

Summary

The people of God had given of their very lives in the wall rebuilding efforts under Nehemiah's leadership. Then, when they dedicated the wall, "they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced." Just when it seemed they had nothing else to give, the joy of the Lord compelled them to give sacrificially with exceeding joy. The Gospel turns the world's values about money upside down.

This message revels in the extravagant celebration of the people who had worked, served and given to make a dream come true – the broken walls of Jerusalem rebuilt. When we come to the end of our lives, we will not remember nor be remembered for what we have possessed but for what we have invested. This is a message that invites people into the true joy of investing one's time, treasure and talents into a transcendent call from God. There is no greater joy than teaming with others at great cost to see God's kingdom built.

Getting to Know Each Other

1. What is one of the most valuable experiences on a team you've ever had? What made it so significant?

Getting Into the Bible

Background

Although Nehemiah was one of God's people, a son of Abraham, we find him in the court of a pagan king. His ministry took place after Israel had been sent away from the Promised Land and Jerusalem destroyed ~150 years prior.¹ He was the cupbearer to King Artaxerxes in Babylon. While working in the royal court, Nehemiah received word that the walls of Jerusalem were in ruins, leaving the city exposed. He immediately sought the Lord and leveraged his position in the king's court. In the end, Nehemiah's tremendous planning, sacrifice, determination and prayer sparked a renewed focus on Jerusalem. His efforts saw the wall rebuilt around Jerusalem and a renewed emphasis from Israel on her relationship with God; all in the face of serious enemy opposition. This vision of a holy city, protected and preserved finds fulfillment in Peter's temple theology (1 Peter 2) and the ultimate dwelling place of God among His people in Rev. 21-22.

2. Neh. 12:43 gives us a snapshot of the people's experience at the dedication of the rebuilt wall around Jerusalem. The holy city and their own relationship to God had been renewed. It was a very costly enterprise, but the language of this verse suggests it was worth it.

- a. What words or concepts do you see repeated?
- b. What is the scope of the verse; how far does it describe the impact reaching?
- c. What does it say about giving that they capped of a season of self-sacrifice and financial contributions with "great sacrifices?" How can we take this example seriously without falling into abuses and unhealthy practices?

¹ Following King Solomon's reign Israel was divided into 2 kingdoms (931 B.C.). The Northern Kingdom (Israel) had been sent into Assyrian exile in 722. The Southern Kingdom (Judah) went into Babylonian captivity in 586. When the Babylonians exiled Judah, they destroyed Jerusalem and the temple located in that holy city. But as He had promised, God brought a remnant back to Jerusalem under the ministry of Zerubabel and Joshua (538). Two years later, the temple began to be rebuilt. While the rebuilding efforts were successful, the walls around Jerusalem were destroyed again in 446. Some 15-20 years later is likely the time when Nehemiah's reconstruction campaign began.

Read Neh. 12:43

“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.”

3. Nehemiah’s rebuilding efforts centered on a physical construction project surrounding a town with buildings and the temple, as it’s central feature. How do Peter’s words direct our “building efforts” in God’s Kingdom?

Read 1 Peter 2:4-5

⁴As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

4. One of the richest promises related to giving is found 2 Cor 9:6-11. What challenges does this scripture hold for you? What encouragement? What strikes you as most radical about these verses?

Read. 2 Cor. 9:6-11

⁶The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹As it is written,

*“He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”*

¹⁰He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.

Application

5. Is it possible to be “rich in good works” (1 Tim. 6:18) without having much disposable income? Why or why not?

6. The rebuilding of the wall was a massive, risky undertaking. What can this story teach us about prayerful, intentional risk taken together with other Christians to advance the gospel?

7. How does the following quote encourage you as you consider taking risks for the sake of advancing the gospel?

“I have found that there are three stages in every great work of God; first, it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done.” (Hudson Taylor)