

God revives His work

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Preacher: Rev.Prof. F. Dalrymple-Hamilton

[0 : 00] Turn your attention to the book of Nehemiah, chapter 12, and we'll read selected verses in this chapter and on to chapter 13, beginning at verse 27.

Nehemiah 12, verse 27. This particular portion is all about the dedication of the wall. And so in verse 27 we read, And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sought the Levites in all their places to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgiving and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres.

Verse 31. Then I brought up the princes of Judah upon the wall and appointed two great companies which gave thanks and went in procession.

One went to the right upon the wall to the dung gate. Verse 38. The other company of those who gave thanks went to the left, and I followed them with half of the people upon the wall, above the tower of the ovens, to the broad wall, and above the gate of Ephraim by the old gate, and by the fish gate, and the tower of Hananel, and the tower of the hundred, to the sheep gate.

And they came to a halt at the gate of the guard. So both companies of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me.

[1 : 43] And the priests, Eliakim, Ma'asaiah, Miniamin, Ma'kiah, Eli-onai, Zechariah, Hananiah, with trumpets.

Ma'asaiah, Shemaiah, El-Ezar, Husei, Ihanahan, Malkiyah, Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang with Zezrahiah as their leader.

And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy. The women and the children also rejoiced.

The joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off. On that day men were appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the firstfruits, and the tithes, to gather into them the portions required by the law for the priests and for the Levites, according to the fields of the towns.

For Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered. Chapter 13, verse 1. On that day they read from the book of Moses and the hearing of the people.

[2 : 58] And then it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God. For they did not meet the children of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them.

Yet our God turned the curse into a blessing. When the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent.

Amen. Amen. May the Lord bless to us that reading. It be to his praise and glory. We stand again and sing. I've been looking at the issue of God reviving his work.

Because fundamentally, that's what happened in the book of Nehemiah. Jerusalem was broken down. Its gates were rubble.

And its walls had been destroyed by fire. So if you bring it down to its simplest, what it required was a man who had vision.

[4 : 10] And that man wasn't a prophet. He wasn't a priest. He was a cupbearer to the king. He had no official religious office.

But he did have vision. And that's what we're looking at this morning. You find that in chapter 6, verse 15, the wall was completed on the 25th of Elul in 52 days.

Now that's the beginning of October of that year, BC 445. And there's an obvious gap between the finish and the dedication in chapter 12.

And these are just to do with, these chapters that fall in between, are to do with, in chapter 7, the repopulation of the city. Chapters 8 to 10 deal with Nehemiah's reforms and confirmation of God's government by the people of Jerusalem.

Chapter 11, right on to 12:26, there's a detailed list of the people who lived in Jerusalem and various lists of priests and Levites.

[5 : 27] So we come to the dedication of the wall in verse 27. At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sought the Levites in all their places to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgiving and with singing, with cymbals, harps and lyres.

The singers, the Levites, they were being sought to come to lead the people in worship and praise, to indicate that a new day has begun.

And that new day, mark this, starts with praise. Yet, something had to happen first. And that something was that the Levites and the priests had to be ceremoniously cleansed.

Verse 30. When the priests and the Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall.

So here's something that's of great importance to us. If we are seeking God in revival, we have to be cleansed. We need the favor of God upon us.

[6 : 55] The priests and the Levites, great that they are in their offices, they're not exempt. Now, the actual purification ceremony isn't discussed in the book of Nehemiah.

But there are many in the Pentateuch written by Moses. For example, in Exodus 30, we read, Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with water.

They will wash with water so that they do not die. And also in the book of Numbers, after that, the priest must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water.

Numbers 19, verse 7. But David the king, in his prayer in Psalm 51, which is a prayer of repentance, he cries out and says this, The necessity of being clean with God so that his blessing can fall upon us.

Now Ezekiel looked forward to a new day. He said this, I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.

[8 : 17] I will give you a new heart and a new spirit in you. This came about in the ministry of our Lord. You remember what he said to Nicodemus?

I tell you the truth. No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit.

Necessary for everybody. Not just for those that take the services. Not just for those that preach. Not just for those that lead or do any other such thing.

Everyone has to have this fundamental blessing. This is indeed God's order and his way.

Going back to Nehemiah in his day that was fundamental before anything else was going to happen. Before any Levite or singer sang a psalm before the wall could be dedicated before the blessing of God could be sought they had to be clean in God's eyes.

[9 : 32] This is fundamental to what we're talking about. In the thanksgiving the choir sang under the direction of Zezerahiah and on that day they offered great sacrifices rejoicing because God had given them great joy.

The women and the children also rejoiced. the sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard afar away. So what words would they have used on that occasion?

It's possible that into this context of Nehemiah and these people worshipping and blessing God that they used Psalm 147.

In Psalm 147 at the second verse the Lord builds up Jerusalem. He gathers the exiles of Israel.

Verse 13 He strengthens the bars of your gates and blesses your people within you. This is one of the great Hallelujah Psalms that completes the book of Psalms from 146 to 50.

[10 : 52] And we come to the key word in Nehemiah 12 43 that the sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away. A similar experience happened when the altar was re-designated re-consecrated in Ezra chapter 3.

No one could distinguish the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping because the people made so much noise the sound was heard far away.

Now the fact of the matter is that one of the things that characterized the early church and made it magnetic in its character was the example of praise and worship initially begun in the synagogue.

This was magnetic. People were drawn to these people because they had something to praise God about and something to shout about. That's what's happening here.

They were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and music of cymbals, harps and lyres. Now what is the reason for the rejoicing?

[12 : 11] Here's the reason. Last two Sundays I've been talking about hindrances to revival. The first of which was opposition from without.

And in the example of Nehemiah he was coming up against some fairly important people. Sanballat the governor of Samaria they go around with very nasty comments.

Will they restore their wall? Can they bring the stones back to life from these heaps of rubbish burned as they are? Sarcastic innuendos that you're wasting your time.

And so it is that Nehemiah in chapter 2 in a portion we didn't cover I went out through the valley gate he says towards the jackal well and the dung gate examining the walls of Jerusalem which had been broken down and its gates which had been destroyed by fire.

And then he says this to the leaders you see the trouble we are in. Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned with fire.

[13 : 35] So here is the enormity of the task but Nehemiah accomplishes it because God has called him and he's got a vision.

His vision is a restored Jerusalem from which the word of the Lord will go out to all nations.

Under God this rubble had been transformed into a city. The Lord Psalm 147 tells us builds up Jerusalem.

He gathers the exiles of Israel. But clearly we're not talking about and praising God this morning for the restoration of Jerusalem.

We're talking about something different. And what we are talking about fundamentally is our personal experience of God and his grace.

[14 : 40] Now the apostle when he writes to the Corinthians he says this do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Do not be deceived neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor drunkards nor slanderers or swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God and that is what some of you were but you were washed you were sanctified you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the spirit of God so Corinth being a seaport was a dark place it had many problems many sins but Paul went there with a message of a crucified and resurrected saviour and the result is that there was a great turning to

God is that possible today yes it is it is because of what God has done for his people in his son the Lord Jesus that he is making us different people we've got something to sing about Exodus 15 1 is a song of triumph I will sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously thirdly and finally the response in chapter 13 verse 1 on on that day the book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter into the assembly of the Lord at the very end of chapter 12 from verses 44 to 47 what you have is the appointment of men to be in charge of the storerooms for the contributions the offerings the fruits and the tithes and all of that is part and parcel of fulfillment of the law of

Moses the way this chapter opens is about the exclusion from the Ammonites and the Moabites from coming to God's house this does not apply today but it did then and the reason it applied if you look at the book of Numbers was that when the people of Israel were on their way to the promised land they wanted to pass through the territory of the Ammonites and the Moabites not turning to the right or to the left but going up a street which is known then and now as the king's highway and they were refused so what we find is all of this has been drawn to the attention of the people by the fact that the book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people now you find this also in chapter eight all all the people assembled as one man in the square before the water gate

Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly he read aloud from daybreak till noon and all the people listened attentively to the book of the law so here Nehemiah is commenting on something different not just the physical restoration of Jerusalem so that it looks complete with its wall and gates and an efficient temple but what he's interested in it's what we're interested in and that is the rebuilding of the nation's spiritual life and it's going to be achieved by continual reference reading and preaching on God's holy law this practice of reading the law in a cycle which was set up by

[19 : 22] Ezra continues in Judaism to this day and so we read in the Acts of the Apostles that when Paul and Barnabas they entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and sat down and then followed the reading of the law and the prophets so it's something that's going on but it's something that has great effect and one of the great chapters that you'll find that comments on this is 2nd Kings chapter 22 this is the reign of the boy king Josiah and he's interested also in rebuilding the temple as the temple is rebuilt the book of the law of God probably Deuteronomy was rediscovered it was taken by the secretary and read before the king and you find in 2nd

Kings 23 he was so personally moved he was in a state of repentance before his God and so the Passover was restored the nation turned to God and things like spiritism were expelled and stopped and this is what's happening here this continual reading of God's law of preaching upon it is the way to restore spiritual health to this nation now Paul writes to the Corinthians in the first chapter God was pleased he says through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe there's something very wonderful happens in the ministry of the word because in it

God is challenging you and me and he's giving us faith faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ something wonderful something marvelous it saves but it not only saves it also builds up in Ephesians 4 we read the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ to hear and this is tying up with what Gerald's been reading to us over these Sundays about the reasons for coming to church it causes growth that's what's fundamentally happening and if it's not happening

I have to ask myself am I doing this properly it causes us to grow and the Christian life and progress as believers and progression and development is what we want so bringing it back to the here and now because all this is not a history lesson there are spiritual principles embedded in this which apply in the here and now so bringing it back to the here and now how do you evaluate the spiritual state of Scotland today and if you can answer that question in your hearts the next question is what am I and you going to do about it

I've said that Nehemiah was a man of vision in this sermon I've already referred to the work of Ezekiel the prophet but Ezekiel has a wonderful vision in chapter 47 and it's of a river flowing out from the altar going right away down into all the barren parts of the land and wherever this river goes life comes into being is it too much to say that from this house there is a river there is the potential for doing something marvelous what does it take it takes a person of vision the beginning of the series I refer to the revival that had taken place on the island of Lewis 1949 to 1950 brought about by two old ladies one who was nearly blind both of them in their 80s but they had a vision and through them and through their prayers the tide was turned we can do that today

[25 : 14] I commend it to you in Christ's name shall we stand and sing