

**NEWS AND VIEWS**  
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*“Southern Baptists with the Full  
Gospel for the Whole World”*

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VOLUME 41

November 2019

NUMBER 11

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*...And the singers sang, with Jezrahiah their leader, and on that day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced because God had given them great joy, even the women and children rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar. (Nehemiah 12:42-43)*

Can you remember the last time you left a worship service and were impacted with the selection of the songs that were sung? Or maybe you were impressed with the professional programmatic presentation? Sometimes it all seems to flow so well. But have you ever been deeply affected with an inexpressible and overwhelming presence of joy? When worship is done rightly, it produces a spirit of joy. Because we meet God there. And joy is from God. This account from Nehemiah records that the people sang and rejoiced because **God had given them great joy**. We cannot pretend that we are joyful. We cannot manufacture it. We can only respond to what God does within us when right worship is expressed outside of us.

We are told that **the singers sang**. We may think that is not a significant thing. But there are many well qualified singers who don't really want to sing. They just go through the motions, mindlessly mouthing the words, trying to stay in tune. And there are some singers that really want to sing, but are woefully less able to sing than **real** singers...(think Deputy Barney Fife, auditioning for the Mayberry choir). That episode was really painful! When a singer **really** sings, it makes a huge difference in the worship setting. Here the biblical record says that **the joy of Jerusalem was heard from afar**. That's what happens when singers really sing. It is attractive and the message goes far from the place where the song is sung. Joy is "heard" beyond the boundaries. Joy transcends the physical realm...because its origin is the Spirit of God.

Oh, how we can mute the sound of joy...think of the many songs that we really want to sing that are stifled, muffled, and muddled. But how the people of God can make a tremendous difference in the reality of worship when they remember they have great reason to greatly rejoice. Joy remains an effective message in the heart long after the tune has faded away from the ears. Joy expressed in gratitude to God for His goodness stays within us long after the worship experience has ended. The realization of joy that comes from recognition of God's promise and presence is transported to more sorrowful places we travel. Maybe that is what God desires for us. That we, as His people, continue to worship, day after day, place after place, occasionally coming together corporately to be refilled with the essence of joy and encourage one another.

For Nehemiah and his people, the wall they rebuilt was secondary in priorities. Worship was their primary function. The need for the wall symbolized their helpless vulnerability apart from the protection of God and His provision and providence. God's strength and His plan of community were to be lived out in the midst of their worship life. Do you have a worship life? Not only publicly, but privately meeting with the Most High God? All of our **joy** flows from a right **worship** relationship with God. Some folks claim to have a relationship with God. But as to their worship relationship with Him...not so much. Are you missing joy in your journey? Worship God. The deficit of the joy of the Lord is truly connected with dereliction of true worship of the One True God. When you worship the Lord in your relationship, you will find that it exalts the Living God, renews our depressed spirit, and feeds our starving soul.

I find it significant that in a previous verse of this passage (12:36) there is a reference to the musical instruments of David, the man of God. Is this a reference to King David? If so, that is a stunning revelation and gives me cause for speculation...Had these things (*musical instruments*) survived the progression of time, even during the exile? Who had them? Where were they? Had the instruments been silent till now? I wish I had more answers...It would be truly significant if these things had been preserved. But more significant is the preservation of the presence of joy in the people of God. This is a timeless aspect to true worship.

Sometimes we think we can't worship if we don't use the same musical instruments that our forefathers used. The things that make the music are not as critical as the sound of the music and the motive for it all. Does it sound like joy? The joy of the Lord, found in the worship of God, is a tune that never goes out of tune...and always living beyond its time. As you celebrate Thanksgiving...don't forget to thank the Living God for the Joy of King Jesus...Joy to the world, the Lord has come...and He is coming again. This life would be dreadfully dismal without the knowledge of this promise.

Blessings to you,  
Pastor Sam