

PREPARING FOR THE RETURN OF CHRIST #12

“Worship is what makes a church, a real community of God”

Text: Nehemiah 7

Introduction

The name Robert Schuller will for all time be tied to his Crystal Cathedral Church. At the time of his death in April, 2015, one LA Times writer said, “it is his legacy.”

The Crystal Cathedral, located in Garden Grove, CA was designed by renowned architect Philip Johnson at a cost of \$20 million—better known for designing buildings in Manhattan.

In 1980 it was the largest glass building in the world. The building has 12,000 panes of glass.

The sanctuary floor is built of Rosso Alicante marble, which was mined in Spain, and cut and polished in Italy.

The pipe organ is the 3rd largest pipe organ in a church in the world, rivaling the one at Lincoln Center in NYC.

The Crystal Cathedral is bigger than the Cathedral at Notre Dame in Paris.

The 40-acre church campus was so striking that the American Institute of Architects gave Schuller its first Lifetime Achievement Award in 2001.

In a 1980 interview with the LA Times, Schuller said *“there’s a place for monuments. If the monument can be an instrument, you’ve got a winner.”*

Sadly in 2010, Schuller witnessed the death of his monument. The church, \$50 million in debt was sold to the Catholic church and renamed Christ Cathedral.

Purpose Statement: The question I want to deal with today is, **what is it that makes a church, a real community of God?** Is it a building, as Robert Schuller believed, or is it something else? In Nehemiah 7 we get the answer. Worship! Our chief end is not to admire a structure, but to glorify God by worshipping Him above everything else.

Worship is what makes a church, a real community of God.

In chapter 7, we find the steps Nehemiah took, to reach that goal.

I. He appointed gatekeepers, singers and Levites v.1

All three positions are connected to worship in the temple.

--The gatekeepers guarded the temple doors

--The singers sang

--The Levites served

These people were put in place **AFTER** the wall was finished and the gates were hung. That happened back in 6:15 [Read].

I'm sure that Nehemiah rejoiced that the wall was finished and the gates hung, because he gave God the credit for it in v.16.

- The walls were important for protection and identity—it set them apart from the nations around them.

But what is significant is that Nehemiah didn't stop to admire the stone and the mortar—he immediately turned his attention to worship—which was the main thing.

There is *excitement* in a building program, and there is *joy* in watching the Lord provide—but the building is not the main thing—it is the *prelude* to the main thing, which is the worship of the people.

The singers were a very important part of temple worship. Remember, for years the people of Israel had been in captivity—first under the Babylonians, then the Persians. During the whole time, all singing had stopped.

--Ps.137:1-4

Finally, after all those years, they would get to sing again! I think it's necessary at this point to make a clarification on the relationship between music and worship. There's a lot of confusion today about this. While music is vital to worship; music and worship are not the same thing.

Music is music and worship is worship! Music is a means to express worship, but it is not worship.

Worship, to quote John MacArthur, *is the heart going up to God in gratitude and thanksgiving for who He is and for all that He has done in saving us.*

David Wells, who writes on culture said, *nothing is more important to our understanding of worship than this: we come to the Lord, not*

because it is our idea to do so, or because we need to do so, or even because we like to do so, but because he first came to us. Worship is our response to what he has done...It is our joyous recognition of God's worthiness.

According to MacArthur, music does not motivate worship, nor does music create worship—

worship is not a mood experience. A darkened auditorium and lights flashing has nothing to do with worship. The source of worship is actually the Word of God!

Worship is the heart response to the preached Word or the read Word! This is what you'll see in chapter 8. A revival will break out among the people as they respond to the Word of God. Cr. 8:5-6

In John 4, Jesus told the woman at the well that the Father was looking for worshippers who would worship "in spirit and truth."

Transition Statement: Nehemiah's first step in reaching the goal of worship was the appointment of gatekeepers, singers and Levites.

II. He appointed men of godly character to share in leadership v.2

Hanani was Nehemiah's actual blood brother. This is the same Hanani back in 1:2 who made Nehemiah aware of how desperate things were in Jerusalem. His actions actually set in motion everything Nehemiah had done. Hanani demonstrated capable leadership.

Hanani and Hananiah were made co-leaders or governors of the palace [citadel or castle]. Persian troops would have been stationed in Jerusalem under Nehemiah's authority. Now they would be under Hanani and Hananiah's authority.

In Nehemiah's mind though, what qualified these men to share in the leadership responsibility was not just their abilities or gifts—but their character.

--v.2b *...for he was a faithful man and feared God more than many.*

Two godly character traits separated these two men from the many men of Jerusalem.

--**They were faithful;** in other words, they were loyal men who would protect Nehemiah's back. Remember how chapter 6 closes [vs.17-19].

--**They feared God;** in other words, because they feared God, they did

not fear the men who opposed Nehemiah.

When we choose people for leadership roles in the church—whatever that role may be—we must look further than their ability or gifts—we must ask ourselves, are they loyal and do they fear God or man?

Transition Statement: A vital step in the goal of worship is the godly character of those in leadership roles.

III. He shut the world out v.3

The gates were to be opened late and closed early. Safety was still an issue—but just as important was the need for the people inside to aware that they were different from the world outside!

Remember this was a huge problem—

- some of the wealthy Jews were putting their business dealings and marriage connections above their connection to God's people 6:17-19
- some of the religious leaders had sold out to the world 6:12-14
- In 3:5 the Jewish nobles from Tekoa refused to help rebuild the walls because they were content to live in the world

There was a great need for the people to focus on the fact that they were different; and they were called to be different—because they were the people of God! **And this must be true of your life also, if you belong to Christ by the new birth.** Listen to how different we really are:

--I Pet.2:9-10

God has ordained that the church be the primary place where we gather to focus on the fact that we are different; and we are called to be different—because we are the people of God.

--Heb.10:22-24 [where does all this take place?] **Read** v.25

When the church gathers on the first day of the week at 11am and 6pm to worship and pray together—don't forsake the assembly if at all possible. It is the appointed time when the world is shut out and the people inside are made aware that they are different from the people outside.

The unsaved cannot worship God, but they can observe your worship of God. According to I Cor.14:25, their observation of your worship can lead to conviction and conversion. So, don't stay at home on Sunday

when an unsaved friend, or family member visits, bring them to church! And men gathering your family together for a time of Bible reading and prayer is also an important time to reflect on the fact that you are different. It was during these family devotional times that our sons made some big decisions in their life.

Transition Statement: An important step in the goal of worship is shutting the world out.

IV. He exposed the need for more people v.4

What is the point of having strong walls and gates, if there was hardly anyone inside. A fine wall or a fine building with a lot of glass doesn't guarantee that there will be a future. The best way to secure a future is to repopulate the city with people!

Keep in mind how important the city of Jerusalem is to God's plan of redemption.

No city, no Messiah; no Messiah, no salvation for Jew or Gentile!

--v.5

This long list of names represents the people who lived outside the walls—he would repopulate the city with some of them. Chapter 11 tells us how Nehemiah did it:

--11:1 some people were drafted.

--11:2 some people were volunteers.

Some of the people volunteered to uproot their families from the country and move to Jerusalem in order to help it grow and secure a future.

Just as the city of Jerusalem played a role in God's plan of redemption, the church does too!

The church has been commissioned by God to take the gospel message to those outside the walls of the church.

--In Luke 14:23 Jesus commanded us *to go into the highways and hedges, and compel [or urge] them to come in, that my house may be filled.* Just as somebody reached out to you and urged you to come to Christ, you are to be doing the same thing.

In John 4 Jesus told the woman at the well that the *Father is seeking such to worship Him.*

He does the seeking through your witness and mine.

Transition Statement: An important step in the goal of worship is reaching people who then become worshippers.

V. He exposed the need for more giving vs.70-71

I think two of the saddest words in Neh.7 appears two times—it is the word *some*:

(70) And some of the heads of the father' houses gave to the work...(71)

Some of the heads of the father's houses gave to the treasury of the work...

How tragic that it didn't read *all of the heads of the father's houses gave*. God's principle on giving is found in 2 Cor.9:6, *give sparingly and you reap sparingly...give bountifully and you reap bountifully*. Whatever you give to God is what you'll get a return on. If you want a small return, give a small amount; if you want a big return give a big amount.

Paul is NOT preaching a prosperity gospel. The simple truth is God promises to bless the generous giver. One reason is—that the generous giver—being blessed—is able to give more.

Remember Jesus words in Luke 6:38, *Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom...*

Those who are generous will experience the overflowing generosity of God. What a wonderful promise? And what a wonderful motivation to be a generous giver. Amen!

Giving is a spiritual discipline, just like prayer, witnessing and Bible reading. It is also an act of worship. That's why giving is part of our worship service.

An important step in the goal of worship is generous giving.

Closing

What is it that makes a church, a real community of God? Is it a building, as Robert Schuller believed, or is it something else? In Nehemiah 7 we get the answer. Worship! Our chief end is not to admire a structure, but to glorify God by worshipping Him above everything else.

Nehemiah gives us the steps he took to reach that goal. Three important

question to ask yourself:

ONE has this church made the goal of worship the main thing? Do we have it right about the place of music in worship? Do we have it right about leadership? Are we concerned about spiritual qualifications or just ability?

TWO have you made the goal of worship the main thing?

- Is your heart going up to him in gratitude and thanksgiving for who He is what He has done for you?
- Are you shutting out the world so that you can focus on the fact that you are different, and God called you to be different, because you belong to Him?
- Have you grasped the principle of generous giving?

The **THIRD** question to ask yourself is, “*Am I a worshipper of God?*” Have you trusted Christ for salvation? Jesus said the Father is looking for worshippers?