



**KING'S  
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**EDINBURGH**

## 8. Rediscovering purpose

### Nehemiah 12:27-43

It's never been easier to tell the world about yourself, and each of us have unique opportunities and connections which we can use to influence others. What we talk about, what we share, how we live – all these things tell other people what matters to us. Christians have news to tell. Sometimes they and those they know get easily distracted and focused on other things but this news must be broadcast.

Nehemiah's story records not just the physical rebuilding of Jerusalem but religious rebuilding as well: the people learn what it means to belong to YHWH their God, and commit themselves to Him once more, doing all that He had commanded them to do. It is after this is done that their dedication ceremony takes place, with a lot of noise, so that "the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away" (Nehemiah 12:43). This line isn't just a happy ending, it is the story.

We can see a pattern established throughout the Bible: God blesses people so that news of Him and His goodness might go out from them so that more people might come to Him. To describe it in physical terms: God blesses (we typically imagine this as downwards), news of this goes out, people come in (to Him).

We can see this right from the very beginning: "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.'" (Genesis 1:28). Though they fail to do this, God remains committed to His intention and commissions Abraham and Sarah to be involved: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12:2-3)

Abraham and Sarah have a child, and from this little family a nation grows: Israel.

They're given land to live in and shown how to live a blessed life, always with the intention that they fulfil the massive promises God made to Abraham. Even as Israel struggles with this, God won't stop speaking to them about it, reiterating and redefining it through prophets (for example, Isaiah 2:2-3). Sometimes they get it right (1 Kings 10:6-9, Psalms 126:1-2) but sadly these seem more like exceptions than the rule, and Israel fails in its vocation to declare God's glory throughout the earth.

But still God will not be thwarted: He makes promises about the fulfilment of the great promise, that He Himself will come and do it. Someone will come who is both fully identified with God, but also fully identified with Israel, so that Israel can be said to have done what it was called to do (Isaiah 49:6, etc.). So when Jesus says those very famous words of John 3:16 He is declaring Himself to be the fulfilment of God's great promise. Because rescue is going to come through Jesus's life, ethnic background is irrelevant, past religious or irreligious behaviours are irrelevant – all that matters is that you put your trust in what He has done for you. This is good news for “whoever believes in him” – i.e. anyone from anywhere. The gospels show us this beginning to happen – crowds are always flocking to Him because they see the blessing of God in Him and they want it. It surprises everyone that this blessing ultimately leads to what seems like the humiliation of the cross but it is there that Jesus defeats those universal enemies sin and death, thus becoming the hope of the whole world because everyone needs rescuing from them.

Jesus calls His followers to join His mission, always with that same pattern and focus on the nations (Matthew 28:19) and that's what we see happening in the book of Acts, the action moves out from Jerusalem, to the region of Judea, to the neighbouring nations, to the ends of the known world (Acts 8:8 is typical). Churches are formed wherever people put their trust in Jesus, and these become new centres from which the noise of God's goodness is broadcast (1 Thessalonians 1:8). Paul understands this as the fulfilment of God's promises in the Old Testament (Ephesians 1:9-10, 3:6-10): the nations are to be brought in so that God might be over all things once again, just as He was at the beginning. The revelation of what's to come confirms this (Revelation 7:9-10, 22:1-2).

This is why Nehemiah 12:43 is so powerful: It isn't just a poetic or cinematic image, it is God's pattern at work, a fulfilment of prophecy, and a signpost to the ultimate completion of God's promise by Christ and His Church. The joy of the church is to be heard far and wide, in every street of our city, across this land, and throughout all the

nations, that many people might come to Jesus and give their lives to Him. This is why God rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, this is why He's building King's and many churches like us today.

How do we make a noise?

## 1. Rejoice

Nehemiah gives us details about the worship service in chapter 12 not just because he's a details guy but because joyful worship matters! Psalm 98:1-4 and others link joyful worship with God's mission plan and pattern. This doesn't mean we pretend terrible things aren't happening, or that we don't weep with those who weep, but the news of salvation cannot be vetoed by anything else. You can read more about Luke's account of him wrestling with God about joy recently here

(<http://www.lukesblog.org/2015/11/how-he-responded-to-my-response.html>)

## 2. Goodness

Nehemiah's other great concern, which we see throughout the closing chapters, is that God's people in His city aren't living as they should. This really matters to the pattern we've looked at today, as Matthew 5:14-16 makes clear. When we make it clear to those around us that what we are about is loving and following Jesus, then they will hear of and experience the goodness of God through us, and they will know who to turn to when they want to hear more about Him.

We can't do it by ourselves, that's clear in Nehemiah's story and throughout the Bible. Those who do great things for God are dependent on Him, not extraordinary in themselves. God wants to work through us, giving us power to turn away from selfish and destructive behaviour. Jesus declared Himself to be the light of the world, then said that we who believe in Him are. This happens because He fills us with Himself. That's how our life becomes all about Him, and we won't be able to help telling others.

## Questions:

- You could share testimonies of how God used other people to reveal Himself to you.
- Why is it important to know the big biblical story and the pattern Luke outlined?
- Luke spoke on Sunday about how being joyful isn't always easy but is always

appropriate. What did you think about this argument, and how God spoke to him specifically when he was wrestling with this recently?

- We often say that God's love for us doesn't depend on what we do, but why does what we do matter for mission?
- With the Christmas coming up, it's a great time to invite people to events at King's that will demonstrate the good news we have to them. Who are you planning on inviting? Spend time praying for lots of accepted invitations.



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