

Finishing Well

Lesson #21 The Joy of the Lord Is Your Strength May 24, 2023

Fall Feasts: Trumpets, Tishri 1 Yom Kippur, Tishri 10 Tabernacles, Tishri 15-21

Themes of 7th month: Gather, judgment, afflict your soul, repentance, rebuild, cleansing, restoration, renewal, revive, refreshing, rejoicing

Keys For Revival: Strong emphasis on God's Word

Devoted teachers of God's Word are restored to leadership

Reverence for God's Word

People must understand God's Word

Ezra brought the book of the Law. He opened the book. He explained the book.

At the Water Gate in Jerusalem there was no eloquent preaching, no sensational sermon.

Ezra preached straight from the Scriptures, reading for hours on end. As the people stood and listened to God's Word, they grew excited as the Word "came alive" in them.

Neh. 8:18 Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the book of the Law of God.

I Thess. 2:13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

- True revival can never take place without an all-consuming hunger for God's Word.
- Even the fieriest preacher cannot stir up a complacent congregation if they're not hungry to hear God's truth.

Neh. 8:10 The Joy of the Lord is your strength. Is The Joy Of The Lord My Strength?

When life is simple and sweet, we are quick to affirm without understanding, because surely "yes" must be the right answer.

But what about when spiritual complacency sticks to every inch of you?

Or when you've allowed sin to overtake you for weeks, months — even years?

- When the word *strength* mocks you?
- When the joy of the Lord feels impossible, would there be evidence against you at a trial that the joy of the Lord is NOT your strength?

Failure or lack of faith can be the very thing that forces us to squarely confront this question.

Ps. 119:162 I rejoice at Your Word as one who finds great treasure.

Like new treasure hiding in an old package, the answer hides in plain sight in Nehemiah 8, waiting to be discovered.

Note: At the Water Gate revival, the people needed to first understand God's Word.

Understanding birthed rejoicing which led to obedience.

God's Word affects: my mind, emotions, will = affects my SOUL [being saved]

Neh. 8:9-10 "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn nor weep. Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Neh. 8:11-12 So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved." The people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

Note sequence: Conviction Cleansing Celebration

Joy and Strength Through Restoration

Ezra was speaking to the remnant of Israel who had returned to Judah to rebuild the city and its Temple.

A. Marriage in Crisis

When Abraham's descendants became slaves in Egypt, God rescued them and made a covenant with His people at Mt. Sinai.

Ex. 19:4-6 Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:

⁶ And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

- Jehovah God = Husband Israel = Wife of God

Israel's Problem: Rejected their covenant "husband" for worthless lovers = spiritual adultery.

- ❖ After centuries of God's mercy, patience, pleading and warning, God sent His wife away.
- ❖ Exile: severe in its brutality
- ❖ Exile: It burned into the minds and identity of the people.
- ❖ Who were they? No land; no temple? How do they relate to God? Special relationship?

Rebuilding Jerusalem: Sacred city had been utterly laid to waste.

Nehemiah gathered the people and Ezra the scribe read to them from God's book.

Neh. 8:8 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. [understood with their mind]

B. Renewing Vows In The Rubble Of Life

God's relationship with His people is much like a marriage, which makes the covenant document between Him and them much like vows. Sacred promises, made in love. Deep commitments.

Gathered to hear again all the promises made centuries before. Gathered to hear the commitments that constituted their identity as a people, their relationship to their God.

The words are read out clearly, to be understood.

Imagine a congregation of ~50,000 that stands and listens to the Word of God for 5-6 hours straight. The people, starved for the Word, hungrily listen to stories of creation, of Noah and the ark, of Abraham and Sarah, of Joseph and his brothers, of the Egyptian captivity, of Miriam and Moses, of the Ten Commandments, the covenant at Mt. Sinai and God's instructions for creating a community.

- They realize what is before their eyes is the destruction *they* caused — a city still barely rebuilt.
- They realize all the ways they and their ancestors had broken — sometimes with glee — every last one of those vows.
- They had been wretchedly unfaithful. There they are, standing in a beautiful dress as it were. They feel crushed under the weight of their infidelity. How could they not weep?
- Great sorrow and weeping when they heard God's Word and realized how far they had strayed from its teaching.

Neh. 8:9b This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep.

For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.

- People's first response was conviction [conscious of their own failure and sin], grief > wept over their sins. They were cut to the heart and wept because the Word was personal to them and spoke directly into their hearts. [Rhema]

Rom. 3:20 for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

The Israelites' initial unraveling mirrors how we feel when we've failed Christ again, and again, and again. "Our shame echoes in our hearts when we realize we've been too tired or too busy for God to get our true attention in a good long while, like He's some vacation scrapbook we keep half complete in the basement."

C. God's Response To His Grief-stricken and ashamed "Wife"

- Their God is still committed to His promises because of His love for her.
- This was God's posture toward His weeping people.
- Nehemiah tells them twice not to weep for "this day is holy to the Lord" [Neh. 8:9-10]

The Levites calm them a third time with that same phrase, "this day is holy" [Neh. 8:11]

- It's not "the day of the Lord," that future time of final judgment.
- It is this day in their history. The day the exiles gathered as a returned people.
- The day God reaffirmed to them that they were still His chosen people, and He was still their God.

Truth: That is a joy that could impart strength. God declared through his law and his leaders that He loved and delighted in His people. He was fully aware of what had transpired, but his commitment was even more steadfast. [Jer. 31:3]

- It is a time of restoration, not only of the ruined city, but of obedience to God's Law.
- Rejoice and celebrate because of the restoration. [Neh. 8:9-12]

I. A Joy Based upon Forgiveness

No matter what I have done, there is absolute acceptance before God by the death of His Son. Nehemiah could have agreed with their self-condemnation, but he said to stop grieving.

God's word was not for condemning them, but for reconciling them to God.

Forgiveness is not something I earn. It is something I accept as a gift.

Rom. 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

- After confession and forgiveness, God wants to replace the grief and sorrow with holy gladness and joy.

In Corinth, a brother committed an act of immorality. The Church disciplined the erring brother with disfellowship. That action caused him to realize the wickedness of his behavior.

He sorrowed over his sin. In II Cor. 2:6-7,11, Paul instructs the congregation to accept back the repentant brother and comfort him before his sorrow became destructive:

"Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.... in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan;

for we are not ignorant of his schemes."

Satan relishes a Christian who is in despair over their sins. When a Christian lacks spiritual comfort and joy, the Deceiver rejoices because that Christian is under Satan's thumb.

Satan, "the accuser of the brethren" [Rev. 12:10], strives to snatch peace and joy from our souls. He whispers "poison and lies" into our spiritual ears.

Truth: Satan uses my spirit of brokenness: It's no use. Forget it. You're hopeless.

God is not pleased with you and He never will be. You are a spiritual loser.

You have screwed-up so many times, He is not going to continue to forgive you.

When God forgives, He forgets and casts all our sins into the depths of the sea.

We should never let Satan drag up before our minds that which God put away forever.

Truth: True conviction from the Holy Spirit will bring us to the end of our own strength to discover infinite resources in Jesus Christ.

I need His strength that is enduring, not just a little increase in power for a moment, but real stamina that will endure all my life. He doesn't just give me what I need; Jesus Is All I Need.

Joy of the Lord is the power that produces a successful, victorious, fruit-bearing Christian.

II. A Joy Dependent Upon Obedience - NOT dependent upon successful Christian service

The Jews still had work to do in Jerusalem and they needed the joy of the Lord to give them the strength to do it.

Neh. 8:14-17 And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwelt in booths in the feast of the seventh month: ¹⁵ And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written. ¹⁶ So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths,...¹⁷ So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so.

And there was very great gladness.

Neh 8:18 Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

- For 7 days they lived in booths made of branches.
- They looked back remembering the nation's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, when the people were homeless and lived in temporary shelters.
- They also looked around at the harvest blessings from God.
- They looked ahead to the glorious Kingdom God promised His people.

When they understood God's Word, they rejoiced in His Word and were ready to obey His Word. Obedience brought great blessings and encouragement.

Luke 11:28 But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and obey it.

- Blessed = makairos = fully satisfied independent of circumstances

III. A Joy that is Independent of our Circumstances

NO experience in my life can touch me except by God's permission.

Heb. 12:1-2 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, ² Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher [founder & perfecter] of our faith; who for the JOY that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- The secret of His joy > doing what the Father had sent Him to do.
- Bringing many sons to glory [Heb. 2:10]; His future kingdom [Ps. 2]

Consider: The one thing that matters in any type of service: You are doing the will of God and are obedient to His Word in the power of His Spirit. The joy of the Lord is the gladness of heart that comes from knowing God, abiding in Christ, and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Testing is woven into the pattern of EVERY Christian's life.

It is part of the will of God. Do not seek to "get out of it."

Whatever God permits in my life, He will bestow POWER to see me through.

Question: WHAT do you want me to learn? How can I find JOY in the midst of trials?

James 1:2-4 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance [endurance]. But let perseverance finish its work [perfect work] so that you may be mature [perfect] and complete, not lacking anything."

This is the very first thing James writes in his letter after his salutation. Many Christians think once they've made that decision for Christ that everything will fall into place and life will be that proverbial bowl of cherries. When trials and tough times come upon them or continue, they begin to question, "why?" Wondering how they could possibly endure horrible circumstances and consider it joy. Look at things from a different perspective!

Consider or Count: Think Things Through; Look At It From A Different Mindset;

Make A Decision After Weighing the Facts & Circumstances

Phillips Translation: When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends!

Realize that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance.

Sequence: Various trials to test my faith > Produces perseverance or endurance > My maturity
Paul's sequence in Rom. 5:3-5 Rejoice in my afflictions which produce endurance which produces proven character which produces hope.

Endurance: ability to undergo a period of stress & strain with the inner strength of Jesus Christ; look squarely in the face of discouraging circumstances without despair;

Despair does not promote growth. Despair does not promote transformation. Despair does not promote thanksgiving, praise, and worship, Despair knows no victory over temptation and trial.

Endurance: I act as though it is already done though yet unseen.

Adverse Circumstances: Instead Of Hindering Our Faith, Can Actually Enhance Our Joy.

Paul and Silas knew adversity as they sat with their feet in the stocks in a Philippian jail cell.

Their legal rights had been violated. They had been arrested without cause and beaten without a trial. At midnight, they sang—loudly—the praises of the Lord they were serving [Acts 16:25].

The apostles in Jerusalem were arrested—twice—and ordered not to preach in Jesus' name.

The second time they faced the court, they were beaten. Unfazed, they returned home

"rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" and ready to preach some more [Acts 5:41-42].

Spurgeon: You look at the weather-beaten sailor, the man who is at home on the sea. He has a bronzed face and mahogany-colored flesh. He looks as tough as heart of oak and as hardy as if he were made of iron. How different from us poor landmen. How did the man become so accustomed to hardships, so able to breast the storm, so that he does not care whether the wind blows south-west or north-west? He can go out to sea in any kind of weather. He has his sea legs on. How did he come to this strength? By doing business in great waters. He could not have become a hardy seaman by tarrying on shore. Now, trials work in the saints that spiritual hardihood which cannot be learned in ease. You may go to school forever, but you cannot learn endurance there. You may color your cheeks with paint, but you cannot give them that ingrained brown which comes of stormy seas and howling winds.

To reach that condition of firm endurance and sacred hardihood is worth all the expense of all the heaped-up troubles that ever come upon us from above or from beneath. When trials work patience, we are incalculably enriched. The Lord gives us more of this choice grace.

As Peter's fish had the money in its mouth, so does sanctified trials have spiritual riches for those who endure them graciously.

Sooner or later, the truth will be that God is now exercising his child, *his consecrated Child*, in the ways of adult godliness so their powers of resistance might grow greater,

"You can consider each trial joy, you can greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory even when you feel like you are face-first in the mud puddle. You can endure whatever circumstances are making you quake in your boots right now. If you have been saved through faith in Jesus Christ—you have all you need. Grab onto God's joy. May we all remember to thank God for the thorns in our life, so that He may turn our sorrow into joy."

Result: This JOY can enable me to sing in the night - just like Paul & Silas.

Praise: Even in the midst of my heartbreak, there is a JOY deep in my heart that NOTHING on earth can take away.

Truth: I can't "work up" this JOY. It is a fruit of the Spirit imparted to me when I am filled with the Holy Spirit. "It is safely nestled in between love and peace." Let Him fill you and the joy will be as natural as breathing. The JOY of the LORD reveals itself to others.

Peter Tackles The Subject Of Joy Through Trials.

I Peter 1:6 In THIS you Greatly Rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, Question: What is THIS to greatly rejoice in?

THIS: I Pet. 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

I Pet. 1:6-9 In THIS you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ⁸ and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹ obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

God's Word Speaks:

Neh. 8:12 Mind They now understood the words that had been made known to them.

Neh. 8:9 Heart For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law

Neh. 8:16 Will The people went out and brought back branches and built themselves booths

My whole being must be captive to God's truth.

Nehemiah 8 describes 3 basic responses [3 parts of my soul]:

Understanding the Word my mind Neh. 8:1-8

Rejoicing in the Word my heart; emotions Neh. 8:9-12

Obeying the Word my will Neh. 8:13-18

I Thess. 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 20:32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.