"The People Sing"

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Preacher: Dr. Michael Staton

[0:00] Well, open with me, if you would, to Nehemiah 11.

Nehemiah 11. Today, between morning and evening service, Marce and I started taking our Christmas decorations downmumbles in the attic and bringing them to set up.
And the first several trips, I was singing holly jolly Christmas and let's have a Merry Christmas and whatever and bounding up the stairs around trip number 23 like an old grasshopper legs just barely making it up the stairs. I told Marcy this was so much easier when we had teenage boys at home we could force to help us.
The forced labor of the teenage son was a wonderful thing. Those days are gone and so I'm a little tired. If I look injured it's just from decorating. Don't worry about it. I should be just fine. Nehemiah 11 and 12 the people sing. We're going to do something at the end of the service that may be neat. It may be corny and it may be awful but it will be memorable.
So nobody leaves. All right? Nobody leaves. A little background of what's going on as we come to Nehemiah 11 and 12. In chapter 7 turn back with me and just let me remind you of a there is a little statement tucked away in chapter 7 that becomes very important in chapters 11 and 13. Chapter 7 verse 4 the city was wide and large but the people within it were few and no houses had been rebuilt.
[1:56] A lot of the work has been done. The city walls have been finished. The problem is that throughout the large number of years people had moved away and those people hadn't moved back and now you've got this significant section of the city. The work's been completed but there's no people living there. Not that there's not any but there's very few. Nehemiah knows that they need more people to move in.

Walls have been rebuilt. Gates have been hung. Now they need the people to move in. Chapters 11 and 12 help us to see what takes place once that has been finished. We're taking chapters 11 and 12 together and it is a lot of information but if you look at chapter 11 what you'll see is another just very long list of names. Now that's not unimportant but we take it together chapters 11 and 12 to see what these names represent. So follow along with me and I just want to kind of take you step by step through what's happening here in chapters 11 and 12 and show you the end result and why that matters for us. 2026 the people of God. Chapter 11 verses 1 and 2 make note that there's a problem. There's a problem. There's a problem. Chapter 11 verse 1. Now the leaders of the people lived in
Jerusalem and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten. One out of ten to live in Jerusalem the holy city while nine out of ten remained in the other towns and the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem. So what's taking place is you've got some of the leaders who live inside the town here but most of the people live outside of it. That's the problem. They need people to move into the town. The city of Jerusalem needs more people to live there. The temple needs more servants. The people as a whole need to consecrate themselves. And it says that the leaders were in Jerusalem but the rest of the people were not. And so they're going to cast lots and one out of ten is going to move into Jerusalem the holy city. A little trivia question just to tuck away for you next time you're playing Bible trivia. This is the first time in the Bible that Jerusalem's referred to as the holy city. It's often referred to that way. You probably have heard songs that refer to it as such and this is the first time we see that designation. And so there is a lottery of sorts in verse one and they're going to cast lots and one out of ten ten percent of the people those who are selected are going to move into the city. Verse two says and the people blessed all the men who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem. So you've got ten percent of the people by lots who have been selected and chosen to move into the city and then you've got other people who voluntarily say will move into the city. And the people seeing the enthusiasm and the

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willingness for people to move into the city it says they blessed them. It's a reminder that it's a good thing to honor those who are willing to sacrifice for the good of others. Now think about that with our own church. We don't cast lots to see who does what ministry or who has to serve where, but there are plenty of people in our church who voluntarily do non-glamorous ministry. And they deserve our honor and they deserve our deepest respect.
In fact, would you just let your mind for just a minute, let your mind race for a moment. Whether it be individual names or individual responsibilities that come to mind, just think for a moment. What are some of the tasks in our church that not a lot of people volunteer to do, but yet they do it for the good of the whole and deserve our blessing, deserve our respect, deserve our honor as they serve. I've got a lot of things that come to mind as I think about that.
[6:52] There are plenty in our church who serve in a way that are up front and public, and those people work hard too. Those who teach adult Sunday school classes and labor in that way, they deserve our honor and respect for sure. But if you teach an adult Sunday school class, you're probably more likely to have some people express appreciation than other jobs.

Those who lead music or preach, work hard, labor hard to do it, but are probably more likely to be receiving encouragement. But other responsibilities, other roles often serve without much encouragement at all. I'm thinking of those who maybe are teaching preschoolers, teaching these little boys and girls who really aren't able yet to say thank you, who don't really yet understand what that teacher is doing to show and express love to them. And so, if you're a parent of a preschooler, let me encourage you to voice your thanks. Bless those who take time to teach your children. I think of those who teach our youth. And our teenagers are certainly physically capable of being grateful. Emotionally, I don't know, maybe. Depends on the student. Depends on the day. Depends on the week. But I do want to say, moms and dads, if you've got teenagers, teach and train your teenagers to be grateful for those who serve them, for those who take time to minister to them. Now, think about those who help us by cleaning our church, by opening up doors on a Sunday morning, by those who stay late to clean up, by those who do things after hours. The things that we just assume will always be done, and we don't often or ever see them being done, but all benefit because they are faithfully done. I think about the people who faithfully give in our church. Just secret giving, silent giving, faithful giving, no fanfare, no strings attached.
Just week after week, month after month, love the Lord, honor the Lord, believe in what we're doing, and help us do what God has called us to do.
Now, think about those who meet with people who are hurting. Those who volunteer their time to sit down with an open Bible and encourage those who are hurting.
Encourage those who are struggling in sin, and just continually point them to Scripture, asking the Holy Spirit to provide the help that they need. We could go on and on and on, and I'm sure you've got other names, faces, or responsibilities in our church that come to mind. And one of the things I appreciate in Nehemiah 11 are these people who just said, we'll do it. We'll do what few people want to do. We'll do what few people are willing to do. We'll do what most people right now aren't ready to do. We'll do it for the good of the people, and for the good of what God has called us to do.
Verse 2, and the people blessed them who willingly offered to live in Jerusalem. We don't want to volunteer to serve in order for other people to bless us. We don't want to be faithful so that other people would show us honor. That can't be our motive for doing it, but it is a biblical thing to show honor and appreciation and blessing to those who faithfully serve.
[10:45] The people blessed them. We've got some people this year who are teaching Sunday school for the first time ever, and I admire them.

We've got other people who are teaching Sunday school for about the fifth decade of their life, and I admire them. And together, those who are brand new doing it and those who have done it longer than I've been alive, together, shoulder to shoulder, volunteering to say, we'll do our part.
Some of you have served in the same place of ministry year after year after year, and your faithfulness is so appreciated. Others of you, on purpose, kind of bounce around in different ministries, and you serve here for a couple of years, and you serve here for a couple of years, and you just kind of are able to get exposed to all different kinds of ministries, and that's a wonderful, wonderful thing.
Some of you have been on your post Sunday after Sunday at your same door, greeting people, welcoming people, loving people, same door, year after year. And if you're ever not there, people who come through think something's happened. They've missed the rapture or something.

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Because you're so faithful, it would be shocking to them if you're not there. And we honor you and bless you for your faithfulness. Others of you show up at all different kinds of places.
[12:13] People don't know what you're going to do next. And we thank you for your creativity and your willingness to serve in all different kinds of ways. It's a simple statement. It's a simple verse.

But there were those who willingly offered to serve. Willingly offered to go. But we've not yet had to cast lots to see who's teaching preschoolers and children.
Though, Kathy, maybe that's not a bad idea one day. Maybe we ought to... It's a biblical thing. We'll just bring some dice and one out of ten of you have to go and teach. We've not had to do that because people willingly, voluntarily serve and give.
And we thank you for that. We appreciate your faithfulness. We honor your ministry. And I do want to encourage you as a church to express your honor to those who serve.
Don't assume that they're appreciated. Let them know that they are. All the more when you can find someone to thank and bless that otherwise might be overlooked, overshadowed.
[13:24] But you see their faithfulness and bless them for it. The problem is they need people to live in the city. The second thing we see are the people.

This is chapter 11, verse 3 to chapter 12, verse 26. If you just kind of let your eyes scan 11, 3 down to 12, 26, it's another long list of names.
Nehemiah is a big fan of names. These are primarily faceless people, meaning they're unknown to us. Most of these names aren't names that we would recognize or know anything about, but they are meaningful to God.
Chapter 3, we saw a long list of names of those who helped to build the wall. Chapter 10, a long list of names of those who signed the document to be faithful. Chapters 11 and 12, a long list of people who moved to Jerusalem.
The individuals mattered to the people and it mattered to God. And just a reminder that that's who our church is. That's what we are.
[14:31] We're a bunch of individual people who form a family together. People matter. Individuals matter.

Now, let's take you on a quick jet tour here of how these names are organized and why they are listed where they are. Verses 11 to 35, it mentions the leaders.
I'll just kind of show you how it happens so you can kind of understand the flow here. Verses 4 to 6, it mentions those who settled there from Judah. Verses 7 to 9, from Benjamin.
Verses 10 to 14, it lists the priests. 15 to 18, lists the Levites. Verse 19, it lists the gatekeepers. It mentions the men of valor.
Those who are courageous and available for military service. If you look at verse 6 of chapter 11, all the sons of Perez who lived in Jerusalem were 468 valiant men.
[15:32] Chapter 11, verse 14, and their brothers, mighty men of valor. There were men that had to be ready to serve, that were ready to put their life on the line. They needed people to protect them.

Verses 25 to 36 moves away from Jerusalem into the countryside. We see the listing of places where Judah and Benjamin settled. When you go to chapter 12, verses 1 to 26, you see the priests and Levites who are mentioned there.
Yet another long list of names of priests and Levites. Going back 100 years to when Zerubbabel first led the group until the present day.
Chapter 12, 1 and 9, the priestly families and Levites at the time of Zerubbabel. Verses 10 and 11, list of the high priest. Verses 12 to 21, another list of priests.
Verses 24 to 26, list of the Levites. Verses 24 to 26, list of priests. And you've got this long list of names and long list of people. And most of these names in here are not names we would recognize or know anything about.
[16:46] But they were people who mattered. I think about that sometimes. I keep in my, I've got a drawer where I've got all of our old church directories.

And you see names and faces. And you go to the back and you can see a listing of all the church members there. And some of those names I know. And some of those names I recognize from people who went here for a long time or have families here.
But so many of those names are faceless names to me. People from 30 years ago or 40 years ago that I don't know, that I never met. But they were a part of the work of God here.

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Individuals matter. People matter. Now I just want to encourage you to never forget that in your life and in your family and in your ministry, that people matter.
Whether the church runs 15 or 1,500 or 5,000, every church is made up of people, of individuals. And people matter.
[17:56] It flows this way. There's a problem. You need people to move back in the city. There's a listing of all the people. And then at the end of chapter 12, it turns to the third movement.

And that is describing the praise that takes place among the people of God. And here, I want us to spend some more detailed time looking at this. 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.
There's a sense of joy here. They're going to dedicate the wall. They're going to dedicate to the Lord what He has allowed them to accomplish. And as they worship, they're going to worship with gladness.
It's an important instructive word for us that as the people of God worship, yes, there should be reverence and fear. Hebrews 12 tells us, yes, we should approach the house of God carefully, as the Bible reminds us to do.
[19:01] But there should also be a sense of gladness among the people of God. Seriousness does not need to negate gladness. And gladness does not need to cancel out sobriety in how we worship.

There is to be a sense of joyful sobriety as we worship. A sense of serious joy. Gladness as we sing and proclaim the goodness and faithfulness of God.
But a sense of reverence and awe as we remind ourselves that the God we are singing to is the God who is the creator of all things. And so as they come to worship, they celebrate and they do so with gladness.
They also, verse 27, it says, they do so with thanksgiving. They are joyful and they are thankful. These two things go together.
The best way to be joyful is to often speak of what you are thankful for. People who often recite what they are thankful for.
[20:07] People who live with joy. That doesn't mean you have to go around and tell everybody every day what you're thankful for, though that's fine if you want to do that. But at least in your own heart to the Lord, take time to recite what you're thankful for.

You guys, you know the old hymn, Count Your Blessings. Name them one by one. Count Your Blessings. See what God has done. The verse says, it will, what?
Surprise you. Why does it surprise you? Well, because we so often forget His blessings. And so we need to stop and with thanksgiving, remind ourselves of what the Lord has done for us.
Tell the Lord your love and appreciation, your thanksgiving for what He has done for you. Among your family, recite the things that you are thankful for that God has done.
Tell your friends and those you work with, recount to them the ways the Lord has blessed you, not in a way that makes them envious of you, in a way that makes them amazed at the faithfulness of God.
[21:22] The hymn that we sung earlier is the heart that should be the fount from which our joy comes from. Great is Thy faithfulness, O God, my Father.

When we think of the faithfulness of God and we tell others how God has been faithful to us, we do so in a way not that makes them impressed with us, but in a way that makes them want to know more about who God is.
In a way that makes them more stunned by the power of God and the mercy of God and the grace of God. And so they gather to give dedication to the Lord and they do so with joy and they do so with thanksgiving.
Look at verse 27. And they do so with singing. The end of verse 27 says, and they do it with thanksgiving and with singing, with cymbals and harps and lyres.
We often say this, but it needs to be said that the people of God have always been a thankful people and the people of God have always been a singing people. There's something good in the heart and the mind of God when His people sing.
[22:36] He didn't have to make us a singing people, but in His wisdom and sovereignty, He's called for His people to express their love and devotion to Him in song.

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And we ought to take that seriously. This is something the people of God have always done. There's joy. There's thanksgiving. There's singing.
There's a time of purification. Verse 30, And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall. And then there's choirs.
Verse 31, Then I brought up the leaders of Judah up unto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks.
So He takes the people and He divides them in half. And He says, We're going to have one group of you here, and you're going to go south, and one group of you here, and you're going to go north, and we're going to have two choirs, and we're just going to sing together as we look at each other and remind ourselves that we are the people of God, the individuals matter, the names matter, the people matter, and what we have in common is together we sing about the God who has sustained us.
[23:52] So Ezra takes choir one, Nehemiah takes choir two, and the people are reminded that the individuals matter, and they lift their voices to remind themselves that God is worthy of their praise.

Now practically speaking in our day, what a lot of people tend to do is they say, they ask irrelevant questions like, do I have to sing if I don't have a good voice?
It's an irrelevant question. You have the voice God gave you. And he wants his people to sing. It doesn't mean everybody needs a microphone.
Not every voice needs amplified, but every voice needs to participate. It's clear, Old Testament and New, God's people are a singing people.
That's simple to see. And if you say, but I need a better voice to sing, if that were true, God would have given you a better voice.
[25:07] The people sing. The question is not, the question is not, do I have a voice to sing? The question is, do I have a song to sing?

And if you are one who remembers the faithfulness of God, you will never be short on a song to sing. The question is not, do you have a voice?
It's do you have a song? And everybody who is walking with the Lord has a song to sing. Let me take you back to the hymn we sang a moment ago comes straight from Lamentations 3. And in Lamentations 3, you know it very well.
It says, your mercies are new. How often? Every morning. New morning, new mercies.
And if every morning there are new mercies, then every day there is something fresh to be thankful for. Then if there's something to be thankful for, there's a song we have to sing.
[26:13] I want to encourage you, whether you are somebody who loves to sing and you sing quickly and loudly and joyfully, or you're someone who sings quietly, or you're someone who maybe doesn't even sing that much and you kind of sit back and say, that's not really my thing.

I want to encourage you, lead out by example in having a song to sing and lifting your voice to the Lord. People in churches and congregations that sing are inspirational and they're contagious.
The church needs people to sing and frankly, and just in a simple pragmatic way, we need some people that sing loud. Because not everybody is comfortable singing and not everybody sings with confidence, but you get behind someone who sings loud, you'll sing loud too because they'll cover up your mistakes.
So those of you, particularly those of you who can sing on key, sing loud. So those of us who don't sing on key, don't get exposed.
But let your family know that it's normal for the people of God to sing. Let your children know it's normal to sing.
[27:35] And it's not just about you and your family, particularly the men in our church. When we sing as a congregation, sing! And let the young people of our church know it's good and fitting and right and normal for the men of God to stand up and to lead the way in singing.

Let it be a part of your life and a part of our worship and just a normal part of our understanding of the people of God that we've been given a voice to sing and if His mercies are new every morning, we've been given a song to sing.
So let's use our voice to declare that song. Some of you may remember the old hymn, I have a song I love to sing since I, what?
Remember it? Have been redeemed. I have a song I love to sing since I have been redeemed. A song of my Savior, Christ and King, since I have been redeemed.

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If you've been redeemed, you have a song to sing. Since I have been redeemed, I will glory in His name. Since I have been redeemed, I will glory in my Savior's name.
[28:56] Great, great old hymn that reminds us the song we have to sing is not tied to how strong our voice is. It's tied to how faithful our God has always been to us.

The problem is they need people to move in. The people are listed. The praise is offered. And at the very end of chapter 12, verses 44 to 47, it lists a fourth thing.
It's the portions. It lists the offerings for the priests and the Levites. It then, in verse 45 and 46, lists the offering of themselves.
And then in verses 47, in verse 47, it lists the offerings for the leaders. Look at verse 47, all of Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah gave the daily portions for the singers and the gatekeepers, and they set apart that which was for the Levites, and the Levites set apart that which were the sons of Aaron.
The people were giving to ensure that the temple was supported, that the workers had what they need, and that the worship of God was provided for.
[30:07] They were offering their resources. They were offering themselves. And it makes a list of how they did that.

A few implications for us from chapters 11 and 12 that I think are worth knowing. Our worship should be filled with happiness. Our worship should be filled with happiness.
That ought to describe who we are. But it's a serious happiness. It's a happiness that's aware of the cross.
It's a happiness that's aware of our sin. It's a happiness that's aware of the sacrifice of Jesus. So it's not light. It's not trivial. It's not silly.
It's genuine joy and genuine gladness. But it's a serious gladness that describes the people of God.
A second thing, that we must be ready to sacrifice and be ready to be dedicated to service.
[31:11] This has been an ongoing thing in Nehemiah as the people were rebuilding the wall. And you'll remember a few weeks ago when I put up the map on the wall and the chapter just walked us through counterclockwise how each family shoulder to shoulder did their work right next to the other family.

And that just reminds us that we need to be ready to serve. Chapter 11, people voluntarily, willingly said, we'll go. We'll move. We'll do this.
And we need to be quick to serve. Here's another lesson. God blesses ordinary people who consistently seek first His kingdom.
God blesses ordinary people who consistently seek first His kingdom. Here's another.
Our dedication is proven best not by obedience on heroic or festive days, but by diligence on ordinary days.
[32:16] Our dedication is proven best by just faithful, regular obedience. I love Easter Sunday.

I love when everybody's here. I love when the church is full. I love when there's people everywhere. I love it. I look forward to Easter Sunday every year. But I'm a little crazy this way.
If I had to pick and I could only pick one, Easter or the week after Easter, I'd pick the week after Easter every year. The week after Easter, Easter, it's kind of hard for people to get motivated. Easter, everybody's excited, everybody's focused, everybody's there early, everybody's dressed up. You've got special events usually for churches on Good Friday and our church we do sunrise service and in every church you go to it's full, the music's full and the preaching's been well thought out and all these things and the week after Easter to me is always a great test for my heart.
will I work as hard the week after Easter as Easter Sunday? Will our staff, will our leaders, will our teachers, will our volunteers, will we care just as much that week after Easter, the non-heroic Sunday?
[33:37] Will we be as faithful in the ordinary day? I'm so crazy. One of my favorite Sundays to preach every year, I never know when it's coming.

I love a Sunday morning when it's pouring down rain. Statistics tell you rain will cut church attendance by 20% right away. And if it's just a little bit of water and that's going to keep us home, that might reveal something of our heart.
If the preacher can't preach with passion and joy because it's not high attendance day, there's something wrong with the focus and direction there. It's a good test of my heart to preach on a good rainy Sunday.

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You give me a holiday weekend and rain together, I'm on cloud nine. There may be 14 of us at church. It's a good test for my soul.
It's a good test for yours as well. Will you be faithful when only God is watching? Will you be faithful on the non-heroic days? Will you be faithful even if nobody else affirms you?
[34:48] Will you be faithful if only God sees and only God knows what you're doing? And then one last one.

The more we take time to remember God's faithfulness, the more joyful we'll be. The more we take time to remember God's faithfulness, the more joyful we will be.
I love instruments. I'm in awe of people who play instruments well. I love people with great voices. I'm in awe that God would give people, obviously not everybody, but a few of you, great voices.
I didn't win that lottery. But some of you did. I love it. But if I could choose to hear a congregation full of common people sing with all their heart of the glory of God, or listen to the most talented person in the world by themselves, I'll take the congregation every single time.
And there is something that just stirs the soul of the people of God when just the common people of God declare the faithfulness of who He is.
[36:25] It really is the joy of the people of God to be a singing people. Before we close, look back again at verse 12.

Go back to verse 27. Verse 31.
I appointed two great choirs that gave thanks. One went to the south on the wall. And the other, verse 38, the other choir of those who gave thanks went to the north.
He says, I followed them with half the people on the wall. And so, what you've got is one choir with Ezra that goes one direction and one choir with Nehemiah that goes the other direction.
And according to verse 42, it says, at the very end of verse 42, and the singers sang with Jezrehiah as their leader. And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced for God had made them rejoice with great joy and the women and children also rejoiced.
[38:18] And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away. He said, I appointed two choirs. and we went around the wall and we lifted our voices to God and the sound rang out.

And we were reminded of two things. The individual people that make up the people of God matter and we have a song to sing because God has been faithful.
Amen? Amen.

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