

**I. Introduction:**

- A. Our text this evening are the famous words of **verse 10** – *“The joy of the Lord is your strength.”*
  - 1. Let me begin with a warning, I run the risk of making a few people slightly angry with me.
  - 2. How can I anger people by talking about joy? By destroying their misconceptions.
  - 3. In our English Bibles we read, *“The joy of the Lord is your strength.”*
  - 4. While that is a perfectly acceptable translation, we usually read those words with our own definitions in mind, but our definitions and ideas might be different from the Lord’s.
  - 5. As I mentioned last Sunday, what Nehemiah said that day was more literally – *“the joy, which comes from God, is your stronghold.”*
- B. Since I gave you my introduction to this statement Sunday morning, you can expect me to be brief tonight.

**II. Let’s start with the context – always a good place to start in any Bible study.**

- A. For six hours Ezra, with the help of his staff, had been reading and explaining some major part of God’s Word.
  - 1. They read from Moses’ Law.
  - 2. Considering the fact that this was the **Feast of Trumpets**, and the next few days were leading up to the **Day of Atonement**, I believe what was being read was **not Genesis** or chapters from the history of Israel.
  - 3. And when we see the people’s reaction, I am even more convinced, that these were the laws and statutes which God commanded Israel.
  - 4. Notice **verse 1** once again, *“and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had **COMMANDED** to Israel.”*
  - 5. *“**Commanded to Israel**”* – not *“revealed to Israel,”* or *“explained to Israel”* – *“**commanded.**”*
- B. There were many hundreds of people that day who were brought under conviction by the Holy Spirit.
  - 1. *“The people wept, when they heard the words of the law.”*
  - 2. The people *“grieved”* and were *“sorry”* – which is the same Hebrew word in **verses 10** and **11**.
  - 3. Then Nehemiah, seeing this grief, gave them those precious words, *“The joy of the Lord is your strength.”*
  - 4. But what Nehemiah’s said didn’t stand alone; it came within its own context.

**III. Nehemiah’s reply.**

- A. *“Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”*
- B. I said Sunday that what we have described here is a preaching service.
  - 1. I also said that there were no sacrifices.
  - 2. Of course, you saw my mistake, but kindly refrained from correcting me, hoping that the Holy Spirit would. And He did.
  - 3. When Nehemiah saw the sincere sorrow and brokenness the people, probably with a nod from Ezra, he led the people north, out of the City of David and through the district called *“Opheh”* up to the rebuilt temple.
  - 4. There they offered sin and trespass offerings to the Lord, followed apparently by abundant peace offerings.
  - 5. Once sin has been covered with the proper sacrificial blood, the remains of the peace offerings could become food for feasts and celebration – **for joy**.
  - 6. That is supposed to be a picture of the Christian life.
- C. Keep in mind that this was *“the **FEAST** of Trumpets.”*
  - 1. **Numbers 29:1** – *“And in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work: it is a day of blowing the trumpets unto you.”*
    - a. *And ye shall offer a burnt offering for a sweet savour unto the LORD; one young bullock, one ram, and seven lambs of the first year without blemish:*

- b. *And their meat offering shall be of flour mingled with oil, three tenth deals for a bullock, and two tenth deals for a ram, And one tenth deal for one lamb, throughout the seven lambs:*
  - c. *And one kid of the goats for a sin offering, to make an atonement for you:*
  - d. *Beside the burnt offering of the month, and his meat offering, and the daily burnt offering, and his meat offering, and their drink offerings, according unto their manner, for a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD."*
2. Nehemiah and the others essentially said, *"In the light of your conviction for sin, offer the sacrifices of repentance to God which He has proscribed.*
- a. *Then enjoy the results of your sacrifices, and share the blessings of those sacrifices.*
  - b. *In so doing, you will find that the joy of the Lord is your strength."*
- D. One of the pleasures of Bible study is the discovery of the treasures which God has hidden for us to find.
1. For example, I pointed out Sunday that the word *"strength"* doesn't mean *"vitality"* or *"power."*
    - a. *It isn't* speaking about our **ability to stand** against an enemy – either **offensively** or **defensively**.
    - b. It isn't **David** fighting Goliath or **Samson** in the temple of Dagon.
    - c. Rather it is **Elijah** and his **servant**, surrounded by the strength of an invisible army of the angelic host.
  2. This is talking about what comes as a **result of strength** – as in the **safety** of a **fortress** or **stronghold**.
  3. *"The joy of the Lord is your (place of) strength."*
  4. Also in my study I learned that the word *"joy"* is not the one which is common to the Old Testament.
    - a. It is used only twice – here and in **I Chronicles 16:27** – where God again shows His love of playing with words.
    - b. *"Glory and honour are in (God's) presence; strength and GLADNESS are in his place."*
    - c. *"Gladness"* is the same word as the *"joy"* in our verse, and in **Chronicles** it is tied to a different word for *"strength."*

#### IV. *"The joy of the Lord is your (place of) strength."*

- A. Notice that Nehemiah **pointed to the Lord** and **His joy**.
1. He didn't begin to sing the ditty from the oldies radio station –
  2. *"Here's a little song I wrote; You might want to sing it note for note; Don't worry, be happy. In every life we have some trouble; But when you worry you make it double; Don't worry, be happy."*
  3. Nehemiah didn't turn to the books of the **psychologists**, telling people that if they forced themselves to be happy they'd feel better.
  4. He didn't quote any **physiologists**, saying that laughter is great medicine.
  5. And this is not the **British idea** of a *"stiff upper lip"* in the face of adversity.
  6. This is not a **human** emotion at all.
- B. This is *"the joy of the LORD"* – and it comes from Jehovah Himself – it is a gift of grace.
1. It is a spiritual emotion, and as such, it has its source in the Lord.
  2. Yes, it has to be appropriated, as we see Nehemiah exhorting people to do.
  3. The Lord isn't going to dump it on us whether we like it or not.
  4. We need to grab it – or perhaps more appropriately – to enter into it.
  5. And how people do that?
- C. Picture a fortress with thick walls, & turrets at every corner, manned by angels with the weapons of heaven.
1. The walls are too high to scale, and too thick and hard to penetrate.
  2. There are no windows for the enemy to break through. There are no weaknesses. It is impregnable.
  3. But while you are making your survey, you also see that there is no ordinary door for the enemy to break down. In fact there is no ordinary doorway for even you to enter.

4. There is just *“the eye of a needle”* – a tiny passage way, so small that unless someone is on his knees there is no way to get inside.
5. **These people** of Jerusalem were **able to enter** this place of security and to **experience its joy**, because they were already on their faces before the Lord in repentance for their sins.
6. It is only with humility and repentance anyone can enjoy this kind of Heavenly joy.

#### V. *“The joy of the Lord is your (place of) strength.”*

- A. From what did they need protection?
  1. What does the context suggest?
  2. Why were they grief-stricken in the first place; what had caused their sorrow?
  3. Wasn't it because of the Law of God?
  
- B. These folk, and in fact, every other human being in the world, need to be protected from the wrath of God.
  1. *“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”*
  2. *“And the wages of (that) sin is death.”*
  3. God's death angel is constantly stalking the people of this earth.
  
- C. But the joy of the Lord's salvation through Christ is the humble believer's strength – his stronghold.
  1. When the God-proscribed blood is properly applied to Mercy Seat, covering the sins of the people....
  2. When the atonement has been made, satisfying the demands of the Law....
  3. There is joy – joy unspeakable and full of glory to God.
  
- D. As people redeemed, **we should never forget** the *“hole from whence we were digged”* and filthy *“rock from when we were hewn.”*
  1. But every child of God should live in the joy that comes with Christ's salvation.
  2. It is unlike any earthly joy; it is not of human invention or even of religious manufacture.
  3. It is God's gift – the joy of the Lord.
  
- E. Not only is the joy of the Lord our **protection** from **the Law**, but also from **reproach**.
  1. When Satan comes again for the hundredth time, accusing us of sin, we can flee to that rock which is higher than ourselves and once again be enveloped with the joy of God's salvation.
  2. Satan cannot touch us unless we leave ourselves exposed.
  3. Of course, the Devil will use every trick in his book to keep God's people from freely serving their Saviour.
  4. Among his weapons, he will use **guilt** and **shame**.
  5. And generally speaking, it is the more godly soul, who is more likely to experience that kind of attack.
  6. The more godly the individual, the more rotten he will feel about sin.
  7. But we do not have to be dragged down. We can retreat into the fortress of joy in Christ Jesus.
  
- F. The **fear of man** can be a dangerous Satanic weapon, but any fear can be overcome with the right kind of joy.
  1. Looking around us, we can find plenty to make us worry – if we choose.
  2. Don't fall into **slough of despond** or the **pit of despair**, return to the Lord's tower of strength, and rejoice with David.
  3. **Psalm 52** – *“Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness of God endureth continually. Might we say – “the joy of the Lord endureth forever?”*
    - a. *Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.*
    - b. *Thou lovest evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness. Selah.*
    - c. *Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue.*
    - d. *God shall likewise destroy thee for ever, he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living. Selah.*
    - e. *The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him:*

- f. *Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness.*
- g. *But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.*
- h. *I will praise thee for ever, because thou hast done it: and I will wait on thy name; for it is good before thy saints.”*

- G. There are people who seem to want their religion to make them feel miserable.
1. They have been more common than they are today, but they are still around.
  2. If that is their choice for themselves, there may be little we do can about it.
  3. But I believe that from beginning to end, the Bible shows God’s saint the possibility of joy.
  4. I believe that the Lord encourages joy – the right kind of joy.
  5. It begins with repentance before God, it catches speed through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and then it climbs all the way to Heaven.
  6. *“The joy of the Lord is your strength.”*