

## "Come and Sing!" Nehemiah 12:27-47

### CCH Sermon (2<sup>nd</sup> Livestream) 29<sup>th</sup> March 2020

V43

- Recently E & I watched this film: Marvellous
  - True story re man w learning disabilities called Neil Baldwin (Toby Jones)
    - Hilarious moments
      - As he supports, then works for Stoke City Football club
      - Helps out at Keele uni
      - Gets to meet all kinds of famous people.
  - Poignant moment where his elderly mother dies, leaving him alone.
    - Decides to join a community choir.
    - Wonderful mix of
      - Ukulele players
      - Retired folks
      - Folks w special needs & their carers
    - All finding solace and comfort in the songs they sing.
  - Like Gareth Malone and his military wives choirs
    - People find music & song can be great outlet
    - When faced with the stresses and challenges of life.
- Here's Nehemiah
  - Man who led people rebuild walls of Jerusalem 444 BC.
  - May sound rather irrelevant to life under the coronavirus lockdown in 2020
    - But incredibly helpful lessons about returning to God
    - Hadn't planned to be in lockdown for end of this series, but actually relevant as we see God's people built up in tough times.
  - Today see N the builder, become N the singer.
    - As he sets up 2 choirs for the people.
    - Key moment cos walls are being prayerfully committed to God
    - A day of real celebration.
      - Called this sermon "Come and Sing!"
      - So look at story with 3 bullet points
      - Then draw out 2 lessons.
- Now reading this section in our situation quite difficult.
  - We are not nec. rejoicing.
  - I hope there are some things to be grateful for.
  - But we may be anxious, fearful.
  - We're at start of book (vulnerability) rather than end (security)
  - So need to do a bit of work to transport ourselves and get into their shoes.
  - But can you feel the celebration for them. At last walls complete.

Let's think first about **DEDICATION**

- V27.
- Amazing moment. Been building up to this.
  - People dedicate books to others.
  - You might dedicate a song to the NHS at the moment.
- They dedicate walls to God.
- Not enough for walls to be complete
  - Protection
  - Separation (so they can be shinningly different)
- They want to thank God and acknowledge him, and commit walls to HIM.
- They are a people that have learned that even material things are spiritual things.
- ➡ Each meal, give thanks- gift from him
  - (perhaps feel that more time when never felt less in control of our food).
- Next there's **CELEBRATION**
  - This is the real emphasis of the chapter.
  - V28-29.
  - Villages- Cool!
  - And in next 3 paragraphs we see the choirs.
  - V31 2 large choirs assigned to give thanks.
  - And they do this pincer movement both semicircles of city walls-
    - Ezra leading one v36
    - Nehemiah at the back of the other v38
  - It's a kind of cross between Glastonbury, Notting Hill Carnival & Songs of Praise!
  - And it culminates in the Temple v40
  - V43 is a good summary.
  - Do you get the sense of celebration.
- I'm reminded of those scenes of celebration and dancing in the street after WW2.
- ➡ Won't we celebrate when this is all over.
  - Church bells will ring,
  - we've already had the suggestion in our street whatsapp of a street party.
- Final thing to note, might have missed v30 is **PURIFICATION**
  - There's a cleaning operation going on.
  - V30
  - Not that the stones or the people were physically dirty
    - Not covered with building dust from their work.
  - Rather that they are spiritually dirty.
    - The people are very conscious that they need cleansing from their sin.
    - You see all we do is tainted by selfishness.
- ➡ You may have greater experience of that lately. Ugly selfishness that creeps in.
  - When life is stressed, and normality is in short supply, selfishness kicks in
  - Lovely prayer shared by one of our congregation this week *"I get so self absorbed sometimes. Open my eyes to the needs of people around me"*
  - Every activity:
    - Our motives, thoughts, words,
    - Like people in Jerusalem needs purifying, starting with religious leaders.
- Let's move to 2 lessons I'd like us to draw out.

## 1) PUT YOUR EMOTIONS TO SONG.

- ▲ Girls watching animation of Swiss Family Robinson.
  - Moment where little Becca on paddlesteamer from Bern leaving Switzerland.
  - She's sad as she considers friends and loved ones left behind, may not see again
  - She breaks into a mournful lullaby
    - Very natural, quite moving.
- Yes we are in a different place emotionally from them- joy. But perhaps we can learn.
  - There's a natural overflow of what they are feeling which they take into song.
  - Sometimes spontaneous and individual, sometimes here planned and corporate.
- Bible full of Songs and Poetry which gives expression to our emotions.
  - Psalms
  - Lamentations
- So put your emotions to song!
- ▲ Lovely to have Johnny's song. "Faith not Fear".
  - You may be more of a poetry or a painting person, but God has made us creative in his image, and the arts can give us an outlet to how we are feeling.
  - Even those who aren't musical can still sing.
- Perhaps we are in a time of **lament** and desperation rather than rejoicing yet
  - (like Ps 137
  - By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept,
  - how can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land"
- Yet I hope there will be time to sing songs of Joy.
- And the Christian can still rejoice.
  - Joy is not the same as happiness.
  - You can have joy in your heart even when don't have smile on your face
  - Deeper thing to draw up from well of your heart.
  - Rejoice in the Lord Always. Yes even in Coronavirus.
    - Cos there will be things to give thanks for in wartime too.
      - Care of loved ones
      - Simple blessings in life
  - And for the Christian, we are
  - Keith and Kristyn Getty address this.
    - Kindly waived all royalties & normal copyright rights so livestream songs.
    - Written this excellent book "Sing"- how worship transforms your life, family and church.
      - we are **Created to Sing**- cos in image of God who sings over ppl.
      - We are **commanded** to sing- 50 direct commands in bible (even stone deaf!)
      - And we are **compelled** to sing.
        - As Christians we know that we are loved.
        - We know that the more serious virus of sin taken by Christ.
        - We know that we have hope of heaven.
          - (and that's the second lesson to take away)
  - - [As we get to our final song in a minute, sing loudly, so people in street hear like in v43].

## 2) MARVEL AT THE CITY

- You get the sense that the people are rejoicing in the walls as they walk around.
  - They don't just have a praise service in the Temple.
  - They revisit the walls and rejoice in them!
- This city is still there in Israel.
  - Can go and see the walls.
  - Archaeologists have found sections of the walls Neh and team built.
    - Though walls
  - But this city points to another city.
- One which Heb 11 says is a city whose architect and builder is God.
  - **Heavenly** City
  - You can read in Revelation 21 & 22 (last 2 chapters of Bible) of the City
    - A city of beauty where
      - Beautiful and precious stones adorn the foundations
      - All God's people are there.
      - There's no more crying or mourning or pain
      - And best of all
    - (in Neh 12 4 times King David mentioned, perhaps cos didn't have a king)
      - But best thing about heaven is Jesus will be there.
        - Do you know him?
        - The King of Love?
- ▲ A friend of mine is pastor of a small London church.
  - He's my age last year discovered a cancerous growth in his jaw.
    - He was off work at church for 6 months.
  - His wife is head of infection control at a large London hospital
  - I've put his video as a link on the dig deeper sheet.
    - It includes teaching from Rev 21.
  - I spoke to him a couple of weeks ago.
    - It's "sharpened my eschatology"
    - = I'm thinking more about heaven.
- This passage encourages us to marvel at the heavenly city.
- Ps 48 encourages us spiritually to do what they did and take a walk.
  - Even while cooped up alone in flat, you can visit heaven in your mind.
  - If you are a Christian, think often about heaven.
  - Sing often about heaven.
- And if you are not, perhaps you are tuning in first time (You are welcome!).
  - Intrigued interested.
  - Yes as Christians we get down about Coronavirus.
    - But it doesn't define us, doesn't stop us,
    - Because we have a hope beyond sickness and even death.
  - We have a King who has died for our sins, and risen to give life.
    - Nothing can separate us from his love.
    - If everything is lost, even life. Nothing is lost, because Jesus is ours.

**PRAYERS- join in with first 2.**

1) Keep us, good Lord,  
under the shadow of your mercy  
in this time of uncertainty and distress.  
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,  
and lift up all who are brought low;  
that we may rejoice in your comfort  
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love  
in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Amen.**

**Psalm 48**

Walk about Zion, go round her,  
count her towers,  
<sup>13</sup>consider well her ramparts,  
view her citadels,  
that you may tell of them  
to the next generation.  
<sup>14</sup>For this God is our God for ever and ever;  
he will be our guide even to the end.

2) Lord Jesus Christ,  
you taught us to love our  
neighbour,  
and to care for those in need  
as if we were caring for you.  
In this time of anxiety, give us  
strength  
to comfort the fearful,  
to tend the sick,  
and to assure the isolated  
of *our* love, and *your* love,  
for your name's sake.

**Amen.**

- Thank you that you are our God for ever and ever.
  - Thank you that you have promised to be our guide.
  - Help us to be filled with faith not fear.
  - Thank you for the heavenly city we can look forward to.
  - During this time increase in us a sense of longing for heaven, our true home.
- We pray for those working on front lines in NHS, police, providing food, delivering necessities
  - Please keep them safe, and may they be given strength and perseverance.
- Pray for those in authority making decisions that you would give them wisdom
- We pray for those known to us who are feeling lonely, that you would make yourself known to them by your Spirit.
- Help us to share the good news with others at this time, being good neighbours and sharing your love in word and deed.

Amen.

**Lord's Prayer**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.