



CANYON HILLS

COMMUNITY CHURCH

Series: Nehemiah

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Real Dedication

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Let's get our Bibles open to Nehemiah, chapter 12. As you're getting to Nehemiah, chapter 12, we're working through this Old Testament book verse by verse. Let me help us look back, just for a minute, to chapters 8 and 9. You don't have to turn there, but chapters 8 and 9 are where the people had come to the place where they acknowledged their sin and rebellion and they repented of it, making peace with God. That was chapters 8 and 9.

They accepted God's judgment and punishment and believed God's punishment on their sin was not only justified, but it was also merciful. They realized that ultimately, they deserved way worse for their rebellion against God, but in God's mercy, he held back, ultimately, everything they deserved.

Last week, we got to chapter 10 and we saw how they responded to God's grace. They identified the five areas of the most grievous rebellion in their lives, and then they committed to be faithful in those areas, to obey God and to trust him for his love and his forgiveness, going forward. That was last week, chapter 10.

Now what follows today in chapter 11 and half of chapter 12 is a long list of the names of families who were chosen to permanently move back into the city, Jerusalem, in which they had just finished putting the protective walls around the city. At this point, everything was temporary.

They weren't building residences yet. The temple was up, the wall was up, and now they would choose people from amongst the nation to move in. The city couldn't handle everybody, but they chose people to move back. It was time to rebuild their lives, living in faithful covenant with God.

There's no need to exegete this chapter-and-a-half of names, but make no mistake about it, church. You need to know this. These names are the very evidence for the historical credibility and reliability of the Bible. Those names are names of people, real people who lived in real time in a real place, and those names serve as evidence that what we are reading here is not just a

good story that a bunch of people got together in a cave and made up. This is stuff that happened, all for a purpose in God's redemptive plan.

Now we are going to begin in chapter 12, verse 27. This is a high point of the whole book. Nehemiah is going to dedicate the wall back to God, and he's going to do that now by organizing a gigantic worship service, beginning with a march around the top of the wall they just built. The whole thing is going to culminate with a crescendo of worship and praise in the temple and in the temple courts.

I was trying to think of what this whole scene might look like. I think it has the feel of the downtown... Do you remember the Seahawks' Super Bowl victory parade? Do you remember that? It was just crazy, just crazy excitement, people packing in, yelling, screaming, clapping, cheering, and crying. They couldn't believe it. That's kind of how I sense this was happening right now, as we get into the middle of chapter 12.

As exciting as chapter 12 is going to be, by way of creating expectation for next week's final message in this book, the whole thing is going to end with a loud *thud*. The whole book is going to conclude abruptly and, honestly, with an unsatisfying ending to what has been an incredible journey of impossible odds.

Now, the reason I tell you that ahead of time is because what I'm amazed about in chapter 13 is that we're still in the story, as we have seen every week. We're still there, and there's something even in how Nehemiah ends his recording of this time in history for us to learn from and apply to our lives, so I pray that you will come next week with that understanding. For now, let's stand for the reading of God's Word. I'm not going to read every verse and every name in here, just because of the sheer amount of verses, but follow along, starting in verse 27.

"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 thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres. And the sons of the singers gathered together from the district surrounding Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites; also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem.

And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall. Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks. One went to the south on the wall to the Dung Gate." We can skip down to verse 35. "...and certain of the priests' sons with trumpets..." They had trumpets. Verse 36:

"...and his relatives...with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before [this choir]. At the Fountain Gate they went up straight before them by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the Water Gate on the east. The other choir of those who gave thanks went to the north, and I

followed them with half of the people, on the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall..."

Now skip down to verse 40. **"So both choirs of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me; and the priests...with trumpets..."** Beginning at the end of verse 42, it says, **"And the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader. And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy... And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away. On that day men were appointed over the storerooms..."** They got put in charge.

Verse 45: **"And they performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did the singers and the gatekeepers, according to the command of David and his son Solomon."** Now I want you to scoot up to chapter 13, verse 1. **"On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people."**

God in heaven, I just praise you for what we have read here, for the victory, the joy, and the celebration. I pray, God, that as we surrender ourselves to the authority and power of your Word, you would use it to change us and teach us. Help us to learn, God, from your people today. In Jesus' name, amen.

That was a lot of Scripture to take in. It's obvious that the spotlight of the whole celebration is shining most brightly on the wall, but I think that would be a huge mistake for us today to put all our focus on what's happening on the wall or for the wall. Yes, the wall is representative of the forgiveness, protection, and provision of God. We even saw, several weeks ago, that this whole book of Nehemiah is pointing toward the gospel.

The whole book is a big arrow, pointing toward God's continuing plan of redemption through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The whole book is doing that for us. It's really about the coming of Jesus, who will make peace and, in our case, has made peace with God for us by paying for our sins and removing our judgment and condemnation so we can be saved from God's coming wrath upon the sins of all mankind. Don't forget. In Christ, we are saved forever and secured by his death and resurrection.

Yet I believe chapter 12 is a portrait of something else. I think what we can see here is a portrait of what real dedication looks like. What does it look like to be all-in with God? I want you to think of that thought in your mind. What does it look like to be all-in with God? Nehemiah is calling the people to rededicate themselves fully, completely, and faithfully to live for God.

This celebration that's going on here in chapter 12 is not something that just kind of accidentally happened. It wasn't some spontaneous movement of people just jumping up and down and running into the streets. No, Nehemiah knows how fickle God's people are, just like us. They had just been through many months of God's incredible intervention.

They finished this wall in record time, against incredible opposition. They have a time where they hear the book read for the first time in 80 or 90 years, and they drop to their knees in

conviction. They repent and rejoice that God did not destroy them off the face of the earth, and they ask for God's forgiveness. The whole thing is just crescendoing. They identify five areas of their life where they knew they were most grievously rebellious, and they said, "We're not going to live like that anymore."

Then they come together here, and I think Nehemiah knows how fast those spiritual highs can wear off. We always call it the *summer-camp high*. He knows that, and so he organizes a service where he's going to call them to go all-in. No turning back, no looking back... Burn the bridges. It's now or never. All those clichés are in the structure of what's happening in the lives of these people.

Church, I think this could be really critical for some of us sitting here today, potentially even soul-saving for any of you who are attempting to live with one foot in the world and one foot in God. I just pray that, providentially, you are here today because God is going to grab you with his holy, loving hands and say, "This is where you are right now. I don't want you *here* anymore; I want you over *here*. I need you moving closer to me."

I hope you sense, this morning, that God is speaking to you, saying, "Here's where you are, but that's not where I want you to stay. I want you closer to me." That's what I believe God wants. That's what I want for you. That's what I want *you* to want for you. So, what does this look like? Let me pull some things out here. Going all-in with God means...

1. *We have to consecrate ourselves with holiness.* Real dedication to God has an ongoing, purifying aspect to it. Dedication to God implies a change in the way we think about our sin and in the way we think about the holiness of God. That has to change. Something in our minds has to click.

Look at verse 30. "**And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people...**" Then, if you look at verse 45, it says, "**And they performed the service of their God and the service of purification...**" That word, *purity*, or *purify*, in the Hebrew, occurs 94 times in the Old Testament alone. That should tell us that that's a word that's very much a big part of God's relationship to you and me. It always involves the idea of cleansing and almost always exclusively applies to moral cleansing, the cleansing of the heart.

To *consecrate* or sanctify something or someone is to set them apart or restore them for the sacred purpose of serving and coming closer to God. *Purification, consecration, sanctification...* Those are all really cool, big, religious words that are all talking about what needs to happen as we come closer and closer to the Lord.

In fact, the whole book of Leviticus is dedicated to this end. The rituals that Scripture spells out in the Old Testament involving consecrating themselves to God involved detailed things like washings, bathings, special clothing, bringing offerings to God, and the sprinkling of the blood of an innocent sacrificed animal upon the offering or their clothing, or even upon themselves. Every step of the consecration or purification process was very graphic, very deliberate, and very humbling, intended to teach that God is uncompromisingly holy and pure, and we are not.

Every step of the way, in Scripture, no one can dare come close to God in their sin. The Bible says, **"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory [purity, righteousness, or perfection] of God..."** We all have sinned. We have all been separated from God by our sin. So, let's just take a minute, really quick, right here, to remember the amazing gift of God's grace and mercy through his Son, Jesus. He made a way for us to come near to him.

Remember 1 Corinthians 6? **"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."** We had to be washed. We had to be sanctified. Hebrews 10:10 says, **"...we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."**

A little further in that same chapter 10, verse 14: **"For by a single offering he has perfected [purified, consecrated, sanctified] for all time those who are being sanctified."** Hebrews 13:12, a little bit further in the same book: **"So Jesus also suffered [was crucified] outside the gate [of Jerusalem] in order to sanctify the people through his own blood."**

Then going back in the same book, the author of Hebrews wants to drive this point home more than any other author in the New Testament. He says, in chapter 10, verse 22, **"...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."**

Real dedication begins when we change our mind regarding our false sense of being good enough the way we are. When that happens in our minds, then we bow the knee before God and we ask Jesus to cleanse us of our sinful hearts with his blood and to clothe us with his righteousness.

Now, in the New Testament, God provides all we need to be consecrated and sanctified before him. By his grace and through our faith, our sins are forgiven and removed and we are positionally consecrated and made perfectly pure and righteous before God. Yet it doesn't stop there. Consecration doesn't stop with faith *in* Jesus. It continues with faithfulness *to* Jesus. Did you hear that? I want you to write that in your notes: "Faith in Jesus," with an arrow pointing toward, "Faithfulness to Jesus."

Second Corinthians 7:1 says, **"Since we have these promises [of the shed blood and sacrifice of Jesus], beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God."** That's our part. Philippians 1 says it this way: **"...let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ..."** I think the Bible message is consistent and clear. *If your faith isn't changing you, then it probably didn't save you.*

Nehemiah is leading the people in a consecration commitment of setting themselves aside for the grand and beautiful privilege of being able to draw near to God. Consecrate with holiness. The question I think we should have rattling in our heads, just for a few minutes, is...*Is there a sin that is keeping me from being all-in with God right now?*

2. *We are moved to celebrate with gladness.* Real dedication to God has a worship aspect to it. If our consecration deals with thinking differently about our sin and God's holiness, then this has to do with our feelings and emotions toward God. Real dedication redirects our source of joy from being of the world to being the God who saves us by his grace and mercy. Let's look at the celebration. I'm going to roll through this really fast.

Look at verse 27. **"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 thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres."** Lots of stuff going on there. In verse 31, it says they **"...appointed two great choirs that gave thanks."**

In verse 36, it says all the priests were celebrating **"...with the musical instruments of David the man of God."** It says, in verse 41, the priests came **"...with trumpets..."** In verse 42, it says, **"And the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader."** In verse 43, it says the women and children rejoiced with great joy, and it could be heard far away.

In verse 46, it says, **"For long ago in the days of David and Asaph there were directors of the singers, and there were songs of praise and thanksgiving to God."** You're getting the picture. The whole scene of dedication is an expression of how happy they were to be in covenant with God. God has made peace with them through their repentance and their commitment to be faithful to obey and trust him again.

Let me just stop here for a minute. Let me just kind of throw in an interruption here. I wonder how many of you sitting here right now need this peace. Listen. True peace in our hearts has to begin with making peace with God, because if it doesn't start there, it's simply a man-made peace, and a man-made peace is typically just a distraction to get us by until the next tribulation or trial blows into our lives. That's not lasting peace. That's not true peace. That's not real peace.

Here we see them celebrating with gladness because they have peace with God. All through Scripture, we see these kinds of celebrations, all pointing toward God's continual, loving promises, his presence, his provision, and his protection. I want you to notice all those ingredients there.

The first one is that they all came together to do this corporately. Don't miss this, church. Going all-in with God means it includes joyfully joining in with the family of God for celebration. It means rejecting the spiritual kind of isolationism. "I love Jesus. I have Jesus. I have my Bible. I don't need the church." That's really sad, because Jesus loves the church. Don't do that.

There were choirs, music, singing, trumpets, and harps. In some places in the Old Testament, it says God even brought smoke into their presence. These celebrations were festive. They were loud. I have to admit to you that celebration doesn't come naturally to me. I've said this before, but you may not know this about me. I am typically a glass-half-empty guy.

Well, that's not true. I'm typically a glass-two-thirds-empty. It's emptier than half. I grew up in New Jersey. That's just what happens to you when you live there. Anybody from New Jersey,

please say amen right here. Anybody? Am I the only one? There we go. Okay. You get it, right? I can see. You're like, "Of course." We need a support group for people who have migrated from New Jersey.

This whole celebrating thing... I'm a little more reserved, a little more half-empty, but this example of the Jewish people here, modeling for us what real dedication to God looks like and feels like, is especially necessary for me to take note of. I admire this, and I admire those of you who continue to grow in corporately celebrating your faith in God.

What I love about God is that all of the feasts, celebrations, and festivals in the Bible were all his idea. They were all his idea! He put them in place. They're all really meant to allow us to celebrate and to remember that he is a good, good Father, and that we are loved by him. That's what this is about.

It's to remember, celebrate, be glad, and not forget that God is good and he loves us. Yes, he is uncompromisingly holy, and he is all-knowing and all-powerful, but don't forget he is also compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness. When you think about it, God has given us every Sunday as a built-in opportunity to corporately celebrate our gladness together.

You know, a huge reason we come together to church is to remember that we're not alone. It's to remember that we're not weird. Well, most of us. We are loved, called, and saved. It's to remember that at some point in our lives, when we had convinced ourselves that we didn't need God, God dropped a giant boulder into our lives. For every one of us, that boulder has a different description.

Maybe that boulder, for some of you, was just overwhelming loneliness, and you realized, "I can't do this without God." For some of you, the boulder was an epic failure in your life. For others, the boulder was a life-changing loss, a shattering loss, maybe of a job, a marriage, a dream, a reputation, or a career.

For some of you, the boulder that got dropped into your life is the sudden realization that everything you grew up hearing about God is true, and you realize, "By God's grace he hasn't given up on me yet." For some of you, the boulder was as simple as a sermon, a book someone gave you, or a tract you found or someone handed to you, and by his grace he opened your eyes and called you to himself.

When we come together we celebrate what God has done. We have so many opportunities and reasons. Luke 10:20 says, **"...rejoice that your names are written in heaven."** Romans 5:3 says to rejoice in your suffering, because God's purpose is to produce Jesus-like endurance, character, and hope in you.

Romans 12:15 says, **"Rejoice with those who rejoice..."** Maybe there are weeks where we come and the level of things we can focus on to rejoice seems to be dwindling, but there are people all around us this morning who are rejoicing up here, and somehow, together, as one of

my favorite preachers just said, we come into this ocean full of people, full of reasons, and together, we just lift our voices and somehow, some way, we all get blessed by that. Rejoice in the Lord always. Something miraculous happens when we gather together.

So, we learn from Nehemiah today, don't we? There's a glorious place for corporate celebration in the dedicated Christian life, not so we can just come and pretend to be happy. That's not what we're doing here. It's so we can redirect our focus and our hearts toward the only true source of joy, happiness, and love.

So, the question is...*Is inconsistent or sporadic worship keeping you from going all-in with God?* Is the conviction that what we do here every Sunday has powerful meaning and place so inconsistent in your life that it's keeping you from going all-in and from moving from where you are with God to where he wants you to be? Jesus said, **"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."**

A few weeks from now, we're going to be celebrating the birth of our Savior on Christmas Eve. In case you weren't paying attention at the beginning of the service, Christmas Eve is a Saturday, and we have three services. Christmas Day is a Sunday, and we have one service that Sunday, at 10:00. All four services are exactly the same. Why am I telling you this? It's because I know you don't listen, you don't read, and you don't pay attention.

The last time this happened was seven years ago. It happens every seven years or so. Everybody came on Sunday morning, after they had just been to church Saturday night, and it was the exact same service. I got up and started preaching the same Christmas message, and y'all looked at me like, "What? What are you doing?" I don't want you to do that. Just pick one of the four, whatever works best for you, and come and celebrate. Then we're going to celebrate and bring our offering, consecrating the mission of the Damascus House even more. Praise God.

3. *We are called to separate with confidence.* Real dedication to God has a kingdom aspect to it. It has a worship aspect, a purity aspect, and a kingdom aspect. If consecration deals with us thinking differently about our sin and God's holiness, if celebration deals with our emotions and feelings toward God's gift and blessings of love, then separation deals with living differently for our God. Look at chapter 13, verses 1-3.

"On that day they read from the Book of Moses in the hearing of the people. And in it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever enter the assembly of God, for they did not meet the people of Israel with bread and water, but hired Balaam against them to curse them—yet our God turned the curse into a blessing. As soon as the people heard the law, they separated from Israel all those of foreign descent."

Just as a sidenote, I love this, because it reminds us that worshiping God is always centered on the truth of God, on the Word of God. They got together on that day. They celebrated. They sang. They had choirs. They had purification, and then they got the Book and they read from it, because every step of our faith in God and worship of God includes the Book. There's no

relationship with God, there's no closeness to God, and there are no claims on God without the centrality of the Word of God. Otherwise, we're just making things up as we go.

The Word of God is the lamp to our feet, keeping us from being tripped up by Satan's traps and temptations. The Word of God is the light to our path, keeping us on the narrow way to eternal life. I guess another question for us to ponder right now is...*Are you here and already beginning to realize you're attempting to live a dedicated Christian life without the Bible?* Are you attempting to live a dedicated Christian life with inches of dust on your Bible? You can't do it, and that's what we're learning.

They got the Book. They could have jumped up and down, had a potluck, high-fived, and had a little dance. They could have done anything and gone home, but they got the Book, and then they read it. Then the background here is that they realize the Ammonites and the Moabites chose to curse God in generations past. They chose to curse God's people instead of helping them during the days of Moses, and God banned those people from ever enjoying his grace with his people.

These Ammonites and Moabites could have lived amongst the Jewish people. By sheer proximity, the Ammonites and Moabites could have experienced what it was like to have God's protection, provision, and presence in their midst, but instead, they chose to curse God. This is a frightening reminder that God will exact his vengeance on everyone and anyone who persecutes his people. Romans 12:19 says to us, **"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"**

The bigger picture of this dedication here is that the people had to separate themselves from those who hated God and his people. Church, sometimes, as followers of Christ, we have to take some hard stands as it relates to the truth and the Book. The Bible isn't advocating for some isolated, Amish-type existence. It doesn't do that anyway. We are called to go into all the world to make disciples, right? Yet going into the world is no excuse for living like the world. That's why 1 John 2 says,

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

I think the application of separation here is more about our identity. It's about who we are and whose we are. Are there certain people in your life who mock Jesus, hate God, and have no regard for you and who you are in relationship to God? Is it possible that there are some friends or coworkers who, by the sheer proximity of them to you, cause you to look and act more like them than like Jesus?

Are there friendships you have that actually keep you from going all-in with God? I think that's the lesson for us. God did that for a reason. They heard the Word, and they had to make a hard choice. "Am I all-in or not?"

I'm going to ask you right now to just bow your heads, quietly. Consecrating with holiness means we know our sin and God's holiness don't fellowship and our unrepentant sin grieves and quenches the purifying work of God's Spirit. Church, going all-in with God means freedom from that bondage today. It means walking away from that sin. It means no more. There's a progressive, growing purity aspect to being all-in.

It also means we make our source of unending joy not just the gifts of God but the gift-giver himself. Worshiping, giving thanks together, celebrating with gladness... Listen. If you are honest today, is it possible that this whole church thing is just kind of optional from time to time? Is it a matter of convenience and not a matter of conviction? Maybe that is what's keeping you from remembering we have a good Father who loves us.

Maybe, today, God has your attention because there's someone in your life who discourages you from picking up your cross every day. It may be that God is saying, "You know what? It's time to limit your friendship, your fellowship, with that person," even if it's for the time being, if they are people who continually curse God and make it difficult for you to be all-in with all your heart.

Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Thy kingdom come and thy will be done on this earth, as it is in heaven. God, we ask today that you would increase our faith and give us courage to trust, to bow down, to surrender to you as our King. God, I pray that today, you will grab us with your holy, divine hands and point us toward a closer relationship with you. Great are you, Lord, and greatly to be praised.