

It was May 5, 1945. The end of World War II was only months away when Pastor Archie Mitchell and his wife loaded five Sunday school students into his old sedan and left the little logging town of Bly, Oregon, for a day of fishing. When they arrived at Gearhart Mountain Mitchell's wife, Elsie, got out by the creek with the children while he parked the car. Pastor Mitchell was just coming down a hill to join them when an explosion erupted, killing his wife and all five youngsters. Those six casualties became the only Americans killed in the continental United States by enemy action in World War II. They were victims of a very unusual weapon, a balloon bomb. The bomb had been carried 6,000 miles across the Pacific by a balloon that Japanese schoolgirls made from paper and paste. About 6,000 balloon bombs were launched from Japan in the winter of 1944-45 to ride the jet stream to the West Coast in a campaign to directly kill people or set fire to the Western forests or just strike fear in the hearts of the American people. Only one balloon bomb succeeded.

The balloon bomb is about the strangest weapon I've ever heard about. But, as we come to the conclusion of our study of Nehemiah I want you to consider another strange weapon that I hope you will take with you today. Before we turn to Nehemiah, let's review. We have spent several weeks examining the behavior of a man who had a big job to do. How did he accomplish this monumental task in just 52 days? We saw that he cared deeply (ch. 1), prayed expectantly (2), planned wisely (2), worked diligently (3), led courageously (4), lived blamelessly (5), trusted completely (6), finished joyfully (7-9). Nehemiah is often examined for leadership principles like these but I want you to see something more. Nehemiah was effective not because he was a great leader but because his magnificent obsession with a great God. We can be gifted, clever, resourceful and do everything right and still fail. But over and over again in the scriptures God uses the not-so-clever, not-so-resourceful to accomplish His purposes. In fact, God seems to take a great deal of satisfaction in using those who are weak to showcase His strength.

Ever since a young shepherd boy named David killed an eight-foot giant named Goliath with a sling shot we have known that any weapon will do if God has your back. If we were going to have a little pick-up basketball game this afternoon and I pulled my four guys together and you put a team together, would it matter who you chose if one of my guys was Dirk or Kobe Bryant or Labron James? If God is on your team, the weapon you use is irrelevant. That's why I want to emphasize the laser-like focus Nehemiah had on the supremacy of God. He succeeded but the glory is not his to take. The glory belongs to God. God wanted a place, a location, a landmark, that would be the focal point of His world-wide campaign to reclaim a rebellious planet. He made sure that Nehemiah was in a position of influence in a pagan kingdom so that he could appeal to the king to build the wall around the temple that would protect the worship of God for all people.

"The most crucial issue in missions is the centrality of God in the life of the church. Where people are not stunned by the greatness of God, how can they be sent with the ringing message, 'Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods!' (Ps. 96:4)? Missions is not first and ultimate: God is." Piper, *Let the Nations...* p. 14.

If you go through and look at Nehemiah's prayers you see this passion for the supremacy of God. "O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God."

Listen to this entry in Nehemiah's journal...**Nehemiah 4:14-20**... "Our God will fight for us."

As the work is completed God's people experience a revival. How can we identify a revival?

1. The workers identify themselves as the people of God...7:5ff. I was with 52,000 Rangers fans last night to witness the first World Series victory in the history of the franchise. At the first of the season I'm sure that many of those people would have said, "The Rangers are OK." Now they're huge fans. Some of you may have never identified yourself with any group of believers. When God is at work people want to be part of what He is doing through a particular group.

2. They gave of their resources to the maintaining of a witness in Jerusalem...7:66-73

3. They gathered together and requested that God's word would be read publicly...8:1-8. They even listened as the scribes explained the words they read. Their confidence in God's word was restored. William Carey is often referred to as, "the father of the modern missions movement." He once said, "When I left England, my hope of India's conversion was very strong; but amongst so many obstacles, it would die, unless upheld by God. Well, I have God, and His Word is true. Though the superstitions of the heathen were a thousand times stronger than they are, and the example of the Europeans a thousand times worse; though I were deserted by all and persecuted by all, yet my faith, fixed on the sure Word, would rise above all obstructions and overcome every trial. God's cause will triumph." William Carey

4. They obeyed God's word by declaring a holiday that had been long forgotten...8:13-18

5. They confessed their sins and worshiped the Lord...9. This is the real test of whether God is at work. A generation before this the parents of these same people gathered for a day of prayer and fasting as King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon was poised to attack the Southern Kingdom and carry them off into captivity. But something was different then. They prayed for deliverance but they did not repent. They even rejected Jeremiah's appeal to them. What a valuable lesson to us; don't expect God to deliver you if you are unwilling to repent. We've all cried out to God to relieve the painful consequences of our sin. But God knows that unless we repent, change our mind about our sin, turn and go the other direction, there will be no lasting change.

Nehemiah 8:9 describes the sound of repentance...weeping. Then he says, "The joy of the Lord is your strength." There it is, one of the most effective weapons known to man. Joy. Not gun powder, dynamite, sharp steel; not fear or intimidation or manipulation; not ships or tanks or airplanes. Joy. The greater our knowledge of God the greater our joy, the greater our joy, the greater our strength, the greater our strength the greater our effectiveness in this spiritual war.

I can't do what Nehemiah did. I can't build a wall around Jerusalem in 52 days. My specific mission is not the same as his. But at a deeper level our mission is the mission of Nehemiah. Our unchanging mission is to communicate and demonstrate a passion for the supremacy of God for the joy of all people. Because the joy of the Lord is our strength.

So how do I get this joy? I mean there are a lot of reasons to be unhappy these days. So let's separate joy from happiness. Happiness is dependent on life's circumstances. Joy is independent of circumstances. In fact, joy often surfaces best in an atmosphere of affliction. Happiness is the absence of hardship. Joy proves the presence of the Holy Spirit. Joy is the alarm that goes off in my life when God's Spirit is present. It was one of the most powerful weapons the early church had.

Joy is a gift Jesus gives to His followers. **John 15:11** <sup>11</sup> "These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full.

Jesus even prays for us to be full of joy. **John 17:13** <sup>13</sup> "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.

Joy was such a powerful weapon for the early Christians that they overcame the power of darkness by the joy of obedience.

**Acts 13:47-52** "For so the Lord has commanded us, 'I HAVE PLACED YOU AS A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, THAT YOU MAY BRING SALVATION TO THE END OF THE EARTH.'" <sup>48</sup> When the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of

the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. <sup>49</sup> And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region. <sup>50</sup> But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and

Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. <sup>51</sup> But they shook off the dust of their feet *in*

*protest* against them and went to Iconium. <sup>52</sup> **And the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.**

I want you to see a brief video of our last mission to Sudan. Then I want to pray for our Sudan team as they prepare to go again. But first, I want to finish the story of Pastor Archie Mitchell. After losing his wife in the balloon bomb explosion, Pastor Mitchell remarried. His second wife, Betty, said that in the aftermath of the explosion, "He never once showed bitterness at all towards the government, or the military, or the Japanese." In fact, two years after the balloon bomb tragedy, the Mitchells went to Vietnam as missionaries. They served together in a leper colony until Archie Mitchell was taken prisoner by the Viet Cong in 1962 and never seen again. What the VC didn't know is that they took a man who was well-armed. From the reports I read I have no doubt that while in captivity Archie Mitchell was victorious. He demonstrated a passion for the supremacy of God, he demonstrated joy in the midst of suffering, and the strength of his testimony led to the transformation of countless souls in Viet Nam. I can't prove it but some day, we are going to get a full report. And we will rejoice.