

Good evening. It's wonderful to be together tonight as we look together in God's word and the book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah chapter 12. I'm gonna try to move this mic slightly. The word of our God. Open your Bibles, if you would, to Nehemiah chapter 12, starting at verse 27 through the end of the chapter. And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, they sought the Levites and 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 Netohathetites, also from Beth-Gilgal and from the region of Geba and Asmaeth. 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 unto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks. One went to the south, and the wall to the dung gate. And after them went Hoshaziah, and half of the leaders of Judah, and Azariah, Ezra, Meshulam. Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, and certain of the priest's sons with trumpets, Zechariah, son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattathiah, son of Micaiah, son of Zachor, son of Asaph, and his relatives, Shemaiah, Azariel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Methanel, Judah, and Hanai. With the musical instruments of David, the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them. 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 and above the gate of Ephraim and by the gate of Yeshama and by the fish gate and the tower of Hanel and the tower of the hundred to the sheep gate, and they came to a halt at the gate of the guard. 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 priest, Eliakim, Masaiah, Menaiah, Micaiah, El Aya, Zachariah, Hanana Aya, with the trumpets, and Massa Aya, Shema Aya, Eleazar, Uzi, Jehovahan, Mikilcha, Elam, Azar and the singer sang with Jerusalem as their leader and they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoice For God had made them rejoice with great joy the woman The women and the children also rejoice. And the way, the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away. On that day, men were appointed over the storerooms, the contributions, the first fruits and the tithes. Together into them, the portions required by the law for the priests and for the Levites according to the fields of the towns. For Judah rejoiced over the priest and the Levites who ministered

and they perform 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. 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. And all Israel, in the days of Zerubbabel, 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 was for the sons of Aaron. After years of challenge and two months of back-breaking labor, we find heartfelt joy and exultation after the hard-fought victory. We find the exuberance of celebration with the singing of the Jews marching on top of the walls in exultation and praise to God as the walls are dedicated to the Lord, to the glory of God with the sound of the cymbals and the harps and the lyres and the trumpets. This passage reminds us We have been created for the glory of God. We have been made for worship of the Almighty. All creation exists for God's glory and the creatures give to their creator praise. Psalm 96 reminds us, let the heavens be glad. Let the earth rejoice. Let the sea roar and all that fills it. And let the field exult and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord. For he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness. And as I was reminded by a friend even today, we find the description at the end of the book of Jonah as God brought renewal to the people as they repented and looked to the Lord. The book ends in verse 11 of chapter four with these words, and also much cattle. The entire cosmos exists for the glory and worship of Almighty God. And most of all, we who have been made in His image with eternal souls, that we may know Him and love Him, that we might live for His glory and praise, and those especially of us who have come to Jesus and have been remade, born from above, made new, that we might declare His glory. We're described in the book of 1 Peter, the people of God, as a living temple that exists for the praise of God, that we might declare His greatness in the marvel of His glory. And man is at his greatest when he is on his knees in worship, when he sees his need of God Almighty, his own smallness before the mighty God of Scripture, is when man is at his highest of how we have been created to live in this world and what we will be doing for eternity is bringing glory to God with great joy and exuberance from the heart of doing the very thing to which we have been created to do. The psalmist in Psalm 27 has one particular ambition and focus in life. Psalm 27 verse four, one thing have I asked of the Lord that I may seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire. in his temple. He will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble. He will conceal me under

the cover of his tent. He will lift me high upon the rock. And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy. I will sing and make melody to the Lord. What is the driving ambition of your life? Why is it that you get up in the morning for what end, what purpose, what is your motivation in all that you do? Why is it you even come to this church or any church for that matter? Well, the psalmist said he prayed, he asked the Lord for one thing, that he may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life. to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, to inquire in his temple. We have been made to worship. And we who have come to know God through Jesus Christ, we have beheld the image of the very glory of God in the person and through the work of our Savior from glory, Jesus Christ. God has made himself known. He's disclosed and revealed himself to us. in his son through the Holy Scriptures. And our response is to be that of joyful worship, that we might lift our hearts and our voices for his praise. And this Psalm 27 is so striking to me because of all the activities of a king, think about all the responsibilities as a leader, much less the king of a nation, his one ambition, his one thing in life is worship. What is your main thing? What is the thing that is driving you? Worship. is to be our priority. It is our privilege. Indeed, it is a great joy to think that we can gather in our elder brother's name and work and worship the mighty triune God, the maker of heavens and earth. We who are so full of unrighteousness and sin on our own, but have been cleansed through Christ, have access to the very throne of grace, can enter into the presence of God Almighty as we worship. Well, God delights that we might worship Him. We find in this passage, I've talked a little bit about worship generally. I wanna talk about worship in this passage. We find here in verse 31 a Hebrew word here that reminds us that we are to be those who give thanks to the Lord. That our lives are to be that of giving thanks and praise. And what does Nehemiah do? He divides the people into two large choirs. The first group is led by Ezra. We read in verse 36 that they're making their way to the south toward the dung gate. They pass the fountain gate to the water gate. And as that choir is moving to the south, there is another choir that is moving towards the north from their position by the Tower of the Ovens, heading towards the Jashana Gate, walking past the Fish Gate to the Towers of Haniel in the hundred in the Sheep Gate. It's very likely, commentators have studied this, that they began, these choirs began at the Valley Gate, which to me is so striking because this is the gate which Nehemiah started out himself when he went to do a reconnaissance of the city, examining its walls as we learned in chapter two of Nehemiah. Well, these two choirs going

in opposite directions converge, and they converge at the temple in holy worship, in grateful praise, and they gather with a crescendo of praise. of praise. In the house of the Lord, they offered sacrifices with joy. We read in verse 40, because God had given them a great joy. Even the women and the children were also, everyone was full of joy, of grateful praise to God Almighty. And the sound of their rejoicing could be heard far away. Have you ever heard a large crowd in the distance roar? We live a little distance from Fort Jackson, but on occasion, not only do we hear munitions going off, but sometimes we hear, especially at the beginning of like a camp or the end of training, the roar of soldiers. And it's a war of strength and of triumph. Perhaps you've heard roar from the USC football stadium, at least a few years back, perhaps, maybe not in the most recent years, but there were years, and I'm trying to remember if it was in the early 80s or late 70s, where the stadium would rock. It would move, I mean, I'm not gonna go too far with it, okay? But apparently I've heard stories before I was here that the stadium would rock and it would move somehow and people, the rejoicing, the sound of rejoicing, of triumph and victory could be heard at a great distance. That is the joy of the people of God giving praise to the Lord. And what a contrast to the previous temple as it was constructed, there was joy mixed with tears. The old remembered the glory of the previous temple, the splendor of Solomon's temple. But this day, God gave them great joy. The wall the builders had reconstructed was complete. And we find that their musical instruments, both in verse 24 and in verse 36, were prescribed by David, the man of God. And that their offerings, in verse 44, were those required of by the law for the priest and the Levites. We find here, that they worshiped according to the word of God. Their worship was not by their own invention. They didn't decide to just do it willy nilly one way or another. They wanted to follow the way in which God himself had given them to bring praise to him. Isn't it wonderful that God has made known to us not only who he is, but how he delights to be worshiped. And they're here are following that precept of scripture with a heart full of faith and joy, not a legalistic following in a narrow, a legalistic way, but in the way of faith, faith that's following the word of God, that's committed to the scriptures. The Lord is able to turn our weeping into joy. This is what he did as he worked among the people. I think of, I believe it's Naomi. because of the circumstances of sadness. I'm sorry, it's not Naomi. Help me out, because I'm just adding this in. Naomi's, is it Naomi? Yeah, Naomi, thank you. Naomi, who experienced such difficulty and adversity, and she changed her name to, I believe, something close to, Mira, myra, that means

bitterness. Don't call me Naomi, which was a much more positive term, I think, of thankfulness, of joy, or praise, something close to that. Instead, call me bitterness. And of course, in God's grace, he raised up from the lineage, her lineage, through Ruth, a child, Obed, and the book ends with great joy and praise and rejoicing in the covenant God who is faithful to his people who remembered them. Well, the people of God wept at the previous temple. And we find, even as we studied in our previous book, Ezra, is we find also in other minor prophets, for example, in the book of Haggai, and there's a slight reference to it in the book of Zechariah, that this temple would be the temple that would be visited by the king of glory himself, and indeed would be a thing of great joy. and they're already entering into that joy. So let me ask you a question. As you gather Sunday by Sunday, as you finally make it to church, dealing with all of the Sunday morning challenges perhaps of a family, or your own lethargy, the demands on your life, do you come to worship with expectation? For when we come to worship, we come to meet the living and true God. The God who is able to work and do beyond all that we can ask or think or even imagine. And we are to come with great joy as we know the great privilege of gathering in our Savior's name. And as we consider the marvelous ways in which he truly has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies that are found in Christ Jesus. And so as we gather Sunday after Sunday, let us be those who gather with joy. Let us sing his praise. My father came to know the Lord Jesus at age 51. It was in September of that year of his 61st birthday, but by Christmas time, he was in a Bible preaching, teaching church. I was a freshman in college and came home for Christmas. I'd been a Christian by God's grace for some years, and it was a marvelous time. My dad could not sing very well at all. But I can remember him singing that hymn, go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere, go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is Lord. I remember him singing that with great gusto and strength and joy. May that be us as we gather in worship. There's another teaching in this passage besides just the importance of worship. We learn in the second part the more conclusion of this passage starting at verse 44 to the end of how God provides for his people. I'd mentioned earlier that they received, they took the tithes, the offerings that are prescribed by the word of God and the people graciously and generously gave from their hearts. When we treasure the Lord, when he is our delight and not the passing fancies of this world, we can't help but be those who are generous. When we open our tight-fisted, our clenched fists, as we know His grace and love, and realize that all that we have is from His, that we are His, and as the Apostle Paul asked in 1 Corinthians 4, what do we have that we have

not received? We've received everything, grace upon grace. And so we freely give, we freely offer. We, like it says in Psalm 110, that we are willing in the day of His power. And this is a day of His power and glory. Our Savior is ascended, He's triumphant, and we share in His blessings. And so here they gave. They gave so that the priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, they were not forgotten. Nehemiah sought to care for the needs of the spiritual leaders of the nation. Cyril Barber and his commentary, his reflection upon this says, when we are right with God, we will delight in those who minister to us in Christ's stead and count it an honor that they are supported in their work. Now, this is not a pledging message, but it is the clear teaching of the word of God, that when we're full of faith and love for the Lord and joy, we can't help but give ourselves to his cause, and we can't help but express our gratitude to those whom he has raised up, those who have laid down their life for the sake of his people. And so, as I was thinking about this passage today, these two themes of worship and of joy, along with giving and honoring those who are part of his work, are merged together in the book of Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 15 to 16. I'd like to conclude this portion of our evening with this. Through him then, that's through Christ, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. That is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. What a great definition for us in God's word of worship. to continually offer up a praise to God that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name. It's our desire to acknowledge His name, to seek to revere Him, to honor Him. to have him as our delight. That's verse 15. And then on the heels of that, naturally occurs the teaching of verse 16. Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. Sound worship. leads to good works. When we have God as our solid joy, we can live ever so for his praise, giving ourselves to him, and all that we are, all that we have, His stewards entrusted with grace upon grace and the very truths of the gospel of our God and of our Savior. Worship doesn't have to wait for Sunday, for we're gathered in His name tonight as His people. So let us, as we begin our prayer time, extol His name. And perhaps I would encourage you to pray aloud, one at a time, and join quietly in the prayers of others as they lift their hearts in thankfulness and in joy to the Lord. Let's spend a few moments just acknowledging God's goodness. and magnificent greatness. Let's be those that acknowledge His name with our lips. Let's pray.