

PP Nehemiah: Worship Is...Cheerfully Giving
Nehemiah 12:44-47

Part 39, 6/29-30, 2013

PP Illus Hudson Taylor, missionary to inland China, used to say, “*When God’s work is done in God’s way for God’s glory, it will not lack God’s support.*” He once wrote a letter to a friend, saying, “*We have 25 cents and all the promises of God!*” Shortly afterwards, God provided. Not by changing Chinese rice to yen, but to stir His faithful servants to give!

Last week, in Nehemiah 12, we looked at their worship service to dedicate the wall they built. A quick review will remind us what that passage showed us about biblical worship. Biblical worship is a dedication of ourselves to God, giving over to God what is rightfully His. And we learned that God likes our worship to be celebratory, full of praises and thanksgiving and singing!

Third, we saw that biblical worship is participatory, involving the whole congregation, even the children.

Fourth, God wants us to worship with purity, hearts made clean through confessing sin to God.

Fifth, there is a progression to biblical worship, as some are taken by God straight into confessing sin, while others toward praise and adoration.

But regardless of the direction He takes you, we end together in the joy of His presence.

Biblical worship, sixth, is passionate, as they rejoiced with great joy.

And finally, we saw that biblical worship has a public witness, as their joy was heard far away.

But the context continues in verse 44, made clear by the phrase “*On that day...*” (12:44).

And what we will see is there is a seventh quality of biblical worship...*cheerful giving*.

Looking ahead to verse 47, we see that “*all Israel...gave*”.

What motivated all of Israel to cheerfully and generously support the ministry of God’s house?

But let me offer this preparation for our study because a sermon on giving is not often popular.

In fact, I had a very good friend here, who, when I told him that I want to preach on Giving for God’s Glory, he told me he’d come back when the series was over.

Notice I said I had a very good friend...

If you are like me, the topic of giving has been abused in the American church.

Years ago, I took our youth group to a church which had recently been experiencing revival, and 45 minutes of the 2 hour service was an appeal to give money to their church.

Lately, I have been getting repeated emails from one well known ministry to give more money to them so they can stay on the air. I clicked the “*Unsubscribe*” button.

Yet I really enjoy being taught how to manage God’s resources to His glory.

Do you realize that no one in the entire Bible talked about money more than Jesus?

If you take all His teaching, you’ll find that He talked about money about 25% of the time.

16 of His 29 parables dealt with money, consistent with the fact that in the entire Bible, money, wealth, possessions is addressed over 800 times.

Managing money and not letting money manage us is incredibly important!

Some of the greatest freedom that Denise and I have experienced in our lives is generous giving.

PP As Jim Elliot once said: “*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.*”

So what motivated *‘all Israel’* to give to God’s work?

PP 1-The ministry was well-organized (12:44)

“On that day men were appointed over the storerooms, the contributions, the firstfruits, and the tithes...” Nehemiah 12:44

There were three offices of priests: High Priest, priests, and the Levites, the majority
The tribe of Levi was chosen by God to serve Him full-time as priests, because they were the only tribe that stood with Moses against those who worshiped the golden calf

The whole priesthood came from Levi but priests descended directly from Aaron, Moses’ brother

PP The Levites were to assist and serve the Priests: *“So the LORD said to Aaron... ‘bring your brothers also, the tribe of Levi...that they may join you and minister to you while you and your sons with you are before the tent of the testimony.”* Numbers 18:1-2

In the days of Moses, there were 22,000 Levites, but by Nehemiah, there were only 284 (11:18)

They were placed in 48 Levitical cities scattered throughout the land, to represent God to Israel

They could own no land, could have no secular career, but were to dedicate themselves fully to the Lord, supported by the peoples’ tithes and offerings

PP *“To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do, their service in the tent of meeting,”* Numbers 18:21

They could serve until 50 years old, and their jobs were varied

They became gatekeepers, or porters, guarding the way to God’s dwelling place

They were responsible to keep the temple and its courts clean and bright

Some taught God’s Law, some were judges in their towns, others became trained musicians

So we have an entire tribe that God had set apart within Israel to serve Him...priests and Levites

These were the heads of the ministry, like our Pastors, Elders and Deacons

And the leadership team organized this renewed ministry in God’s House

Biblical worship is to be orderly and organized, so that people trust that what they give will be used with integrity and effectiveness

The revived people began to give generously and obediently, so they organized men: *“to gather into them the portions required by the Law for the priests and for the Levites according to the fields of the towns”* 12:44

They made sure that what was brought to the temple was managed with integrity

When ministry is well managed, God’s people will rejoice in giving: *“for Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered.”* Nehemiah 12:44

God is not pleased with a disorganized church, which mismanages peoples’ gifts

PP 2-The Ministers led well (12:45-46)

Not only was the ministry organized, the ministers served in a biblical way!

They *“performed the service of their God...according to the command of David and his son Solomon.”*

That was over 500 years before their time

How did they know the command of David and Solomon?

Because they studied, loved and lived the Word of God!

This was a bible-centered ministry!

Spend some time, even briefly, at a church that isn't centered on God's Word and your soul will suffer a famine

After a while you won't even know that your soul is starving, unless you can discern the signs
Emptiness, irritability, dissatisfaction, depression, and the list goes on!

Not until you wander your way back into a relevant, bible-preaching, Christ-exalting church and
all of a sudden, your sponge-like heart cannot soak it in fast enough!

And it thrilled the souls of the people so that they *'rejoiced over their spiritual leaders'*

And we see that they did: *"they performed the service of their God and the service of purification"* according to God's word

Last week I explained how purification was done, but let me say this: when we are made clean
before God, our joy is restored

The blood-bought people of God are made clean by confessing sin that God graciously reveals
Ministry leaders make sure we are continually reminded of the great things God has and is doing

So we have *'the singers and the gatekeepers'*

'singers' were supported fully because our faith struggles up and down, and singers reminded
the people there is more to life than work and struggles, that they were God's people
serving an incredible God, providing hope and joy and a future

'Gatekeepers' protected not only the city, but guard the way into the house of God

Elders and pastors act as gatekeepers in our church, making sure all who enter our fellowship as
members have a clear testimony and good reputation with those outside of the church

I am continually amazed with many of our Board members, at the sacrifice they make to serve
this church, the love they have to serve with excellence

There have been many, who, no matter what pressures and demands they face at work, they
maintain their commitments and focus for the church

I find that amazing and refreshing!

You might be thinking that you don't even know who the board members are in our church

Head to our website and click *'I'm New'* and you'll see and read a brief bio on our board

members as well as our staff, so you can pray and email an encouraging note to them

Singers, gatekeepers, Levites and priests were vital ministries in the house of God, made possible
because *'all Israel...gave'* seeing their responsibility

PP 3-The Members all Understood Their Responsibility (12:47)

Illus "It's not how much of my money I give to God, but how much of God's money I keep for
myself." Robert Gilmore LeTourneau. Inventor and entrepreneur of earth moving machinery,
who eventually began to give 90 % of profits to God and lived off the 10 %

Did you know that today, those 55 and older provide most of the finances for ministry

Furthermore, the average Christian in America gives 2.6% of their income to their church

Only 4% of all American Christians give at least 10% to their church

Imagine the level of ministry that can be done if all God's people saw it as their responsibility to
support the work of God

“And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel and in the days of Nehemiah gave the daily portions for the singers and the gatekeepers” 12:47

Not those 55 and older, all of them

I am often asked what percent of giving is responsible giving to the church

Israel had 3 tithes totaling 23% giving annually

Above that were freewill offerings, which were voluntary and generous contributions

We live today under grace, not under law, but the standard of the Law doesn't reduce under grace, it sharpens, even increases and focuses on the heart!

For example, in the Old Testament, murder was unlawfully taking someone's life

In the NT, Jesus taught that murderous anger in the heart is guilty of the same thing

It isn't 23% of all we have belongs to God, it is an attitude that 100% of all we have belongs to God and we are to use it to support what He loves

There is nothing on earth that God loves more than His church

So I would answer the question of what percentage we ought to give to the church this way

Give generously, cheerfully, regularly, and responsibly, and let your service follow your money

PP *“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7*

Illus Mother who was teaching her daughter to give...

There may be some of you thinking, *‘You just want a bigger paycheck!’*

I will share something that I would normally never share with you, but I think it's appropriate

For several years now, knowing that God was radically enlarging the scope of our ministry, I have asked the Board to forego any raises for me

God will provide for all my family's needs, and we simply live within our means

Usually, the board has not listened, but this past year, the entire staff insisted that the Board forego raises in our salaries

We didn't meet budget, and were not able to give any of our missionaries an increase, so we asked to be treated the same, and the Board thankfully consented

I don't say any of this to bring honor to ourselves, but to hopefully persuade you that preaching on biblical generosity is not to bring more money to staff wallets, but to increase our ability to serve God and do what He has asked us to do

And friends, we can and should cheerfully respond and give responsibly!

So let me end by offering 7 brief principles of giving from **1 Corinthians 16**: *“Now*

PP *concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come. And when I arrive, I will send those whom you accredit by letter to carry your gift to Jerusalem.” 1-3*

PP i. Giving to God's work is for every Christian: *“as I directed the churches”*

PP ii. Giving to God's work is to be a regular priority: *“On the first day of every week”*
-Not when you see what is left over at the end of the week

PP iii. Giving to God's work is to be a personal action: *“each one of you”*

PP iv. It is a planned and thought through commitment: *“is to put aside and save”*

PP v. It is to be proportionate to God's generosity: *"as he may prosper"*

PP vi. It is to be given freely with no regrets: *"so that no collections be made when I come"*

PP vii. And finally, it is to be given without delay: *"when I arrive . . ."*

All Israel gave to God's house! Why?

PP (summary of 3 points) Because the ministry was well-organized and well-managed

Because the ministers led well

Because the members of all God's people understood their responsibility

"When God's work is done in God's way for God's glory, it will not lack God's support."

Taylor

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Elliot

Pray