

Series: rebuild

August 26, 2018

Title: The Sound of Rejoicing

[Slide 1]

Text: Nehemiah 12:27-43

“Standing in your gates”

And then it was finished!

The Big Day had finally arrived. A ragtag bunch of exile survivors had done the impossible. In 52 days they had turned a pile of ruins into a fortified city, complete with a dozen gates and numerous towers. They had worked as families and clans, each rebuilding their own section of the wall. They had endured the constant threat of attack and ceaseless insults from the surrounding peoples. They had negotiated a severe economic crisis.

And they had reset their relationship with the LORD, the God of Israel. No turning back to the failed behaviors of the past.

Now it was time to dedicate the wall of Jerusalem.

Celebrate!

I remember my daughter on the day she got her driver’s license. She took the driving test as close to her 16th birthday as humanly possible. And that evening after passing the test, she was on the road. I can still see her driving down our street, heading off to see her boyfriend. She was one happy camper!

How do you celebrate a major life accomplishment? Something you have looked forward to, but perhaps wondered if it would ever come to pass? Like graduating from high school, earning your college degree, buying your first home, landing the job of your dreams.

As a pastor who performs weddings, I know that the ceremony is only the prelude to the main event that day: the Reception!

“Standing in your gates”

When it came time to celebrate the rebuilding of Jerusalem, Nehemiah orchestrated a national day of celebration. It began with assembling the marching band:

[Slide 2]

Nehemiah 12:27 NIV

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 Levites were one of the 12 tribes of Israel. Their assignment was to facilitate the worship of God by performing various services, including singing and worship. No celebration of Jerusalem's rebuilding would be possible without their presence. They would lead in worship and praise.

We don't know what songs they prepared for the event, but the first song could have gone like this:

[Slide 3]

Psalm 122:1-4 NIV

I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD."

Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together.

That is where the tribes go up – the tribes of the LORD – to praise the name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel.

"Walk about Zion"

The two parades:

When all the musicians had arrived, Nehemiah arranged for a massive, two-part parade – right on the walls of Jerusalem. The first group marched up the eastern wall:

[Slide 4]

Nehemiah 12:31, 37 NIV

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....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 site of David's Palace to the Water Gate on the east.

The second group marched up the western wall to meet the first group at the Temple:

[Slide 5]

Nehemiah 12:38-39 NIV

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, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate. At the Gate of the Guard they stopped.

Dancing on the Walls:

Imagine what it must have felt like to be walking, singing and dancing on the walls of Jerusalem! Each person in the parade could remember the long days and nights of clearing debris, lifting stones into place, repairing burned out gateways – all the while keeping a watchful eye for a sneak attack. Now the wall that had seemed an utter impossibility two months ago was a highway under their feet. They could look down on the city and the surrounding countryside. They could sleep in peace. It was a time for dancing on the walls!

“Walk about Zion!”

I wonder if they sang from Psalm 48?

[Slide 6]

Psalm 48:12-14 NIV

Walk about Zion, go around her, count her towers, consider well her ramparts, view her citadels, that you may tell of them to the next generation.

For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.

“Like those who dreamed”

In God’s House:

When the two choirs met, they joined the priests in the Temple – the House of God. Choirs sang, trumpets sounded, the people cheered.

Nehemiah tells us:

[Slide 7]

Nehemiah 12:43 NIV

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.

Born in a moment:

Why such a celebration? Why such joy? These people were experiencing the miracle of an entire nation coming back to life after the long, dark years of exile. It was what Isaiah had prophesied:

[Slide 8]

Isaiah 66:8 NIV

Who has ever heard of such things? Who has ever seen things like this? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children.

And there is a song that fits perfectly that wonderful moment in a rededicated Jerusalem:

[Slide 9]

Psalms 126:1-3 NIV

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.

Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.

"Like those who dreamed"

What God did for Jerusalem on that day He wants to do for you. Inside each one of us is a city that needs rebuilding. Perhaps you are finding yourself walking around the ruins, wondering if anything good can come from the mess you are facing.

If that's the case, listen to the way this psalm of joy concludes:

[Slide 10]

Psalm 126:4-6 NIV

Restore our fortunes, LORD, like streams in the Negev.

Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.

The same God who blessed you in the past will bless you and bring you joy again. He is the God who restores. He is the God who does great things for us. He is the God who fills us with joy.