

## **Sermon Series Nehemiah – Neh.11-12: Give Yourself to God**

(Regula A. Brandle, St. Paul's, Nov.8/2009)

Prayer.

I hope you enjoyed hearing all the names that are recorded for us in the book of Nehemiah, chapter 11 and 12?

Do you know why they are there? .....**lest we forget!!**

I thought God has a great sense of humour in putting it all together as it is for today, with the Remembrance Day liturgy and the reading from Nehemiah 11 and 12.

You see, as we remember all the fallen soldiers in the past, so that we can continue to honour their sacrifice for our country, so did Nehemiah want to make sure that we don't forget the people who sacrificed to move from the more secure countryside to the more dangerous capitol city of Jerusalem!

It was also a sign of appreciation and honour for each individual who contributed to the well-being of the community/nation.

I don't think it comes naturally to us to remember and acknowledge the accomplishments of the past, but today's Scripture passage from Nehemiah is a reminder for us not to forget that we are influenced by our past.

And that is true not only on an international, national and local level, but also on a family and personal level!

Well, today we are looking at chapter 11 and 12 in the book of Nehemiah. For those of you who are visiting, or have not been able to be with us for the past few weeks..... we are getting towards the end of a sermon series on the book of Nehemiah.

For everyone's sake, I would like to briefly review what has happened so far until now. It is important to see the big picture and not just look at the details in each chapter;

Chapters 1 to 6 were about the rebuilding of the damaged wall of Jerusalem, under Nehemiah's very able and godly leadership.

Then in chapter 7, verse 4 we hear that the Jerusalem was sparsely populated. So, keep that comment in your mind. But the rest of chapter 7 is a list of all the people that returned from captivity in Babylon.

If you'd like....these first 7 chapters were about the renovation and restoration of the outward structures.

Then, chapters 8, 9 and 10 were about the community listening to God's law. And, consequently, confessing their straying away from God's ways and a new commitment to follow God's commandments and regulations.

Again, if you'd like....chapters 8-10 are really about the inner renovation and restoration of the people.

It isn't difficult to get the point that when God initiates transformation, it is going to be with every aspect of life, outward and inward!

If you have forgotten most of what has been said so far in this sermon series, I do hope you will remember this:

Renovation, transformation and restoration in our lives includes both the outward and the inward parts. It is to be all-inclusive! ☺

And now we come to chapters 11 and 12 and the account of re-populating the city of Jerusalem and the dedication service for the finished city wall.

I will not have the time to go into much details, but the point that I think the Lord is making for us in these 2 chapters is this: "Give yourself to God!".

Let me explain with the three main aspects that are shown in these two chapters:

### **1. The re-populating of Jerusalem = strengthening of the community**

(vv. 11:1ff.)

Remember from chapter 7, verse 4 that the city was sparsely populated?

A few gems from here:

They cast lots in order to determine who was to live in the city. Casting lots was understood of discerning God's will.

We don't use that method anymore, since we have received the Holy Spirit who will tell us, if we just dare to listen to His voice.

Living on the countryside was safer than living in the capital city (the more likely place of attack by enemies), so moving to the city was a real sacrifice and a more dangerous thing to do than remaining in the surrounding towns.

Also, they chose 10% of the entire population of Israel to come and live in the city.

Nehemiah decided to tithe the people, as the people had promised to tithe their produce (10:37)!

Please take note that the focus and goal here was on the well-being of the community, of the nation....not so much on the individual!

This is indeed a strange thought for us in our hyper-individualistic society.

But I cannot help but think how the immunization against the H1N1 virus would have gone much smoother and with less convincing work to do for the officials, if it had happened in Israel in Nehemiah's time!

Here, it seems, that everyone has their own opinion and knows better.....but the people in Israel seem to have had a much better sense of the importance of community and nation!

A weak city would have meant a weak nation, thus the importance of re-populating the capital.

Question for you and me: Do you ask the Lord of where to live, or do you just do what pleases you?

What work, life and faith community has the Lord called you into?

The invitation is “Give yourself to God” wherever he has planted you!

## **2. The dedication service for the wall = emphasis on worship**

(vv. 12:27ff.)

This dedication service was really about giving all the thanks and the praise and glory to God, acknowledging that the building of the walls was accomplished because of God’s help.

The enemies had said (4:3) that a fox could knock down these walls, but here the people were marching on it.....what a witness of God’s power and the reality of faith to the seen and unseen world!!

And we are given a neat picture in 12:40ff showing that worship was not just about a few professionals doing it in front of an audience, but everyone joining and rejoicing in worship.

True Worship is giving all the glory and honour to God. And that is about giving yourself to God!

Question for you and me: Do you give praise and glory to God where it is due? Do you emphasize the importance of praise and worship individually and corporately?

## **3. Bringing the tithes to the Lord = support for the mission**

(vv. 12:44ff)

When believers have a godly ministry that exalts the Lord and obeys his word, they are only too glad to bring their tithes and offerings to support it.

Would you agree?

The people brought their tithes and offerings, not only because it was the commandment of God, but also because they were pleased with the ministry of the Levites and priests (v.44)

One of the results of God’s inward and outward renovation in and among people is financial generosity of supporting the work that God wants to accomplish with and through us.

It is just one more aspect of “Giving yourself to God.”

We learned about the physical sacrifice of moving into the city in order to strengthen the community, we heard of the spiritual sacrifice of giving glory and praise to God for what he had done, and we heard of the spiritual sacrifice of financial generosity.

The wall was finished, the people had repented from their departure from God's ways, and yet, following the Lord day in and day out is an ongoing inward renovation that never stops when you have decided to follow Jesus!

Back to Israel in Nehemiah's day.....

at the end of chapter 12 it sounds like Israel lived ever happily ever after the restoration of the walls of Jerusalem and after the restoration of their commitment to follow the Lord.....

But please come back next week to hear the ending of the book of Nehemiah and whether that was the case or not!

Amen.