

Dedication of the Wall

Neh 12:27-38, 43
SS Lesson for 08/18/2013

Devotional Scripture: Ps 96

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW AND APPROACH TO LESSON

Key Verse: Neh 12:43

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

Commentary from NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

LESSON INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

DEDICATION PREPARATION (NEH 12:27-30)

The gathering of the people (27-29)

The gathering of the elect (Matt 24:31)

The gathering that will bring all the scattered children of God together (John 11:51-52)

Christians are used to help gather God's kingdom (Matt 12:30)

Gathered so that we may give thanks, praise and worship to God (Ps 106:47)

All the nations will gather together and the peoples assembled (Isa 43:6-9)

God gathers like a winnowing fork (Luke 3:16-18)

God gathers multiple flock (John 10:16)

The purification of the people (30)

Purity that comes from being a child of God (Phil 2:14-15)

Purity that we should think about constantly (Phil 4:8)

Purity that leads us to help others (James 1:27)

Purity that comes from the hope and trust in God (1 John 3:3)

Purity that comes from obedience (1 Peter 1:22)

Purity that comes from the washing of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11)

Purity that comes from the washing of God's Word (Eph 5:25-26)

DEDICATION PARTICIPATION (NEH 12:31-38)

Positioning the people (31)

Positioned through work (Ruth 2:19-20)

Positioned without knowledge of destination (Genesis 12:1)

Positioned to be alone with God (Gen 32:22-25)

Positioned by God to where He wants us (1 Cor 12:18)

Positioned by God to do His purposes (Est 4:14)

Obedience of the people (32-37)

Obedience because of love for God (John 14:15)

Obedience that is an obligation (Rom 8:12-14)

Obedience regardless of circumstances (Dan 3:16-18)

Obedience through suffering (Heb 5:8)

Obedience that leads to righteousness (Rom 6:16)

Obedience that shows our love for God (1 John 5:2-3)

Leading the people (38)

Leadership that leads to the way of God and truth (Matt 22:16)

Leadership that leads even when there is fear of the unknown (Mark 10:32)

Leadership that leads to the way of Jesus (John 14:6)
Leadership that leads to a cleared way (1 Thess 3:11)
Leadership that leads to the Most Holy Place (Heb 9:8)

DEDICATION PRAISE (NEH 12:43)

Praise of offerings (43)

Offerings that are done willingly (2 Cor 8:12)
Offerings that are offered right (Gen 4:2-7)
Offerings that are sacrificial given (Phil 4:16-18)
Offerings that offer ourselves as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1-2)
Offerings that are given as part of worship (Ps 96:8-9)
Offerings that are planned in advance (1 Cor 16:2)

Praise of rejoicing (43)

Rejoicing in God's salvation (Ps 13:5)
Rejoicing in the revival by God (Ps 85:6)
Rejoicing in God's righteousness (Ps 89:15-16)
Rejoicing in the day the Lord has made (Ps 118:24)
Rejoicing in the Lord always (Phil 4:4)
Rejoicing in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:16-18)

CONCLUSION AND OTHER THOUGHTS

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM STEVEN COLE

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE NIV STANDARD LESSON COMMENTARY

PRACTICAL POINTS FROM THE BIBLE EXPOSITOR AND ILLUMINATOR

Introduction

Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson explains how God people rejoiced over the **Dedication of the Wall**. The **study's aim** is to learn from Israel's celebration of God's blessing and copy the principle. The **study's application** is to use the principles learned to praise and celebrate the goodness and blessings of God.

Key Verse: Neh 12:43

43 Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

Nehemiah assembled two great choirs to sing thanks (cf. vv. 8, 27); the number in each choir is not indicated. The choirs probably began near the Valley Gate, which interestingly is the place where Nehemiah began and ended his nighttime inspection of the ruined walls months earlier (2:13-15). The first procession moved counterclockwise on the southern and eastern wall toward the Dung Gate (12:31) and past the Fountain Gate up to the Water Gate. Because both choirs entered the temple (v. 40), the first one may have proceeded on the wall up to the East Gate. The procession included the following: Ezra, who led the group (12:36), the choir, Hoshaiah... half the leaders of Judah (v. 32), priests (seven of them named and some with trumpets), and Zechariah and his eight associates... with musical instruments. The second choir moved clockwise, presumably starting at the Valley Gate and going past various gates and towers till they arrived at the Gate of the Guard. This group included the choir, Nehemiah, half the officials (12:40), priests (seven of them named and with trumpets), and eight others who apparently were singers. The parallel arrangement of the two processions is striking. Their walking on top of the wall (vv. 31, 38) visually demonstrated that the walls were strong, a rejoinder to Tobiah's earlier mocking claim that the wall would be so weak that even a fox on top of it would break it down (4:3). Perhaps Nehemiah wanted Tobiah to see that with God's help the project was completed in spite of his and others' opposition. Since the people now carried no spears, swords, or bows (cf. 4:16, 18), the enemies had no doubt withdrawn. Seeing the two large processions marching on the walls must have been an impressive sight. 12:42b-43. In the temple ("the house of God," v. 40) the choir leader Jezrahiah led the two large choirs. Sacrifices were made and the people rejoiced so loudly that they could be heard far away.

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

Joy and sorrow are two extremes of human emotion, and both have their value in the course of life. One cannot be joyful all the time, nor should one bear sorrow all the time. Life needs to be built upon a proper balance of the two. If we see someone who is always laughing and having nothing but parties and good times, we might feel that something about his life is not in the proper perspective. On the other hand, when one is in constant sorrow, we believe that he is bearing burdens beyond his ability or dealing with an illness and needs professional help. "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:... a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance" (Eccles. 3:1, 4). God has given us special times for sorrow and for joy, and we need to experience them as God directs. "Ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you" (John 16:22). Jesus was talking about His death and resurrection—sorrow because of His leaving them and joy because of His resurrection. Israel had just gone through seventy years of captivity, of living in a pagan society with no access to the temple. Their sorrow was great and hard to bear. "We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they . . . carried us away captive" (Ps. 137:2-3). Now Israel had come home. They could worship God as they should. They were at the temple. All the priests were in place, the offerings were ready, and the walls of Jerusalem were restored. All the people around them could hear the sound of joy coming from the hearts of God's people. "The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that

shall say, Praise the Lord of hosts: for the Lord is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the Lord" (Jer. 33:11). Christians are joyful because we have a hope beyond the promises of this world. It is a hope that is eternal, one that no man can take away. Our joy is not in a temple made with hands but in one that is eternal in heaven. "[We have] an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Pet. 1:4-5). I am sure that those who heard the sounds of "great joy" were deeply impressed. Before they had heard the sounds of the people's labor as they built the wall. Now it was different; "God had made them rejoice with great joy." God makes all those who trust in His love rejoice, especially those who have a living faith in Christ. God has given to all who trust Him a joy greater than any other and a place in His kingdom forever.

Commentary from NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Nehemiah 12:40-42 (not in today's text) notes the gathering of the two processions at the temple for singing after each completes its half-circuit of the city. Sacrifices are not required at this ceremony, but they are freely and joyfully given nonetheless. Indeed, the emphasis in the verse before us is joy, with forms of the words rejoice and joy used four times. The picture is one of religious exultation accompanied by trumpets (v. 41). Passages such as Psalm 48:12, 13 may reflect such processional celebrations (compare Psalm 68:24-27). This celebration seems to surpass the earlier ones for the temple (Ezra 3:13; 6:16) and the reading of the law (Nehemiah 8:12, 17). The people have had several weeks to rest from their wall-building labor (compare Nehemiah 6:15 with 7:73b and 9:1). There is nothing to hinder those present from praising God at the top of their lungs!

Approach to the Major Outlines in Lesson

The outline of the lesson was adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary and from the points revealed by the study of the Scriptural text.

Verse	Phrase	Commentary
27	Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication	Dedication Preparation
31	So I brought the leaders of Judah up on the wall, and appointed two large thanksgiving choirs	Dedication Participation
43	Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced	Dedication Praise

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The topic that dominates the first half of the book of Nehemiah is the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls and gates. That task was completed in 445 BC, and it was an exceptional accomplishment. Nehemiah 12 (today's text) takes us to the dedication ceremony of those rebuilt walls. The biblical writer is highly selective in his use of information to tell the story of the celebration, and piecing it together is not easy. Much information that we may wish to have is not included. For example, today's lesson is about two processions that march around

the rebuilt walls, but the starting point for these processions is not stated. An educated guess is that the starting place is the Valley Gate. This gate faced west, overlooking the Central Valley adjacent to the narrow City of David (the oldest section of Jerusalem). This is the gate where Nehemiah began and ended his nocturnal inspection after arriving in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2:11-16). We will have more educated guesses to make regarding the locations of other named gates that the processions crossed. Immediately preceding today's lesson text is an extended listing of the names and duties of priests and Levites who had returned to Jerusalem from exile. Levites play a vital role in today's lesson, so a refresher on their origin and functions is in order. The designation Levites refers to descendants of the man Levi (Genesis 29:34; 35:23). All priests of Israel came from the tribe of Levi, although not all male Levites ended up becoming priests (Deuteronomy 17:9, 18; etc.; contrast 1 Kings 12:31). "The duty of the Levites was to help Aaron's descendants [that is, the priests] in the service of the temple of the Lord: to be in charge of the courtyards, the side rooms, the purification of all sacred things and the performance of other duties at the house of God" (1 Chronicles 23:28; see extended description in vv. 29-32). A key levitical function under this umbrella was that of musician, which is an important part of today's study. Precedent for this function stretches back many centuries (see 1 Chronicles 6:1-31; 15:16-22; 23:1-5; 25:1-6; 2 Chronicles 5:12; 7:6). Levites were still musicians in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah (see Ezra 2:40, 41; 3:10, 11; Nehemiah 7:43, 44).

From the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

Dedication is a well-known concept in our world. Books and musical compositions are dedicated to special persons. Memorials are dedicated to the memory of statesmen, reformers, and fallen heroes, as well as in remembrance of famous battles. Tombs are dedicated to unknown soldiers. Dedication ceremonies mark the opening of highways, tunnels, and bridges. Ships and aircraft are dedicated in special observances, as are innovative cars and other inventions. Buildings and properties are dedicated: medical centers, libraries, museums, schools, office buildings, and even athletic fields. Each of these is dedicated to the public for its use. "Dedication" is a common religious word as well, in the sense of presenting something to God. We observe parents' dedication of their babies and missionary candidates' dedication of themselves. We dedicate to Him new houses of worship and new organizations to further His work. Dedication observances were practiced in ancient Israel as well. The ordinary happenings in our lives hold great promise as objects of praise and rejoicing in the Lord. A wedding, the birth of a child, even a beautiful sunset can draw us out in joy, wonder, and praise to God. We first have to decide that we will set our hearts on finding these occasions and using them to thank and praise God. Then we have to keep reminding ourselves until it becomes a habit, a norm of life. Each of us could become a leader of others in this area—sort of a cheerleader for God. The building of the protecting wall around the city of Jerusalem furnished just such an occasion in Israel's history. The wall was needed to protect the people of Jerusalem. Building the wall involved a lot of long, hard work. God had blessed them in enabling them to complete the task. Ezra and Nehemiah had led the people in the work, and it now was time to lead them in honoring the Lord with a dedication celebration. The temple had been built, the worship of the Lord reestablished, and many (though not all) of the people of Israel had returned from captivity in Persia. Now the wall around Jerusalem had been completed, and it was time to mark the occasion with sacrifices, a dedication of the wall, and a feast. Ezra, Nehemiah, and all the people set out to create a memory, and God took part by giving them rejoicing hearts.

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Dedication Preparation (Neh 12:27-30)

27 Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps.

28 And the sons of the singers gathered together from the countryside around Jerusalem, from the villages of the Netophathites,

29 from the house of Gilgal, and from the fields of Geba and Azmaveth; for the singers had built themselves villages all around Jerusalem.

30 Then the priests and Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, the gates, and the wall.

The gathering of the people (27-29)

The gathering of the elect (Matt 24:31)

31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

The gathering that will bring all the scattered children of God together (John 11:51-52)

51 He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, 52 and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.

Christians are used to help gather God's kingdom (Matt 12:30)

30 "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.

Gathered so that we may give thanks, praise and worship to God (Ps 106:47)

47 Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.

All the nations will gather together and the peoples assembled (Isa 43:6-9)

6 I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth — 7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made." 8 Lead out those who have eyes but are blind, who have ears but are deaf. 9 All the nations gather together and the peoples assemble. Which of them foretold this and proclaimed to us the former things? Let them bring in their witnesses to prove they were right, so that others may hear and say, "It is true."

God gathers like a winnowing fork (Luke 3:16-18)

16 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." 18 And with many other words John exhorted the people and preached the good news to them.

God gathers multiple flock (John 10:16)

16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

The purification of the people (30)

Purity that comes from being a child of God (Phil 2:14-15)

14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe

Purity that we should think about constantly (Phil 4:8)

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.

Purity that leads us to help others (James 1:27)

27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Purity that comes from the hope and trust in God (1 John 3:3)

3 Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

Purity that comes from obedience (1 Peter 1:22)

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

Purity that comes from the washing of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11)

11 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 Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Purity that comes from the washing of God's Word (Eph 5:25-26)

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,

Dedication Participation (Neh 12:31-38)

31 So I brought the leaders of Judah up on the wall, and appointed two large thanksgiving choirs. One went to the right hand on the wall toward the Refuse Gate.

32 After them went Hoshaiiah and half of the leaders of Judah,

33 and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam,

34 Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah,

35 and some of the priests' sons with trumpets — Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Michaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph,

36 and his brethren, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them.

37 By the Fountain Gate, in front of them, they went up the stairs of the City of David, on the stairway of the wall, beyond the house of David, as far as the Water Gate eastward.

38 The other thanksgiving choir went the opposite way, and I was behind them with half of the people on the wall, going past the Tower of the Ovens as far as the Broad Wall,

Positioning the people (31)

Positioned through work (Ruth 2:19-20)

19 Her mother-in-law asked her, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!" Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz," she said. 20 "The Lord bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. "He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead." She added, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers."

Positioned without knowledge of destination (Genesis 12:1)

12 The Lord had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.

Positioned to be alone with God (Gen 32:22-25)

22 That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. 24 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 25 When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

Positioned by God to where He wants us (1 Cor 12:18)

18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

Positioned by God to do His purposes (Est 4:14)

14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

Obedience of the people (32-37)

Obedience because of love for God (John 14:15)

15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command.

Obedience that is an obligation (Rom 8:12-14)

12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation — but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, 14 because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Obedience regardless of circumstances (Dan 3:16-18)

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Obedience through suffering (Heb 5:8)

8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered

Obedience that leads to righteousness (Rom 6:16)

16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Obedience that shows our love for God (1 John 5:2-3)

2 This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. 3 This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,

Leading the people (38)

Leadership that leads to the way of God and truth (Matt 22:16)

16 They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are.

Leadership that leads even when there is fear of the unknown (Mark 10:32)

32 They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him.

Leadership that leads to the way of Jesus (John 14:6)

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Leadership that leads to a cleared way (1 Thess 3:11)

11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.

Leadership that leads to the Most Holy Place (Heb 9:8)

8 The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing.

Dedication Praise (Neh 12:43)

43 Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.

Praise of offerings (43)

Offerings that are done willingly (2 Cor 8:12)

12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

Offerings that are offered right (Gen 4:2-7)

2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

Offerings that are sacrificial given (Phil 4:16-18)

16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. 17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Offerings that offer ourselves as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1-2)

12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Offerings that are given as part of worship (Ps 96:8-9)

8 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. 9 Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.

Offerings that are planned in advance (1 Cor 16:2)

2 On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.

Praise of rejoicing (43)

Rejoicing in God's salvation (Ps 13:5)

5 But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.

Rejoicing in the revival by God (Ps 85:6)

6 Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

Rejoicing in God's righteousness (Ps 89:15-16)

15 Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O Lord. 16 They rejoice in your name all day long; they exult in your righteousness.

Rejoicing in the day the Lord has made (Ps 118:24)

24 This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Rejoicing in the Lord always (Phil 4:4)

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Rejoicing in all circumstances (1 Thess 5:16-18)

16 Be joyful always; 17 pray continually; 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from Steven Cole

Before they dedicated the wall, the priests and Levites purified themselves, the people, the gates, and the wall. The Old Testament rituals for purification symbolize the fact that our hearts are sinful and God is absolutely holy. Those who serve Him must be cleansed from all known sin of thought, word, and deed. A scandal hit the front page of our local paper and the evening news this week, in which a man who was formerly an elder here, who also was in full time ministry, was charged with 17 counts of molesting girls who were at sleepovers with his daughters. When that sort of hypocrisy is exposed, the world mocks the name of Christ. All of us struggle against temptation. All of us are vulnerable to fall into sin. But if you are not guarding yourself from temptation and walking in consistent victory over sin, please do not make a claim of being a Christian. Don't get involved in any sort of ministry. Rather, humble yourself before God, repent of all

of your sins, and take measures to protect yourself from falling again. Purity on the heart level is an essential requirement for Christian service.

The dedication of the wall was a time, not to praise Nehemiah, but to praise the Lord. Nehemiah organized two choirs to walk in opposite directions on top of the wall until they converged at the temple. They sang praises to the accompaniment of cymbals, harps, and lyres. The chapter refers six times to David, who is twice called “the man of God” (12:24, 36, 37 [twice], 45, & 46). David was a man after God’s heart because he was a worshiper of God. He had set up the whole system of worship that these people were seeking to follow (12:46). God doesn’t want your work if He doesn’t have your worship. To worship God is to rejoice in and extol His great attributes and actions. It is to reverence God above all else. True worship is not just outward, but inward. It engages the mind, the heart, the will, and the emotions. Whether you’re setting up chairs or preaching a sermon, it ought to flow out of a heart of worship for God.

As you read the account of this dedication service, you get the distinct impression that these people were enjoying themselves! Chuck Swindoll (p. 186) pictures it as a sort of Jewish Disneyland Parade! Note the emphasis on joy in 12:43: it is mentioned four times in that verse, and again in 12:44. It says, “the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar.” It wasn’t their song that was heard from afar, but their joy (Swindoll, p. 188). Outsiders heard their joy! Have you ever been outside of a stadium when a ball game was going on inside, and suddenly the crowd roars? You know when that happens that something good happened inside! Probably someone for the home team just hit a homerun. In the same way, people should be able to walk by the church and think, “Something good is going on in there!” In fact, God has hit a grand-slam homerun for us through Jesus Christ. We need to so caught up

(Adapted from Sermon notes by Pastor Steven J. Cole, Flagstaff Christian Fellowship www.fcfonline.org)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The ancient Hebrews knew how to celebrate! Today, we have more reason to do so, since Jesus has been raised from the dead and is now reigning at God’s right hand. The Jews of Nehemiah’s day celebrated a rebuilt wall; we can celebrate the fact that Jesus tore down a wall, “the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14-18). We should look for ways to celebrate in Christ. New buildings can be dedicated, milestones acknowledged, and teachers honored. Earthly celebrations in Christ can spur us to greater tasks of faith as we look forward to the great celebration by God of the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2, 9). That celebration will never end.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. We should take every opportunity to proclaim the blessings of God (Neh. 12:27-29)
2. God desires personal purity before any participation in a work for Him (12:30;cf. chaps. 8-10)
3. God gives those who labor for Him abundant reason for thanks (12:31)
4. God’s work is usually accomplished by a variety of God’s faithful people (vs. 32-36)
5. There is room and time for everyone when it comes to celebrating God (vs. 38)
6. Genuine, God-given joy can be a powerful witness to the world around us (vs. 43)