

Recommit

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 February 2025

Preacher: Tim Tree

[0 : 0 0] Over the last eight weeks or so, we've been in a series called Building Back in Nehemiah, and we've been thinking about r-words, reconnect, react, recruit.

We've looked at seven different weeks, at different re's to do with this. So on the first two weeks, Richard Brown told us about reconnecting and reacting, describing to us how Nehemiah saw the peril that the Jews were in.

He saw their problems, he prayed, and he responded and reacted. He reconnected to God, and he responded. And then Richard Marzetti told us about how Nehemiah recruited people from different trades, and they all came together and did one good work together.

And then Chris, in a family service, told us how they responded to adversity. Do you remember they had, like, two different things in each hand? They had tools for the wall in one hand and swords in another.

And how, despite, and we had some great opposition to building going on down here, that with God's help, they overcame their challenges. And then Emily talked to us about respect, how we treat each other, especially those who are vulnerable.

[1 : 1 8] And how, in Nehemiah, it wasn't all about just physical rebuilding. It was about rebuilding their community God's way. And then two weeks ago, Adedeo told us how God uses different people's talents to do different things in his kingdom, and how we all have an important part to play.

And I wasn't here last week, but all of these sermons are available to download on our website or to listen to his podcasts. Chris told us how the people redirected and rededicated themselves back to God, how Ezra read the law the first time it had been read for many years, and how they responded and reacted.

And so the wall's been finished. They've all come together. They've read the law. They've rededicated themselves to God. What's next? It sounds like the whole thing is finished.

Next comes chapter 12. We're jumping a couple of chapters, and I'll tell you why in a minute. And Michael has kindly agreed. I have to say, anyone that has agreed to read bits of Nehemiah has been taking their literally lives into their hands, as they are largely full of unpronounceable names.

So Michael is going to read to us from Nehemiah chapter 12. If you've got a paper version or an electronic version, please turn to it. He's going to read two sections from chapter 12.

[2 : 4 9] So as Tim said, I'm going to read from Nehemiah chapter 12, verses 27 to 31, and then verses 40 to 47. 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, with the music of cymbals, harps, and lyres.

The musicians also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem, from the villages of the Netaphatites, from Beth Gilgal, and from the area of Kepa and Azimath.

For the musicians had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. When the priests and the 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 signed two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right towards the Thang Gate.

And now verses 40 to 47. The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God. So did I, together with half of the officials, as well as the priests, Elakim, Messiah, Minna-Naman, Messiah, Illinois, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with their trumpets.

[4 : 19] And also Messiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jernanan, Malachiah, Elam, and Ezer. The songs, sorry, the choirs sang under the direction of Jezreelah, and on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy.

The women and their 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 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 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 Aspah, there had been direction for the musicians and for the songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. So in the days of Zerubbabel and 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. I don't know if you noticed, but actually, this part of the story of Nehemiah didn't even make it into the video.

[5 : 55] The video ends at the end of chapter 8. This part doesn't even get a look in. When I was sort of looking at, it was kind of my fault, I'm preaching the last one anyway, but I like to always be able to blame Anne or someone else.

I could have been thinking, why have they left me the end bit? I'm an action person. I would have loved to have done the one with swords in one hand, you know, and tools in the other.

Chris may not have enjoyed doing the risk assessment for that particular activity with the congregation. But actually, I think that in this book, we've saved the best to last.

Nehemiah chapter 12 really tells us about praise and thanksgiving. This isn't an add-on or a sort of addendum at the end. It's really key to what happens in Nehemiah.

Building the war is important, but rebuilding the people's relationship with God and their attitudes and rebuilding their hearts matters so much more.

[7 : 02] And so today, we're going to think about what it means to recommit ourselves in worship, giving God praise for who he is and giving him thanks for what he's done.

And we're going to think about who should be doing praise, who should be living a life of praise. We're going to think about how we can praise God and how he wants us to praise and thank him.

And finally, and most importantly, we'll think about why this should be really central in our lives. And so there's nothing better than actually putting into practice what we're going to be thinking about.

So if you're able, would you stand now, please, and we're going to sing two songs of worship to God. First of all, starting on with a song that I can imagine they would have maybe sang at an event like this.

It's called The Greatest Day in History. Happy Day. So, who should be people that praise God?

[8 : 10] Now, normally the answer in church is? Everyone. No, the answer is always Jesus, man. It's, I don't know if you've noticed, but the Bible is full of lists, I think.

If you look at the book of Nehemiah especially, then there are lots and lots of lists of names. And I looked up lists of names. This is a list of 539, I think it is, random names that have been generated for people to pick, like as passwords, for them to try to remember.

But the part of chapter 12, which I didn't get Michael to read, is also full of names. And because I didn't want you to miss out, I thought I'd just give you a quick, so here you go.

You can just, while I'm talking, you can look at the names as they go up. Moab, Badiiah, Badiiah, Badiiah. I'm so glad that you didn't have to see these.

Now, God tells us in his word, still going, God tells us in his word, that all scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching.

[9 : 24] So what are we meant to learn from the lists? In fact, if you look in, I think it's chapter 9, then there isn't just a list, there's a list with numbers beside it.

It's like a Microsoft Excel table in the Bible, still going. Why does God put lists in the Bible?

And I think it's because God is a God of the macroscopic. He can see everything. But for him, every individual matters as well.

So every tribe and every person who returned to Jerusalem was important to God. And even when it comes to building the wall, we hear that there are different crafts people who come and do it.

People who work with gold, people who work with silver, people who work with jewels. A perfumier comes and helps rebuild the wall.

[10 : 30] And in this chapter 12, we hear that there are people who lead the praise and worship. It says this.

It says that the choirs were sang under the direction of J, I'm going to call him. So there were people who led the worship and there were choirs who led the people.

But if you read the rest of the chapter, you will see that this is not a spectator sport. So the priests came and they purified everything they could get their hands on as far as I can see, including the people, which means all of them.

All of them were there. And I'm afraid sometimes that sort of the gender language in the Bible isn't very helpful because you read that second bit from Nehemiah 12, 43, and you think, well, where are the men?

Because it says, essentially, it's almost saying even the women and children also rejoiced. It was assumed that the men were there anyway.

[11 : 41] So all the people took part in this worship. And we are commanded to do the same as well. Another sort of translation of the first verse that I read at the beginning of the service from Psalm 100, and it's echoed five psalms before in Psalm 95, is make a joyful noise unto the Lord.

Now, I don't know about you, but I know I'm pretty good at making a noise. Whether or not it's joyful is debatable. When I look at musical notes, they sort of do this to me.

I don't know if you've noticed, when I go down there to sing, I constantly look over to Mark and he has to sort of nod to me and say, yes, I've cut your microphone off now, Tim. It's safe for you to sing.

But I think that we don't always really know what we sound like when we sing. I've got to the age now where I can buy my niece the kind of presents which as a parent I would have hated my children to be bought.

My children were bought electronic drum kits. My favourite is when they were I think seven, four and two. My elder brother bought them a proper dart set.

[13 : 04] So I've actually bought this for my niece who is just going to school now. And I need two people to help me. Hello. Can you hear me?

Through this. Excellent. I need two volunteers. Come on, Kate. You can come and out. And Rob as well. Excellent. All right. How's your karaoke?

Okay. All right. Now I just want you let's start maybe with Magical voice Magical voice two. You know what you sound like. Magical voice three.

I'd like you to think of a song you'd like to sing. Maybe happy birthday. We all know that. Okay. Can you give them a note please? Because that's really going to help. Okay.

Happy birthday please. Both together. Okay. Something's clearly gone wrong.

[14 : 12] Let me see. Magical voice four. Okay. Okay. Okay. Try it again. Wait. No, no, no. Another note. Maybe a little higher.

Okay. Happy birthday to you. Happy birthday to you.

Okay. Thank you very much. You can sit down now. Round of applause. Thank you. My sister-in-law is going to love that gift.

I actually have to say Elijah nod if this is true. Elijah and I tried these out last night. Maybe a little too late. Maybe a little too loud. Maybe mummy was in bed.

But not at the end of it. Let me just turn that off. Otherwise I'm really worried. Why did I do that? I don't think we know what we sound like when we worship.

[15 : 16] I don't think we know what we sound like to God. Now that was just funny. You know, high voices, low voices. I don't know if you're aware. Some people really cannot sing in tune.

And I hope this next video works. Because it's one of my favorite songs, which I'm really glad has got new life on TikTok now. This is Toto, Africa. And this is someone singing it, with and without some help.

Could it take some time to do the things we never had? Could it take some time to do the things we never had?

He used something called auto-tune to take his flawed voice. That if we're honest, may have been joyful.

It was certainly a noise. But I think that God has an auto-tune for our praise and worship.

[16 : 19] Because what matters to him is not the quality of notes that come out of our mouths, or the eloquence of the words that we speak when we say thank you.

Because he doesn't hear our voices. The Bible tells us that he hears our hearts. And that when we sing to him, we are making music, or we should be making music, using our heart.

And Jesus, when he's asked about, if you like, worship style, location, where will it be? He says, the Father is looking for people who will worship him with spirit and in truth.

And the truth is that he hears our heart, not our voice. And he is a good father who loves hearing from his children.

Alison didn't so much like hearing from either her husband or one child last night. But I love hearing from my children. This is a picture that I had to go in my loft.

[17 : 32] I admit to find this yesterday. This is Jacob's first thank you letter to me, which he made on the computer after Christmas.

And it says, Dear Daddy, thank you for my presence. Happy Christmas. Love, Jacob. I think he may have got a little bit of help making this on the computer. Nonetheless, if I were an art critic and I were to look at that, I would say, where are the arms?

I mean, I assume that's a manger scene, but neither Joseph nor Mary have arms. And their legs are different lengths.

No wonder it took them so long on a donkey to get from Nazareth to Bethlehem. And Jesus, his head is actually on the wrong way round. But I love that, and I've kept it and I've cherished it because it was my child saying thank you to me, even in a really flawed way.

I love it. Over the years, I've got loads of cards that people have printed and sent to me. They've gone in the shredder. That one, I've kept because it was my child and the message came from the heart.

[18 : 55] And when we sing and when we speak and when we pray and when we thank, God doesn't care about the words that we use. He cares about our heart.

This is a modern day painting of a scene from one of the Gospels in Luke, I think it is, where Jesus sees a Pharisee praying with many words, with long, eloquent sort of sentences.

And then it's a sinner goes in and just says, have mercy on me. And God heard the sinner. And as we'll see in the next section, when we think about how we praise, praising and thanking God is a lot more than just singing.

But the Bible says it does involve singing. And so, I encourage you now, yes, I will be looking and going like this, but I encourage you, let's stand and sing praise to God.

Let's sing praises rising, knowing that if we're singing to God from our hearts, that it is a joyful sound that he hears.

[20 : 08] So, if you're able, please let's stand and sing. Praise is rising. Thanks. So now let's spend a few minutes thinking about how it is that we should give thanks and praise to God.

I love to run, and I always run with some earbuds in. And for me, it's one of the times when I can worship God and praise him and thank him without interruption.

And there are times when it's great if we can worship and thank and praise God as individuals. But actually, if we look at this passage, it was a time when God called his people back together.

If you remember, as Michael read, there were people in villages all the way around Jerusalem, and they were called together to gather. There were Levites, priests, leaders, musicians, choirs, people, women, and children all brought together.

And we see the same thing in the New Testament where we're encouraged to come together and to speak to one another with our worship, with our songs, with our psalms, with our hymns, with songs that God gives us from his spirit to say.

[21 : 36] And that's something that you can only really do together. Some things it's easier to do together. My wife, Alison, is on a bit of a fitness drive at the moment, and she tried to get me to do this exercise where, now I'm going to need some other people to help me with this.

Elijah, I need you because so far you're the only person I know that can actually do this. Andy, can you come and help me because you're fit? You've got slightly back, that's perfect.

Chris, maybe. Do you want to come and help? So, there's this exercise that you're meant to be able to do, okay, where you, now just sit down to start with, let's all sit facing the front.

This is exercise. Cross-legged. You have to start cross-legged and apparently, this is an exercise that tells how long you're going to live, Andy, so you and I should be a little bit worried about this one.

You are meant to be able to stand up without touching your hands on the ground or kneeling or doing an Arab spring, okay, just in case you could.

[22 : 52] So, actually, Elijah, can you just... Oh, oh, come on. You're a little bit stiff this morning? Ah, yeah.

Right, okay, old men, on three. One, two, three, go. Okay, I'm not even going to... Oh, all right, not, not, no, it's not that.

But, but do you know what, can you just do something? Just come here. Elijah, just come here. Chris, just go there. Just up. Let's hold hands. Okay, put your feet down.

Oh, wait, you got... Just, I'm worried you're going to let go of me. On three, one, two, three, one, one, one, one, one, one, one, come on, we can... Yeah! Please sit down.

Have a go with your family at home. There are some things that are just so much easier to do when you're all together. Can some people do it on their own?

[23 : 53] Yes, they can. But it's so much easier when you come together. And it's easier because you can lift one another. When one person is feeling down, someone else can help raise them up.

When one person is finding it hard to see things to be thankful for, we can speak to one another. We can speak truth to each other.

We can speak encouragement to each other. That's why in Hebrews it says, don't give up meeting together, but encourage one another. In our youth group recently, we've been sort of reimagining what church might be like.

And we had a... So this is going to sound really bizarre, I know, but does anyone remember one of the phrases that we came up with? Penguin Church. Okay?

Because we think church should work a lot like one of those... I don't know. What are they? I'm going to call them a herd. A huddle? A huddle of emperor penguins.

[25 : 00] Now, there's lots of different sort of teaching points that you could bring from this one. But I didn't realize at this point until I'm a bit of a science nerd. I actually read a research paper about what you're going to see, and it's called the ripple effect, which happens amongst emperor penguins.

I hope this works. While those on the outside take the brunt of the storm, those on the inside take tiny steps that move the huddle in waves.

It's just the most awesome thing.

Apparently, it starts when one penguin moves, and it sends this wave through the huddle, and it's one of the ways in which they keep themselves warm.

And I think it's a beautiful picture sometimes of how we can worship in church, that we worship together, and that together we help each other see who God really is.

[26 : 11] Sometimes you hear people say, I'm not sure what I got out of that church service. It's a strange word, church service, isn't it? Because maybe that's not...

We should be going there also to be ones who contribute, who take part in that wave. What do we put into our church services?

How do we help others praise and worship God? Words of encouragement, smiles when someone's up here feeling quite nervous, are amazing ways in which we can take our part in that penguin church that the youth group loved.

So we can worship together. But it should also be more than words. I don't know if anyone's ever played a mean game on you and given you a beautifully wrapped present with a bow and some silver paper and you open it up and there's actually nothing inside.

It will be really disappointing. And God and Jesus warns us about worship that looks good on the outside but actually doesn't really come from that place in the heart.

[27 : 27] In Isaiah he tells his people to stop bringing meaningless sacrifices. And Jesus describes the Pharisees as being like whitewashed tombs.

[31 : 30] Now, don't worry. I'm not going to go through every reason why we should give thanks and praise, because dinner would be a very different color by the time we did this.

I love the way in which, in the story of Nehemiah, they can link praise, which I think of as thanking God for who he is.

With thanksgiving, which is thanking him for things that he has done. So his character affects what he does and how he treats us.

And in Nehemiah, we can see that God was faithful. He heard the prayers of Nehemiah, and he answered them. We could see that he was powerful, because when Nehemiah went and asked the king, the king didn't just say, yes, off you go.

You can build your walls. He gave Nehemiah the time off to do it. He gave him letters making sure he could get there all right. And he gave orders that all the materials should be provided.

[32 : 41] God is so powerful, being able to move one of the rulers of the world, something we should remember. And he was loving. When the people read the law and they realized how they had let God down, they repented and God forgave them.

And our lives are full of reasons for us to be thankful to God. The scriptures tell us that all of creation declares his glory.

and that he is good and that his love lives forever. And I need to remember this all the time.

I'm actually going to jump on a couple of slides and just say this. There are so many reasons for us to give thanks and praise.

And actually, at the end of the service, if you want, one of these symbols, these symbols are all up around the church. And please feel free to go and grab one.

[33 : 48] But I wonder, I just want people to shout out what to them these symbols might represent. Either things that we should praise God for or things that we should thank him for.

So don't all shout at once, but I do want a good steady stream. And you can be creative because the symbol will mean different things to different people. So anyone, shout out, any of them, what do you think we should thank God for?

Justice. Faithfulness. Mercy. Health. Compassion. Love. The NHS.

Absolutely. Family. Learning. Pardon? Friends. Family. Wonderful works.

Peace. Yes. Nature. Creation. Forgiveness. Love. Food.

[34 : 59] Freedom. Hope. Pardon? Health. Health. Okay.

Okay. So I'm going to say amen. Because we just prayed. We are thankful to God for all of all of these things. It can be quite easy though to remember those things.

So we have another phrase in youth group where we say those were really good Sunday answers. Because it's easy on a Sunday to remember. And I keep on my iPad had.

This is a picture of Stefa. She's 84. She lives in Ukraine. And a group of us from the church visited her about 10 years ago now.

Stefa is 84. She broke her hip. I wrote this down. She broke her hip 12 years ago in her bedroom. She can't walk anymore. The hip was mended. But there were no physiotherapists that she could afford.

[36 : 08] And she can't afford any drugs for the pain. And so she has stayed in bed for those 12 years. Before that her daughter who was a drug addict died.

And so she brought up her granddaughter. Her son who was in the army died in the east. And if you look you can see everything that she needs to live is around her bed including a bucket.

it. When I saw that I promised myself that I would never ever again moan about our national health service.

Just occasionally on a Monday morning when I have to ring up at exactly 8 o'clock and I'm told I'm 842nd in the queue to speak to the GP.

I might forget that but I need to remember that God's mercies are the same all the time and so I need ways to remind myself of why I should be thankful to God.

[37 : 19] In Judaism there was a custom where in Deuteronomy it tells them to write them down. this is God's commands and also the things that he done for them.

It says write them down, tie them to your hands as a sign, tie them on your forehead to remind you and write them on your doors and gates.

Nowadays we don't walk around with those things. Maybe we need a new thing to do and so I rewrote the verse for myself and this is something that I try to do.

So I'm going to say write them on a post-it note which should be sat somewhere alongside you. Stick it on your mirror or fridge or computer or wherever you go quite often or put it on your phone lock screen.

I love that. You can get a verse of the day sent to your phone lock screen every day or set a reminder in a Bible app because we all need to remember these things.

[38 : 31] And so as we close, actually I'd like the back, we're going to sing 10,000 reasons as our closing song. Actually can you just play it through once for us?

And I've left some post-its for you lying around. There should be some pens as well. Please feel free. Grab one, grab two, grab them all.

Write down things that this week on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday and Friday are going to remind you of the goodness of God.

Stick them somewhere at home where you will remember. If you really want to, stick it on your forehead and go Old Testament.

but don't leave here without taking something to remind you of the many, many blessings of God. So do you want to just play the music through once, write something down, take something away with you, make a note in your phone, change your lock screen, and then we'll stand and sing and worship God together.

[39 : 42] as we leave, let's remember that God calls us to live lives of thanks and praise to him as individuals, but also as a body of believers together using actions and not just empty words, making a joyful song that can be heard well outside the walls of this building.

And we'll close with a blessing based on Psalm 100. May you know the Lord who is good.

May you experience his love and faithfulness that endures forever. And may you enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise today and always.

Amen. Amen.