

- Read 12:1, 22-24, 27-47

Introduction

- Climax & conclusion to the whole book:
 - conclusion to the whole rebuilding of the walls thing;
 - also possible to see here a picture of God restoring and re-establishing his people in his land after the exile... what are the characteristics of God's redeemed community? What has God managed to do with them as they "finish the story"?
- 5 main areas worth noting as we go through the passage:

Respect For All God's People (1-26)

- Lists of names of priests and Levites over three generations:
 - first returnees under Zerubbabel (1-7);
 - (the/a) subsequent generation (12-21);
 - priestly family divisions - 2 per month (1 Chronicles 24:7-19), so 24, but 2 or 3 missed out in these lists, just copying omissions, dead easy! (cf comparable list for Nehemiah's generation in 10:2-8)
- Not really any great significance to the individuals - but, marks a refusal to treat past generations as unimportant
 - so how do we respect, treat well and value all of God's people?

Consciousness of God's Purity (27-30)

- vs.27-30 mark the preparations for the actual dedication
- Particularly picked out are the practical preparations of the singers
- But perhaps more significant at this point is v.30
- **Purification:**
 - As they came to thank God for all he had done, even starting to think about Him made them conscious of his purity, and their own uncleanness
 - So, ceremonially, symbolically, they embark on a process of cleansing - probably marked in that culture by washing, by sacrifices, by fasting, etc, though we are not told the details
 - Their "cleansing" rituals don't of themselves make clean, but do mark a deep-seated consciousness of who God is, what he is like - and particularly of his holiness
- Also, interesting to note that their cleansing extended to walls - perhaps thought unclean by contact with dead bodies of those killed defending the walls before Jerusalem fell in the first place?
- Whatever, their vision of God's holiness was all encompassing as they approached him:
 - they are first drawn to God, to his protection, to his care, to his provision, to his invitation...
 - and as they come they are increasingly aware of his purity and holiness...
 - do we have this consciousness of God's purity as we draw near to him? And of the overwhelming grace poured out on the Cross in Christ?
 - the extremeness of who God is? Or have we domesticated God?

Trust in God's Care (31-43)

- Third characteristic of these redeemed, restored people of God, this re-created community of his people, is their trust in God's care (vs 31-43)
- Part of the significance of the whole concept of dedication was a giving over of the item or person so dedicated to God's ownership - it became his - and so it became, in a sense, his "responsibility" to look after it
- Not just the walls that they walked round, but also the whole community encompassed by those walls
- Note direction - from walls to God - focus is Him, not what he has given or even accomplished through them

- So, not just conscious of his purity and acting in conscious awareness of that aspect of his character, but also of his care and protection, and consciously giving the walls, and their whole community over to him - knowing they can't do it themselves
- Physical protection is perhaps main reference here - but certainly not limit:
 - how can we consciously act in such a way that we show we are dependent on God and not our own walls?
 - generosity? (giving out from our resources)
 - hospitality? (welcoming in to our security)
 - risk taking for his glory?

Celebrating God's Goodness (31-43)

- Also in these verses 31-43 is the 4th characteristic - a joyous celebration of all that God has given and of who he is
- So that note of praise right from the gathering of singers through to the exuberance of v.43!
- This is a celebration of all the ways God has guided and protected, strengthened and helped, as workers perhaps troop along bits they built, or lookup at the procession marching along above them on "their" bit of the wall!
- They rejoice, they sing, they offered "[a] great [many] sacrifices" - thank offerings where God got some, as did the priest, and so did the worshipper who, with his family (women & children of v.43) ate and partied together
- Quite a day!
- But also indicative of their knowledge of God as a God who gives joy, and who is worthy to be praised!
 - do we celebrate God's goodness enough?

Providing for God's Work (44-47)

- Final characteristic this restored people evidence is a quite natural provision for God's work
- vs.44-47 - as people gave their offerings/tithes, their zeal required that there be people appointed to organise it
- Their very generosity and obedience was the spur in getting the organisation done!
- Not just financial provision, but willingness to provide for God's work in time as well - the priests and singers followed their callings and "performed the service of their God" (v.45)
 - how are we providing for God's work?

Conclusion

- If we are, then, a community of God's people with the "Under Reconstruction" signs up outside the door, then we will - among many other things - be increasingly characterised by these five things:
 - a respect for all God's people
 - a consciousness of God's purity
 - a trust in God's care
 - a celebration God's goodness
 - a provision for God's work
- May God grant his grace and strength that these may increasingly be found among the characteristic dimensions of our life together as God's people here