

Neh. 12:27-47 “Dedication Service”

For the Children: Does your dad sing in the shower? If so, why do you think he would do that? Perhaps he does so because he is happy! When people are happy, they often sing. God’s children have more reason to be joyful than anyone else. We should be showing our thankfulness and joy to the Lord by singing praises to Him all the time! One day, we will be doing just that in heaven, without any sin to distract us by making us unhappy. **Questions:** What do we have to be joyful about? How did the Levites help God’s people express their joy in the OT? Do we need people to do our singing for us in our worship services today?

Introduction:

First Point: Preparation for the Service

- 1) **Music Leaders:** To prepare for the dedication of the wall, the priests and Levites were called to Jerusalem. The Levitical choirs and musicians had a role to play in leading the worship-music with “hymns (Psalms) of thanksgiving.” This tradition went back to the commands of David and Solomon (Vss. 45-46). See 1 Chron. 9:333-34; 15:16; 23:5; 2 Chron. 5:12, 29:30. In applying this today, we should not assume choirs and bands are appropriate, for the Levitical role was “mediatorial” – worship on behalf of the congregation. Today, the emphasis falls on the whole congregation singing, since we are all now “priests” in Christ (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16)
- 2) **Leaders in Purification:** The priests and Levites were also called to purify themselves and the people, even the walls and gates before the service. The ceremonial cleansing pointed to the need for Christ to remove all our sins, and sanctify our service in every area of life – without which, our worship would be unacceptable to the Lord

Second Point: The Procedure of the Service

- 1) **The Two Choirs:** The Levitical choir was split into two, each travelling in opposite directions along the top of the walls, followed by the musicians, priests and leaders. They met at the Temple and there gave great praise and thanks to God in song, with thank-offerings
- 2) **Thankfulness and Joy:** The songs and offerings expressed thankfulness (vss. 27, 43). Even the word “choir” (v. 31) means “songs of thanksgiving.” The people were thankful for the return from Exile, their protection from enemies and their restoration – all undeserved. We have greater restoration and security in Christ. Our thanksgiving and joy should be greater. It should be continual (Eph. 5:19-20, Col. 3:16-17). Our singing should show this greater joy. We give a good witness when it does – as the people did here (v. 43)

Third Point: The Post-Service Provisions

- 1) **Appointed Gatherers:** After the service, men were appointed to gather and store the tithes used to support the priests and Levites – including the singers and gatekeepers. For the people realized that David and Solomon had established a good tradition with the singers (vss. 45-46). In any case, the Law commanded support for the priests and Levites. They also “rejoiced over the priests and Levites who served” (v. 44). For these men had helped them express their thanks and joy before the Lord
- 2) **Continuity of Worship:** By supporting these men, God’s people provided continuity for future worship services – for thanksgiving and joy are ongoing. However, it is not singers and musicians who create that joy. They merely help express it. The thankfulness and joy come from knowing Christ and His blessings

Conclusion:

Heb. 6:9-12 (WCF 18:1-2) “The Full Assurance of Hope”

For the Children: Sometimes sick people are put on medication that takes a while to be seen to be working. At first, you can't see any improvement, but you keep going because you trust that the doctor knows what he's talking about. Our Great Doctor, the Lord Jesus, tells us that we may be certain that if we believe in Him, He will heal us of all our sins, and we shall be saved. We do trust that – and we should, it is absolutely, 100% certain – but sometimes we can't see it happening and begin to doubt. If we are patient, though, we will see it all happen.

Questions: Why do some of God's children find it hard to believe that they will be saved? How can we be certain we are saved? What are some things that will make it harder for us to trust in God's promises?

Introduction:

First Point: True and False Assurance

- 1) Those Who Have Fallen Away: There are hypocrites in God's kingdom at present. There are those who have tasted of God's gifts but have fallen away (vss. 4-8). There are those who do not really believe who still think they will go to heaven. The existence of those who fool themselves may make some believers struggle with assurance. However, while it is good to examine ourselves, the mere fact of false claims of assurance does not deny the existence of legitimate claims by those who truly believe
- 2) Those Who Can Expect Better Things: Hence v. 9 contrasts those who have fallen away with the readers, concerning whom the writer is convinced of better things – the blessings that accompany salvation. In v.11 he makes it clear that sincere believers can have “full assurance.” WCF 18:1 has a similar contrast. Nor is this confidence a baseless speculation or “probable hope” as in Romanism

Second Point: The Basis for True Assurance

- 1) Christ Is the Ground: Hope based on man's works will always be uncertain. But if it is based on Christ's works, it becomes absolutely certain. Believers are God's “beloved” in Him. Through Him, our sins are completely covered and our works made acceptable. Looking at Him inspires confidence – which is why Calvin called assurance the “reflex” (an automatic response) of faith. Not looking at Him will undermine assurance
- 2) Word and Spirit: God's Word also gives a sure testimony that believing in Christ enables us to be assured of salvation (Jn. 3:16, 1 Jn. 1:9). We should likewise trust our text when it speaks of “full assurance.” The Spirit adds His testimony within us, enabling us to lay hold of such promises (Rom. 8:15-17, 23-27, Gal. 4:6-7)
- 3) Fruits of Regeneration: Good deeds of love to brethren demonstrating love of Christ (Mt. 25:40) can also help – though only in a “secondary” way, after we have looked to Christ and believed His Word with the aid of His Spirit. God is not unjust so as to ignore works He has wrought within us. For Christ's sake, He graciously rewards such deeds. To see His work in our lives in this way encourages us to live out of the assurances of God's Word

Third Point: The Importance of Reinforcing Assurance

- 1) Diligence to Realize: This secondary role of good works in reinforcing our assurance, shows the importance of being diligent in serving God (v. 11). Assurance is given as a gift, with faith, but our subjective enjoyment of it goes up or down according to our use of the means of grace, our zeal for the Lord, our efforts in resisting sin etc. The opposite, being “sluggish,” undermines our enjoyment of assurance
- 2) Remembering the Past: Looking at the OT record of the faith of God's people can encourage us to persevere with zeal. It also reminds us to be patient when the fullness of assurance does not come to us right away. For the OT saints often had to wait to see the fulfillment of God's promises. In all this, we need to heed the warnings of Scripture against falling away – a warning that should help us to be assured, rather than causing us to doubt

Conclusion: