

Unwavering Resolve

Worship God

Nehemiah 12:27-43

July 26, 2026

Introduction

If you have lived in Athens for any length of time, you know what happens on six or seven Saturdays every fall. About 93,000 people put on the same colors, drive from every direction, park in every available field, unfold tailgate tents, fire up grills, and by kickoff they have crammed themselves into Sanford Stadium. *(Slide - Sanford Stadium image)*

They stand for the national anthem. They stand for the alma mater. They stand when the team runs onto the field. They stand when their team scores. They stand when their team stops the other team on third down. They sing "Glory, Glory to Old Georgia" at the top of their lungs. They pay eye-watering sums for season tickets, parking passes, food, hats, and shirts. They rearrange their calendars, skip weddings, and negotiate custody agreements around the schedule. They drive four hours home in the dark after the game and show up at work Monday morning still hoarse from the noise. And nobody watching this thinks it is strange.

I want you to place yourself there in your mind for a moment this morning because I want us to see something the Bible sees clearly and our culture sees only occasionally. **What college football fans do on Saturday is a form of worship.** Not the highest form. Not the truest form. But by definition, it is worship.

Here is that definition. *(Slide) Worship is the joyful ascription of glory through dedication and sacrifice.*

On any given fall Saturday, 93,000 people ascribe glory to Georgia football (standing, singing, shouting), dedicate themselves to it (rearranged calendars, season tickets, hours of tailgating), and sacrifice for it (money, sleep, comfort, sometimes relationships), all with unmistakable joy.

Now, before you groan and roll your eyes at me, **No, cheering is not wrong.** Cheering is a gift. God made you with the capacity for full-throated joy, and a Saturday in Sanford Stadium is one of the smaller places that capacity gets exercised. The problem is never the cheering. **The problem is when the cheering at the stadium is more real, more costly, and more joyful than it is for who God is and what He has done.**

Body

Worship is something that Christians and non-Christians do. It is something that religious and irreligious people do. It's actually what all human beings were made to do. And so we're all worshippers all the time. The only difference is who or what or how we worship.

Who or What do we Worship?

- **(Slide) Sometimes we worship a person.**
 - You can tell your glory is going to a person when their opinion is YOUR weather report for the day. When their approval is YOUR peace. When their mood is YOUR mood.
 - You know you are dedicated to them when you give obsessive attention to what they think, need, want, and prefer. You adjust your life around the possibility of their pleasure.
 - And what you sacrifice in this worship is your other relationships and your identity. You and every relationship you have reorients around this person. That's the sacrifice.
- **(Slide) Sometimes we worship a relationship** (which is different from a person).
 - You are glorifying a relationship when you find yourself fantasizing about the right person, the right proposal, the right wedding.
 - Dedication to a relationship manifests itself in the form of the search, or the swiping left or right, the prioritizing last-minute opportunities looks like the search, the app-swiping, or the endless dissection of every relationship with friends equally invested in the same outcome.
 - And what you sacrifice in the worship of a relationship is contentment in the season God has you in. You sacrifice present friendships and family. You sacrifice the freedom of an unhurried life.
- **(Slide) Sometimes we worship an ideology.**
 - Glory goes to the cause. The candidate. The movement. The verdict vindicating your side.
 - Dedication in the worship of an ideology looks like hours of news, podcasts, social media, arguments with strangers, and the constant litmus-testing of other people to see where they stand on the issues.
 - And what you sacrifice in the worship of an ideology is friendships with people who may live right next door to you but see the world differently than you. You sacrifice nuance. You sacrifice charity. You sacrifice the capacity to see anything the other side sees.
- **(Slide) Sometimes we worship our image.**
 - You give glory to image through the selfies, the filters, and the compliments. Every time someone says, "you look great," you give image glory.

- Dedication to the worship of an image looks like the gym schedule, the wardrobe rotation, the skincare routine, the haircut cadence, the teeth whitening, the supplements, and the editing or filtering of photos taken for the public.
- The sacrifices we make in worship to image are many. Our time. Our money, our peace. Our willingness to be seen and known and loved as you are.

On and on we could go. Control. Help. Dependence. Independence. Work. Achievement. Possessions. Religion. Race. Nationality. Suffering. All of these and more are things that we worship. We ascribe glory to them through dedication and sacrifice, hoping they will give us JOY. **(Title Slide)**

Genuine Worship of God

The issue is not THAT we worship. The issue is WHAT or WHO we worship. And what we see in Nehemiah 12 today is the same behavior (glory, dedication, sacrifice), only it's directed at God, who is the only One worthy and the only source of true joy for us. Look with me.

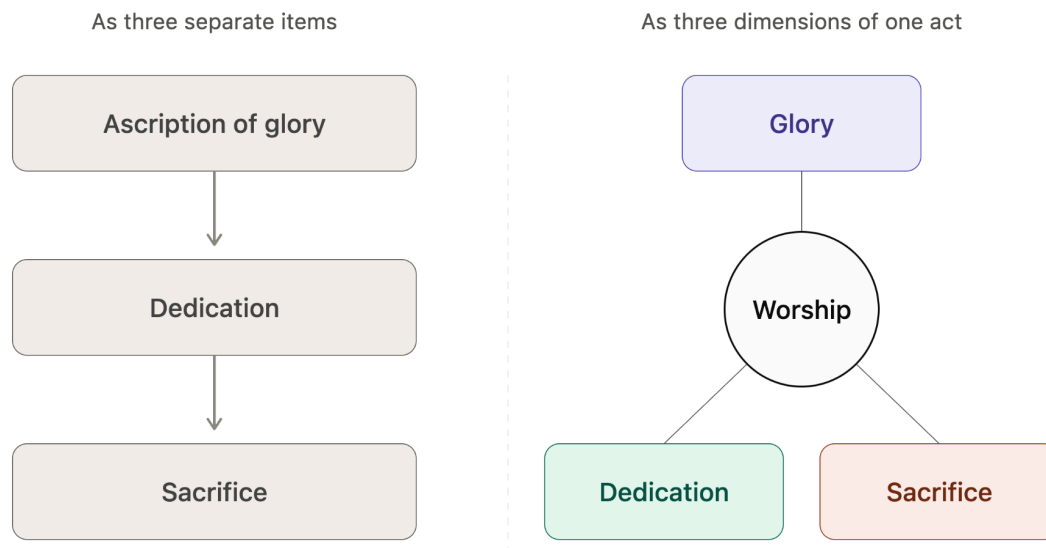
Ascribing glory to God is woven throughout the entire passage. **(Slide) Verse 27** names the tools: **"thanksgiving and singing accompanied by cymbals, harps, and lyres."** **Verse 31** calls the two groups **"processions that gave thanks."** And **verse 43** crowns it all: **"they rejoiced because God had given them great joy... and the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away."** God gave the joy. God is the source. God is the object. The glory ascribed in Nehemiah 12 has one direction and one target, and his name is the LORD.

Dedication is the frame of the whole passage. **(Slide) Verse 27** opens with the phrase **"the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem"** and names it again in the same verse as **"the joyous dedication."** Everything else in these seventeen verses sits under that heading. **Verses 31 through 42** record the dedication itself, two great processions walking the entire perimeter of what had been built. They walked the whole wall and handed it to God.

(Slide) Sacrifice is explicit in verse 43. "On that day they offered great sacrifices." These sacrifices were substantial animals from their flocks and herds, given up to God because God was worth the cost. But sacrifice runs through the whole passage under the surface too. **Verses 27 through 29** tell us the Levites and singers were gathered from surrounding villages. Getting them to Jerusalem cost travel, time, and coordination. **Verse 30** describes ritual purification, which under Levitical law required its own offerings and washings. And the processions themselves in **verses 31 through 42** were hours of hard walking with instruments in hand along the top of a wall they had spent months rebuilding under threat. Sweat is a form of sacrifice too.

So, dedication, glory, and sacrifice. **(Slide - Image, see below)** But notice what the passage does not do. **It does not treat ascription of glory, dedication, and sacrifice as three separate activities happening in sequence.** like items on a Sunday morning program. It treats them as three dimensions of one act. Verse 43 pulls all three into a single sentence. They

offered great sacrifices. They rejoiced. God had given them great joy at the dedication. **The three elements fuse into one moment of true worship, offered to the true God.**



Now let's go back to the different things we worship. The person, the relationship, the ideology, the image, and every other option on the list has one thing in common. ***Every one of them collapses under the fused weight of glory, dedication, and sacrifice.*** The person leaves or disappoints. The relationship arrives and reveals another sinner. The ideology wins and does not deliver the kingdom. The image ages. You keep worshiping, but the god keeps failing. And when the god fails, the joy you were counting on to make sense of your dedication and sacrifice turns out to be for naught.

Only One Being in the universe bears the weight of these three things fused together and give us the joy we were made for in return. The God of Israel does not fade with time, does not disappoint when tested, does not shrink under the demand, and does not run out of glory to receive or joy to give. When his people offered the fused worship of glory, dedication, and sacrifice, he gave back "great joy" so loud it was heard far away. That is what a worthy God does with the worship of his people. He returns joy proportional to his own worth, and his worth is infinite.

So the question is not whether you will worship this week. You will. The question is not even whether you will fuse glory, dedication, and sacrifice into one act. You will do that too, because that is how worship works. The question is (to quote Elijah), **(Slide) How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him. If Baal is god, follow him.** Give your worship to the thing that will bear its weight.

Conclusion/Application

So here's what I want us to do this morning. (Slides as I say them) I want us to first recognize that none of the other things that we worship can give us true joy.

- If you worship a person, the joy is the moment they are happy with you. The look, the words, the touches, the message. Then the person is unhappy. Or leaves. Or maybe you finally discover that they really are a person with the same limitations as everyone else, incapable of being your world. Worshiping a person always fails, because no human being was designed to bear the weight of another human being's ultimate. Your worship crushed the person you were worshiping, and joy is gone.
- If you worship a relationship, the joy is the giddy high of falling in love or having the certainty this is the one. It's the engagement ring. The wedding planning. **Then Mr. or Ms. Right turns out to be Mr. or Ms. Sinner.** The person you were waiting to save you needs saving. So then you have two people, neither capable of bearing the weight of the other's worship, sharing a house and a bank account and a set of expectations no human meets. You would be surprised at the number of marital problems rooted here.
- When you worship an ideology, you will sometimes gain temporary joy with the thrill of the win. The satisfaction of the map being more blue than red or red than blue. Then your side loses. Or your side wins and it turns out winning did not fix what you were promised it would fix. Or the leader you trusted collapses. Or you look up and realize the ideology has hollowed you out into a person you no longer recognize. Joy is quickly gone and replaced with vengeance.
- Worshiping the god of image will give you temporary joy with the ping of the compliment. The likes. The views. The comments. But eventually all of that breaks down. You may get on the wrong side of your followers, or age finally catches up to you, and joy slows to a trickle. And you find you have spent your life curating a version of yourself no one was ever going to love as much as they would have loved the real you.

(Title Slide) Control. Help. Dependence. Independence. Work. Achievement. Possessions. Religion. Race. Nationality. Suffering. **We would all do well this week to ask the Lord to reveal to us those people and things to which we are ascribing glory through dedication and service in search of joy, and that He would reveal to us before it's too late how those idols fall short.**

Have you ever come here on a Sunday morning for worship ... stood to sing, but barely sing? Have you stood while we prayed, but not really prayed alongside? Have you sat patiently through a message, but left without conviction, repentance, and life change? I have done that many, many times in my lifetime. I have come to worship God with God's people and not worshiped. And what I've come to see is that when that happens, it's because some other alternative or counterfeit god has been getting my glory, dedication, and sacrifice all week.

I wonder how often we show up here on Sunday morning tired from a week of ascribing glory to gods that never gave us the joy they promised, and then we wonder why the songs feel flat and the sermon feels distant? The problem is not the songs. The problem is not the sermon. The problem is that we have been worshiping all week, and it was not here, and it was not him. So how can God ever get the glory so that we can have real joy?

(Slide) The good news of the gospel is that Jesus is the true worshiper. The worship you and I have never once offered fully, he offered perfectly, in our place, for our sake.

- **His ascription of glory was perfect.** In John 17, on the night before he died, he prayed, "Father, I have glorified you on the earth by completing the work you gave me to do." No other human being has ever ended a life with that sentence. Jesus is the only one whose glory ascribed to the Father was pure, undivided, and complete.
- **His dedication was total.** He set himself apart from eternity past for the work of our redemption, and in the garden he prayed, "not my will but yours be done," and he meant it all the way to the cross. He walked the wall we could never walk. He handed his life to the Father the way the people of Jerusalem handed the wall to God, and he did not come down.
- **His sacrifice was great.** Not a bull. Not a goat. Not a lamb from the flock. Himself. Once for all. The great sacrifice of verse 43 was only the shadow. The body was Jesus, hanging on a Roman cross outside the city, absorbing the judgment that our counterfeit worship deserved.
- **And his joy was complete.** Hebrews 12:2 tells us that "for the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame," a joy rooted not in his circumstances but in the finished work of redemption and the eternal delight of his Father, a joy he now shares with everyone united to him by faith.

If you belong to him, his worship counts for you.

His dedication is your dedication.

His sacrifice is your sacrifice.

His glory ascribed to the Father is credited to your account.

When the Father looks at you, he sees the perfect fused worship of his Son offered in your place, and he receives you as beloved.

Which changes everything about the way you walk into and out of this room. You do not have to worship your way into God's favor. You already have it in Christ.

You do not have to keep ascribing glory to the counterfeit gods hoping this time they deliver joy. You have been set free from the exhausting cycle of glory, dedication, and sacrifice offered to gods who cannot bear the weight. And you have been set free to worship the one who can.

So worship God. (Slide)

- Bring him your glory, because he alone is worthy of it.
- Bring him your dedication, because he alone will not waste it.
- Bring him your living sacrifice, because he has already offered the sacrifice that makes yours acceptable.

(Slide) And receive from him the joy that he alone gives, the joy the people of Jerusalem tasted on the wall that day, the joy that the world outside these doors is still waiting to hear.

May the sound of our worship be heard far away this morning. Not because we have manufactured it. But because the true God has given it to us in his Son.

Let us pray.

(Title Slide)