friends on summer evenings. "Meet me at the court. Let's play some hoops" I'd say. Well in a way our text today is meant to leave that same kind of joyful imprint on our lives. As we look at Nehemiah chapter 12 today, I want you to imagine Nehemiah almost like an enthusiastic kid heading up onto the walls of Jerusalem and happily telling his friends, **"Meet me at God's house!"**

But remember first that not everything was always so happy for these folks in 444 B.C. Recall that a lot of the book of Nehemiah is about struggle. How many of you remember Nehemiah's lonely night ride back in chapter 2? Nehemiah had just made a 1,000 mile journey from Persia to Jerusalem. That's the distance from Franklin, WI to Dallas, TX. He hadn't even told anyone yet in Jerusalem what God had put on his heart to do or why he had come. So at night he went out to survey the damage. And remember what he found? The walls of Jerusalem were so badly broken down and there was so much rubble strewn down the hill on which Jerusalem was built that he couldn't even make it through. He had to turn around because of the rubble. It was a minor miracle I think that Nehemiah didn't just turn around and head back to Persia. People probably would've just forgotten that he'd ever showed up in the first place.

But you know that feeling too, don't you? I'm talking about that feeling where you look at the challenges in front of you and you think, "How I am ever going to make it through this?" Or, "What have I gotten myself into?" You ever look at the size of a problem and think, "I sure feel small!"

But what did Nehemiah do when he was challenged by this feeling? He didn't panic. Instead...he prayed. He was always praying. But that's not all. He combined his prayers with hard work. Lots of it. *Pray hard, work hard* ... that could be a theme of Nehemiah. In other words we learned from Nehemiah, "Do your best and trust that God will take care of the rest." Or, "Do what only you can do and trust God to do what only He can do!" because you and I aren't ultimately in control. We are limited in our resources. We are limited in our resolve. But with God all things are possible!

And so the people in Nehemiah's day did it! They rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem because it was God working through them and with them and for them. The people had persevered. But what would they

do now? Would they sit around and pat themselves on the back saying, “Good job, folks. Who’s awesome? We are. Who rocks the house? We do.” Nope. Instead we’ll see how Nehemiah had the attitude, **“Meet me at God’s House!”** And I want you to put yourself in Nehemiah’s shoes too with this same attitude of, **“Meet me at God’s House!”** Why? The first reason is **to survey what God has done.**

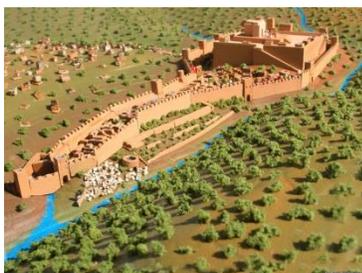
27 At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. 28 The musicians also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem—from the villages of the Netophathites, 29 from Beth Gilgal, and from the area of Geba and Azmaveth, for the musicians had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. 30 When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall.

31 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. 32 Hoshaiiah and half the leaders of Judah followed them, 33 along with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, 34 Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, 35 as well as some priests with trumpets, and also Zechariah son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zakkur, the son of Asaph, 36 and his associates—Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani—with musical instruments prescribed by David the man of God. Ezra the teacher of the Law led the procession. 37 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 site of David’s palace to the Water Gate on the east.

38 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, 39 over the Gate of Ephraim, the Jeshanah 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.

40 The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God; so did I, together with half the officials, 41 as well as the priests—Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah with their trumpets— 42 and also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam and Ezer. The choirs sang under the direction of Jezrahiah. 43 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.

Do you have a sense of what’s going on here? I know it’s hard in the midst of all these foreign names and odd sounding places. But remember before that the walls of Jerusalem were so broken down you couldn’t go around them. Now that they were rebuilt you could actually go up and walk on them.



So there were two big, diverse groups of people up there on the walls. In each group there were priests and politicians. There were leaders and teachers. There were choirs and musicians—trumpet blowers and cymbal crashers and string pluckers. One of the groups was led by Ezra the priest. They went counter-clockwise. The other group took off with

Nehemiah bringing up the rear and they went clockwise. So there were two groups walking in different directions around the wall. What were they doing up there walking around? **They were surveying what God had done!** You see they started their procession right about the same place Nehemiah did when he took that lonely night ride setting out from the Valley Gate, when he surveyed how impossible the task would be to accomplish with human effort alone.

And so now as each group walked around they could survey from up above what God had done. Some of these people had personally worked on portions of the wall. But from down below all they could see was what was in front of them. Perhaps they struggled to see how their little part of the wall was even important. But now they could see the whole big picture. They could get a sense of what God had accomplished through each person doing their work as part of the team. And they showed that they had the right perspective on it all because they weren't up there to pat themselves on the back. They were there to praise God. After all God had answered their prayers.

He had helped them overcome! Think about all the struggles, all the threats, all the obstacles, all the challenges. Think of those critical points when some people wanted to just quit and walk away. You ever want to do that...just give up, quit on something important, or perhaps give up on God and walk away?

You know anything that's truly worthwhile, any project worth undertaking, is going to feel like that once a while sometimes. Life itself will feel like that too. It's not going to be all easy all the time. There are going to be obstacles. It's going to get hard. That's true also for Christians. And sometimes it's hard to get along with certain people. Sometimes it's hard to work with certain people simply because they are sinners like you and like me. Sometimes it's easier to give up and go home.

But if you do, you'll miss out on what God's going to do! **"Meet me at God's house" because there's nothing like being able to survey what God has done.** We all need to take some time to survey what God has done in our lives. Let's do that for just a moment as a church family. Just two and a half months ago here's what our site looked like at our Groundbreaking ceremony {pic}. Well now look at it {pic}! Survey what God has done. Praise God for all the challenges he's helped us overcome! Together we've overcome site plan revisions. We've overcome local politics. We've overcome permitting delays. We've overcome architectural challenges. We've overcome physical injuries and fatigue. We've overcome different personalities. We've overcome installing really heavy windows. We've overcome things that people probably don't even want me to know we've overcome! And we'll continue to overcome no matter challenges we yet have to face because we know it's never been all simply our work, but God's. And to see it now and to look ahead to its completion is to survey the work of God through us and with us and for us. **"Meet me at God's House" to survey what God has done!**

Yet the most important part of this surveying, the most important reason we meet at God's house is **to celebrate the sacrifice that Jesus made.** *43 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.* So the two groups met at God's house—the temple, which itself had been rebuilt a generation earlier. It was a joyful thing to get to sacrifice thank offerings there at the temple. You know in a way that's what we do also as we sing and play music and pray and give our

offerings here at God's house. I mean this is what church is—it's God's house in the sense that God himself is present with us through his word and sacraments. So we celebrate here together. We sing and we praise and we pray. We worship. And when our worship flows from thankful, joyful hearts it's acceptable to God like a sweet smelling sacrifice. But what is it really that makes our sacrifices of praise acceptable to God? Why can we truly celebrate and have joy? I mean perhaps you're not feeling so joyful right now in life. Perhaps you feel like Nehemiah looking at the pile of rubble in front of him. Perhaps you feel like your path forward is impossibly blocked.

But friends, it's not. We all have a reason to celebrate and it's not first and foremost because of the imperfect, halfhearted sacrifices we offer to God—whether of our time or money or prayers or praise. It's because of the priceless sacrifice that Jesus, God's Son, made for us because he loves us. It's because of His sacrifice on the cross that we of all people truly have the greatest reason to celebrate.

You see that building project of the wall around Jerusalem in Nehemiah's day was never just about the wall. That was never the point. The point of the wall was to protect the temple. And the point of the temple was the sacrifices. And the point of the sacrifices was Jesus to whom they pointed. They were shadows that pointed ahead to the day when 2,000 years ago Jesus became the sacrificial Lamb who took away the sins of the world when he was crucified outside those rebuilt city walls up on a hill called Calvary, when he offered up his sinless life as sacrifice to break down all the walls and barriers that separated us from God. **"Meet me at God's House,"** dear friends, to celebrate the sacrifice Jesus made for us so that we could become entirely acceptable and pleasing to God, so that we wouldn't have to fear going to hell, but we could all look forward to going to heaven.

That's why we don't want to lose sight of the greater purpose in our own church building project. We want to share Christ's victory over sin and death by loving people enough to meet them where they are. This is the true worthy cause. It's worth mentioning that we must not lose sight of this cause in the choosing of any particular colors on the walls or the fabric of chairs or the texture of concrete or the quality of the cabinets or the countertops or patterns of acoustic panels. Those things may be somewhat important but they are not the point. The building itself is not the point just as the walls of Jerusalem were not the point. The point is to be able to say to people, "Meet me at God's House" so we can celebrate the sacrifice that Jesus made.

And if we understand this, then finally we can say to one another, **"Meet Me at God's House" to get excited about how we can serve.**

44 At that time men were appointed to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions, firstfruits 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. 45 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. 46 For long ago, in the days of David and Asaph, there had been directors for the musicians and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. 47 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.

Now this section perhaps seems a little anticlimactic. I get it. They dedicated the wall, they celebrated, and it sounds like now they're getting down to business. But don't think of it quite like that because the church isn't a business. If you think of it like that you'll miss the incredible excitement that's in these words. Because think about what happened here. The people used to feel beaten down and were disorganized. But after rebuilding the wall and after meeting at God's house to worship together, everybody now it seems wants to give generously as a way to honor God with their firstfruits. Everybody wants to use their time and talents with maximum energy to honor God and keep things going. Everybody wants to do their part in supporting the ministry of sharing God's grace. Why? Because they're excited. They're excited to serve.

Friends, how about you? I hope and I pray that over this summer you've soaked in the joy of serving that exudes from the Builders For Christ volunteers. Just about every week we've heard Robert give updates. And just about every week what has been his theme? The joy of serving.

So friends, over the next couple weeks we're going to communicate our plan for moving into our own ministry center when it's completed, God willing, in November. And the thing is we're going to need more volunteers, not less in order to give God our best. We're going to need more of you to serve and with humble, eager, willing hearts. Our plan is start out in our new ministry center having two services on Sunday mornings so that we can serve more people in our community. And I pray that as we get ready for the move, that God would move all your hearts to serve as you have the opportunity to do so because you're as excited as I am to reach into our community and say, "**Meet Me at God's House!**" Amen.