

**Time to Celebrate**  
Nehemiah 11-13  
SERIES “Next”  
**Jarrett Stephens**

What a journey we have been on together these last couple of months. This NEXT season has been something else, and I want to thank you church for how you have received the vision we believe God has laid on our hearts and how you have responded during this time.

I told our staff at our Staff Advance back in January and I mentioned this to you at the beginning of this series – that success for us will NOT simply be in accomplishing our goals and raising the necessary funds to do the five initiatives we believe God is calling us to, but REAL success will be that we are stronger and more united than we ever have been as we walk through this process.

And I really believe that we are. I can’t tell you the number of meetings, phone calls, emails, text messages that NOT just I have received but members of our staff...our Vision Team have received with encouragement and support...it’s been amazing.

And today, we bring our Nehemiah series to a close with a message I’m calling: **Time to Celebrate**

We have termed today, “Celebration Sunday” and at the end of this message we are going to reveal to you what we have taken in as it relates to our “first and best offering” AND our “total cash and pledges”, but first I want to set all this up by reminding you what NEXT is all about, give a review of where we have been, and then we’ll close our Nehemiah series out from Neh. 12 and reveal where we are in our giving.

Sound like a plan? Let’s get after it!

First, what was NEXT all about? We had five major initiatives that we wanted to accomplish through this campaign. If you recall, we said these five initiatives fit within our three FOCUS PRIORITIES of making disciples, loving our community, and strengthening the Church. And our tagline for NEXT was: “From Northwest Houston to the world.”

Our theme verse was **Isaiah 54:2** – “**Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes.**”

EVERYTHING we are seeking to do in this NEXT Initiative is about the expansion of the gospel and the deepening of our faith and trust and commitment to Christ – it’s deep and wide – that’s lengthening the cords (preparing for growth and expansion) and strengthening the stakes (that’s going deeper in our faith and discipleship).

The Five Initiatives included:

- Worship Center Remodel (Champions Campus)
- North Klein expansion for Life Groups and a parking lot
- Digital Ministry and Broadcast expansion (gospel in English and Spanish via the airwaves)
- International Church Planting (GEM, FAMM and IMB)
- Third Campus in North Magnolia (goal of the campaign was to start a nest egg if you will specific to land acquisition one day should we find what we're looking for)

These five initiatives make up the NEXT project and to cast vision for this project we have walked the last six weeks THROUGH the book of Nehemiah. It's a great book to study when you need vision and teamwork and commitment and sacrifice to complete a big project or when you set out to do something great God has called you to.

As a reminder Nehemiah was a cupbearer to the king of Persia...that was a prominent and powerful position.

He receives a report back from Jerusalem that while many exiles have returned, the city is still in disarray. The walls of the city are rubble. The gates have been burned. The at one time "beacon on a hill" – the holy city of Jerusalem – it and along with the rebuilt temple was a shell of its former glory and when Nehemiah hears of its current demise, it crushes him.

If you remember from chapter one, he weeps! He felt the broken-down walls of the holy city was a reproach to the name of his God and he takes it personal. He humbles himself and fasts...and for FOUR months he prays.

Nehemiah didn't start with a plan, he started with prayer and when God opened the door for a conversation with the king, Nehemiah stepped out in faith and asked for permission to go back and rebuild the city of his ancestors.

After making the 800-mile journey back to Jerusalem, Nehemiah prayer walks the city, and then challenges the people to "rise up and build". And what you see is this extraordinary amount of teamwork begins to take place.

Nehemiah's project becomes the people's project and shoulder to shoulder these people begin rebuilding the walls of the city – and remember, the walls of the city was representative of their lives.

The walls represented safety and security. It wasn't as much about the physical rebuilding of the walls as to what their rebuilding represented and allowed for. They were rebuilding so they could live in the city and prosper in the city and worship in the city without fear of attack or opposition coming from the outside.

Nehemiah called this rebuilding in chapter four a "great work" and listen to this: with any great work comes opposition. They had threats from the outside coming at them and conflict from within threatening them, but Nehemiah kept them together.

If you remember he gave them a trowel in one hand and gave them each a sword and encouraged them to stay at the work. He reminded the people:

**Neh. 4:20b – “...Our God will fight for us.”**

They were accomplishing something great for God...there was a sense of urgency. It took hard work and dedication, but they did it!

And what had been destroyed for nearly 100 years (the broken-down walls of Jerusalem) was rebuilt in 52 days and everyone that was involved in the effort and those looking on, the Bible says:

**Neh. 6:16 – “...for they perceived that this work had been accomplished with the help of our God.”**

THEN...what happens next – amazing. The people gather from sun-up to high noon listening to the Word of God. The Law of the Lord is read to them and explained to them in a way that they understand...and they weep.

What they are hearing breaks their heart because they realize they have not been keeping the Law as God had desired.

And so, in repentance they pray and ask God for forgiveness. They covenant with God that they are going to do what he tells them to do, and they start with celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles unlike it had been celebrated in centuries – they do EXACTLY as the Law commands in letter and in spirit.

You get to chapter eleven, and they begin to repopulate the city of Jerusalem. People are moving from the burbs back into the city, and there is great joy.

And THEN...we arrive in chapter twelve – and here is what I want you to see. Something is happening BIG PICTURE in this passage AND that I believe is happening at Champion Forest right now.

First: **The people attempt something great for God’s glory** (This is what we’ve seen up to this point)

Second: **The people consecrate themselves and their work to the Lord** (this is chapter 12)

Third: **God gives them great joy**

This is the passage...this is the movement of the sermon...and this is our story today. Let’s unpack it.

**Neh. 12:27-31 – “And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem** (Here we go! The wall has been rebuilt. The Word has been read. The people have repented. A covenant has been signed.

The city is repopulated. They have attempted and accomplished something great for God – now what do they do next?) **they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres.** <sup>28</sup> **And the sons of the singers gathered together from the district surrounding Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites;** <sup>29</sup> **also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth (people living in areas not too far away from Jerusalem), for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem.**

<sup>30</sup> **And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall.** (This act of purification is an act of consecration. It's a way of saying, "Lord, this wall is yours...the spiritual leadership is yours...these people are yours. Now, this is HUGE. The people consecrate themselves and their entire work and city to the Lord. Notice: They don't just move on...they don't just post it on their social media for all to see and then forget about it. Instead, they gather everyone together and they worship...and they sing...and they give thanks...and they make sacrifices – it's all an act of consecration to the Lord – "ALL that we have done and ALL that we are, is yours, Lord!" \_ <sup>31</sup> **Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks. One went to the south of the wall to the Dung Gate."**

Now, this is interesting. At the start of this rebuild do you remember the naysayers...the opponents of Nehemiah and the people of Israel? You had Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem. They were talking all kinds of smack and taunting the people.

At one time they told them (Neh. 4:3) – that if a fox goes up on the wall, it'd come crumbling down!"

Well, now, Nehemiah has the leaders of Judah up on a wall along with two great choirs, and that wall isn't going anywhere. We're told it was probably 8 feet wide so a lot of people could fit up there.

And you have these two great processions taking place. You've got a set of leaders and a choir that starts in the south – they go counter-clockwise around the city and the other choir and group of leaders start in the north going the other direction.

They encircle the city – again...as an act of consecration. They are giving the walls of the city...the city...themselves to the Lord, and it culminates when they meet in the temple to join together.

**Neh. 12:38, 40a, 43 – "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. So both choirs of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me... (and then he names some of the priests and singers – look at v. 43) And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away."**

I LOVE that! “God had made them rejoice with great joy...and the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.”

That’s the third movement we see!

- The people attempted and achieved something great for God...this rebuilding of the wall was FOR the glory of God.
- They consecrate themselves and their work to God – and look at the end result: JOY!

(v. 43) – “God made them rejoice with great joy....and the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.”

When you attempt something great for the glory of God AND you consecrate yourself and your work to him – you say, “Lord, this is yours...I’m giving it to you!” It’s much like our:

**Illus. Parent Commitment/Baby Dedication** –We have our next one coming up on Mother’s Day. And what do we do? Parents symbolically give their children to the Lord. They acknowledge the gift God has given them in the child and they say to the Lord, “this child is yours...all of his/her days.

This is EXACTLY what was happening in Neh. 12. When a parent walks to the front and holds that baby up before God, they are not giving the child away. They are declaring who the child belongs to! That’s consecration!

THIS is what this church did on “Commitment Sunday” when we laid our offerings before the Lord and it’s what we are doing today on “Celebration Sunday”! We’re consecrating ourselves and this work to the Lord!

The people of Israel were saying, “God, this wall, this city...WE are yours ALL of our days!

Now, if you read (ch. 13) which is nearly a decade later, they are having a little bit of trouble keeping that commitment – we’re not going to go into it for time’s sake, but read it later. It’s a good reminder that a one-time act of consecration does not eliminate the Enemy’s temptation to cause us to drift from our commitments to Christ. We must stand firm and stay on guard.

Here in chapter 12 though...at this moment in time, they mean it with their whole heart – and what does God give them as a result?

ULTIMATE JOY!

When we attempt something great for God – and that’s what NEXT is...it’s an attempt to do something great for the glory of God AND when we consecrate ourselves and our work to him – that’s what TODAY (“Celebration Sunday”) is all about – joy is what God gives us in return.

Commentator, **Douglas Nykolaishen** wrote: “**Great joy comes from both receiving God’s gifts and devoting them to him to use as he pleases.**”

Think on this for a moment: Receiving God's gifts AND devoting them back to him – produces joy!

Hear this play out in real life. Listen to just THREE testimonies that I've received that speaks to this. As I read this...each person made a commitment to obey the Lord – to do what they felt he was telling them to do FOR his glory. They consecrated themselves and their work with worship and thanksgiving and sacrifice...and listen to the joy that comes as a result.

**Illus. Greg Creel email (read),**

Josue from our Spanish ministry – “Josue is an engineer. He had a work visa as an engineer, and due to recent changes in immigration policy, he is now waiting to see what will happen. He truly does not know what the outcome will be for him, and there is a possibility that he may have to leave the country.

Despite the uncertainty, his faith remains firm. Since arriving at Champion Forest, the church has deeply impacted his life and his family. He has found in the children's ministry a place where his children are growing spiritually and socially, and in the student ministry a place where he can serve.

He says, “I don't know what will happen or where I will be, but I give in faith, because just as this church has been a blessing to me and my family, it will be a blessing to others who do not yet know Jesus.”

This was a testimony from our Connection Room several weeks ago when we laid our offering before the Lord: “A young man I met over a year ago in the Connection Room, came by after the 10:45 service to share his personal experience with God yesterday. He said he is between jobs and came to church with \$200 in his pocket with no intention to participate in NEXT. He said as he stood there watching the congregation bring their sacrifices to the altar God touched him and told him to take his \$200 to the altar. After giving God every excuse not to follow His call, he finally went forward and brought his sacrifice. He said the sense of obedience he felt was overwhelming. To God goes the glory.”

Champion Forest...it's Celebration Sunday.

And I think what you are going to see in just a few minutes is this truth that we have talked about today. We have attempted something great for the glory of God, and what we're doing right now is consecrating our work and our lives to him.

My prayer is that God would make us rejoice with great joy in this moment and that the joy he gives us from right here at Champion Forest would be heard far away!

So, at this time, I'm going to ask my team to come up and join me. In just a few moments as they take their place, I am going to share two numbers with you.

Here's the thing...don't just hear them as campaign results. Hear them as evidence! Evidence of God's grace in our lives...evidence of sacrifice and faith for his glory...evidence that this church is attempting something great for the glory of God! THIS today is his!

Okay...here we go!

First and Best Offering presentation:

Total amount of Cash and Pledges received:

Did you notice in the passage we read today...TWO times (v. 31 and 38) they sang songs of thanksgiving! That's exactly what we're going to do right now. It's time to celebrate!

Let's stand and sing with joy and gladness at what the Lord has done!

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*Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.*