

This morning, we are continuing our journey through the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah is the man primarily responsible for refounding the nation of Israel after their exile in Babylon. The story begins in 445 BC, and there is a lot to learn about leadership and about building up the church and the people of God. In ch. 1, Nehemiah hears about the devastating state of Jerusalem, and receives permission from King Artaxerxes of the Persian Empire to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the wall. In ch. 2 he surveys the scene and rallies the people together to the task. In 3-4 he assembles the people, builds the wall, and deals with some opposition. Chapters 5-6 were all about spiritual warfare as Nehemiah tries to finish the wall. In chs. 7-10, he begins to build up the community spiritually. They read the law, mourn, and then find joy in God's grace. Last week was about repentance and faith. This morning, we are up to 11 & 12, looking at the elements of the gathered community:

NIV Nehemiah 11:1 Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns. ² The people commended all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

After this comes a long list of those who settled in Jerusalem, as well as the Levites and priests who served there. This is a historical document, and is important in that it grounds it in real life. It is also important to note that some families were willing to stay in Jerusalem for the sake of God, sacrificing their own comfort for the good of the community. Let's pick it back up in 12:27:

12:27 - 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 singers 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 singers 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 Zaccur, 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 scribe 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 house of David 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. 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 singers 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 singers 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 singers and gatekeepers. They also set aside the portion for the other Levites, and the Levites set aside the portion for the descendants of Aaron.

This passage has a lot to say about the elements of the gathered community, the pieces that make up the church when they gather together. What do we learn from Nehemiah 11-12 about what we are to be about?

- 1) **Carefully appointed and qualified leaders** – there are priests, Levites, provincial leaders, gatekeepers, and chief officers

³ These are the provincial leaders who settled in Jerusalem

There is organization and leadership. In the New Testament church, the leaders take the form of elders. There are three responsibilities that the elders have:

They set an example of Godly living for the church.

1 Timothy 3:1-7 - Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

Notice that this passage is so much more about character than abilities

They shepherd the church

1 Peter 5:1-4 - To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; ³ not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

Acts 20:28 - Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

They oversee the secular affairs of the church as God's stewards

1 Timothy 5:17 - The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

There are other roles in church leadership, such as deacons or servants and ministry leaders.

- 2) **Members serving the needs of the community** – gatekeepers, temple servants, men in charge of the storeroom

²¹ *The temple servants lived on the hill of Ophel, and Ziha and Gishpa were in charge of them.*

Besides the leaders, all members of the gathered community are to serve and use their gifts to build up the community.

Ephesians 4:11-13 - *It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ 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.*

1 Peter 4:10 - *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*

What are your gifts and talents? They are given by God to be used in service.

3) **Worshipful celebration and thanksgiving** - singers

Not to us but to your name be the glory! Anything that is good is from you!

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*

The choirs sang under the direction of Jezrahiah.

They are here to joyfully celebrate who God is and what He has done! Part of our role here is to worship God.

John 4:23-24 - *Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."*

Ephesians 5:18-2 - *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. ¹⁹ Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and **spiritual songs**. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Listen closely to how C.S. Lewis puts it:

*“But the most obvious fact about praise – whether of God or anything – strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honour. I had never noticed that **all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise unless (sometimes even if) shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it.** The world rings with praise – lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favourite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favourite game... I had not noticed either that just as men spontaneously praise whatever they value, so they spontaneously urge us to join them in praising it: “Isn’t she lovely? Wasn’t it glorious? Don’t you think that magnificent?” The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about.*

Praise is a natural thing – when we enjoy something, we want to praise it. When you feel that someone is beautiful, you want to tell them. If someone has made you proud, you want to tell them. If you read a great book or watch a great movie, you want to praise it to others. When you experience a beautiful sunset, or breathtaking mountain view, or incredible waterfall, you want to praise it, share it with others. When we enjoy something, we naturally want to praise it.

Lewis continues:

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete till it is expressed. It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with... The worthier the object, the more intense this delight would be. If it were possible for a created soul fully to “appreciate”, that is to love and delight in, the worthiest object of all, and simultaneously at every moment to give this delight perfect expression, then that soul would be in supreme beatitude.

When we enjoy something, our delight is incomplete until it is expressed. Ever watch a movie by yourself? See a moving video? What do you want to do? Tell others about it! Post it on Facebook! Express to others how amazing it is and hope that others join you in praising it! Shout it from the rooftops so that others will join

in praising and share in the enjoyment! This song is amazing. Share it with others so that they can join you in praising it.

They spend time together in musical praise & worship. They remember God's faithfulness and testify to what He has done

4) Faithful financial support of the community

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

⁴⁷ So in the days of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, all Israel contributed the daily portions for the singers and gatekeepers. They also set aside the portion for the other Levites, and the Levites set aside the portion for the descendants of Aaron

Part of what we do in the gathered community is giving to the work of the Lord and supporting those who minister. We care for the needy.

1 Timothy 5:17-18 - *The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.* ¹⁸ *For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages."*

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 - *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.* ⁷ *Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.* ⁸ *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

The tithe was the firstfruits, the first 10%. Why give? Because it is all God's. Because giving is a concrete way to express your dependence upon Him.

Think of tithing. In the Old Testament, believers set aside the first 10%, the firstfruits, to be given away to God and to those in need. How many of you find it easy to give away 10%? I would imagine not many of you. After all, why willingly live on 90% instead of 100%, especially when you worked so hard for that money and have so many needs? But what if you really understood that you are stewards of God's money? What if you realized that God was like a rich man saying to you,

manage my money – you can do whatever you wish with 90% of it, but I want you to give 10% of it away? Who would not sign up for that? If we truly believed it was all his, we would have no problem with it. Perhaps now you can understand what Malachi wrote:

***Malachi 3:7-10** - Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?' ⁸ "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are under a curse-- the whole nation of you-- because you are robbing me. ¹⁰ Bring the whole **tithe** into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.*

To not tithe is not to be stingy, but to rob God. That was an OT law, but we are to be even more generous in every way, with our money, with our time, with our talents, because it is God's, given to us in order to serve others.

It reminds me of an interesting verse in Ephesians 4:28 where Paul says “*He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to **share** with those in need.*

Why do we make money? So that we might have something to share with those in need.

5) **Reading and teaching of God's Word**

8:1 - all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel. ² So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. ³ He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

9:3 - They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshipping the LORD their God

The last element of the gathered community comes from the previous couple of chapters. They gather to hear God's Word so that they might obey it. Discipleship: what does God's law require of us?

***Matthew 28:18-20** - Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

***2 Timothy 4:1-5** - In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ² Preach the Word; be **prepared in season** and out of **season**; correct, rebuke and encourage-- with great patience and careful instruction. ³ For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

Do the work of an evangelist. Continue to preach the gospel. Worship, discipleship, service, fellowship, evangelism

What is your role here? Be a servant - use your gifts to serve and build up the body. Be a worshiper – praising God for who He is and what He has done. Be a contributor – give to the work of the Lord. And be a student, a disciple, a learner.