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SERMON TITLE: Victory or Judgment: It's Your Choice!

Rebuilding a City: Trusting God & Each Other

SCRIPTURE: Nehemiah 12:27-43

DATE: July 5, 2020

View online service at www.fpcd.org/live-stream

Read also Romans 15:5-13.

We say each week:

God is good! All the time!—and—All the time, God is good!

We say with these words many things: Victory; Faithfulness; Promise-keeper; Prayer-answerer; Ruler; Merciful One; Source of hope; Joy-giver.

With these words we are giving praise and glory to God.

We do this together, as one voice; in complete harmony with each other because we agree that God deserves praise and we trust him.


We are taking a stand for victory in God, no matter what.

God is good! . . . *all the time!*

The people held a praise celebration to dedicate the new wall. They were taking a stand for victory in God. They invited people from everywhere—community officials, church officials, civic and church volunteers, and everyday folks—men, women, and children. They organized singers and bandleaders to form two great marching choirs. READ Nehemiah 12:27-43 (below)

The people took such joy in all their work that they brought tithes and offerings to the church. They reinstated worship as it had been from the time of David and Solomon. They exulted in the joy of the Lord. They reveled in their victory.

People with faith in God, Christians who believe in Jesus can revel in victory. We can stand on it, delight in it, talk about it. Do we grasp that, though? Especially in hard circumstances, do we grasp the power of God?

Here's a cup of water.  How would you describe the cup?

- Is it half full?
- Is it half empty?

With God, my cup overflows.  It looks a little messy! 😊

But isn't that like faith? Let's think about it. If I have a problem and I see myself as a Christian limited by my natural

resources, then isn't it like saying the cup is half empty? But then if things are going well, I give God credit, isn't it like saying the cup is half full?

But then there's the Psalmist. He writes:

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. (23:4-5)

The biblical view of the cup is not half-full or half-empty, but overflowing. It is not overflowing only when things are copacetic but in the valley of the shadow of death, in the presence of enemies.

That's when we have the victory! **MY CUP RUNS OVER!**

The Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) can be translated, "You give me so much blessing I get drunk." One can interpret the Old Testament Hebrew translation as, "in Yahweh's hand, my cup is drunk with superabundance."

Are we living there? I'm not sure we are!

But, that's what the celebration was about in Jerusalem. The people got up on that wall and with the greatest of joy the band marched and the singers sang and the people praised their God.

Victory is defined as a superabundance of blessings from God. **It is yours to embrace.**

It is victory in the face of opposition, resistance—for them, that was overwhelming rubble and destruction, small population—for us it might be a pandemic, economic downturn, and dismantlers of society—yet with God they overcame, and so do we.

It's your choice to say "**MY CUP IS RUNNING OVER!**" To say it takes focus; it takes community; it takes good leadership.

Nehemiah modeled courage and asked it of the people. He modeled working hard and asked it of the community. He modeled service and asked it of all others. He modeled care, and asked it of each neighbor. Above all he modeled sustained, persistent faith in God. He urged others to trust God, too.

Do you want to build something bigger than you and your family, something that engages the whole community, something

victorious? Something where others look and say, *hey, something different is going on this city*. It takes thinking outside of ourselves; it takes partnership with God who is good: the Promise-keeper; prayer-answerer; vision-inspirer; powerful Ruler; Merciful One; Source of hope; Joy-giver. **“ALL the TIME” . . . GOD is GOOD!**

But the title of this sermon is Victory or Judgment. If we don't quite grasp the victory, if we are not fully living in the thrill of victory, isn't there like a “lower level” of faith in the Lord?

Not really. Not according to the Bible. Passivity of faith isn't really a thing in the Bible. If you have been reading your One-year Bible, in recent weeks you have read about Elisha the Prophet. In one story, a man named Naaman, the Aram Army Commander, had a problem. He developed leprosy. After being sent to Elisha he was healed! It was true victory! He offered Elisha a present, but Elisha refused. He said instead, “Go in peace! *Enjoy your gift from God!*”

However, Elisha's servant Gehazi wasn't that devoted to God. He thought, “Elisha let him off too easily. I'm going to get something out of him.” So after Elisha left, Gehazi went after Naaman and said, “We've changed our mind.” But it was Gehazi who was lethargic in faith and greedy.

When he returned Elisha confronted him, “Is this the time to accept money and gifts, Gehazi?” *God generously healed a man—and should you want to gain profit from it?* So Elisha said, “The leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you.” (2 Kings 5:15-27)

He received judgment. It was Gehazi's choice. He did not exult in God's victory or what God had done for a very ill man. He took advantage of it for his own deceitful covetousness. He was judged.

Let's return to Nehemiah's story.

Do you remember the resisters? One of them was named Tobiah. Tobiah lived in Jerusalem. When he heard that the King had sent Nehemiah, it displeased him and other leaders greatly “that someone had come to seek the welfare of the people of Israel.” (2:10)

He and others ridiculed Nehemiah, saying, “What is this that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?” (2:19)

His negativity, glass half-empty attitude of resistance led to mocking of the work: “That stone wall they are building-- any fox going up on it would break it down!” (4:3)

But Nehemiah persisted and so did the people.

That led to anger, and Tobiah and his faithless colleagues “all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it.” (4:7)

Next Tobiah tried to harm Nehemiah by luring him away, and even hiring someone to do him harm in the temple, all because he was driven by unbelief and resistance to building up the welfare of the community. (Nehemiah 6) He had no thought for God.

One of the priests was related to Tobiah, and he gave Tobiah a room in the courts *of the temple* without Nehemiah's knowledge. When Nehemiah discovered it, he threw Tobiah and all his furniture out. (13:4-8)

Tobiah had chosen a road of unfaith. He did not believe in God; he only wanted to tear everything down. He was not considering the welfare of God's people or the vision of God to repair, rebuild, restore, and revive this community. Tobiah fell into judgment.

It was his choice to resist God. He paid the consequences.

Which way do you choose?

The legacy of the ones who chose Victory, even though it was hard work, though it took persistence in the face of opposition and it required the efforts of many people—they are remembered as people of faith and unity.

Victory or judgment. It's your choice!

As for me—and hopefully you,

GOD IS GOOD . . . ALL THE TIME!

AMEN

NEHEMIAH 12:27-43 ^{NLT}

²⁷ For the dedication of the new wall of Jerusalem, the Levites throughout the land were asked to come to Jerusalem to assist in the ceremonies. They were to take part in the joyous occasion with their songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps, and lyres. ²⁸ The singers were brought together from the region around Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites. ²⁹ They also came from Beth-gilgal and the rural areas near Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built their own settlements around Jerusalem. ³⁰ The priests and Levites first purified themselves; then they purified the people, the gates, and the wall. ³¹ I led the leaders of Judah to the top of the wall and organized two large choirs to give thanks. One of the choirs proceeded southward along the top of the wall to the Dung Gate. ³² Hoshaiah and half the leaders of Judah followed them. . . . ³⁵ Then came some priests who played trumpets, including Zechariah, . . . a descendant of Asaph. ³⁶ Zechariah and his colleagues . . . used the musical instruments prescribed by David, the man of God.

Ezra the scribe led this procession. ³⁷ At the Fountain Gate they went straight up the steps on the ascent of the city wall toward the City of David. They passed the house of David and then proceeded to the Water Gate on the east. ³⁸ The second choir giving thanks went northward around the other way to meet them. I followed them, together with the other half of the people, along the top of the wall past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, ³⁹ then past the Ephraim Gate to the Old City Gate, past the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel, and on to the Tower of the Hundred. Then we continued on to the Sheep Gate and stopped at the Guard Gate. ⁴⁰ The two choirs that were giving thanks then proceeded to the Temple of God, where they took their places. So did I, together with the group of leaders who were with me. ⁴¹ We went together with numerous trumpet-playing priests . . . ⁴² and the singers. . . . They played and sang loudly under the direction of Jezrahiah the choir director. ⁴³ Many sacrifices were offered on that joyous day, for God had given the people cause for great joy. The women and children also participated in the celebration, and the joy of the people of Jerusalem could be heard far away.

Romans 15:5-13

⁵ May God, who gives . . . patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. ⁶ Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory. ⁸ Remember that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show that God is true to the promises he made to their ancestors. ⁹ He also came so that the Gentiles might give glory to God for his mercies to them. That is what the psalmist meant when he wrote: "For this, I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing praises to your name." ¹⁰ And in another place it is written, "Rejoice with his people, you Gentiles." ¹¹ And yet again, "Praise the LORD, all you Gentiles. Praise him, all you people of the earth." ¹² And in another place Isaiah said, "The heir to David's throne will come, and he will rule over the Gentiles. They will place their hope on him." ¹³ I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.