

Joy of the Lord is my strength (An outline of a sermon/ bible study)

Nehemiah Chapter 8

How is joy and strength related? Would you like to have both joy and strength? Nehemiah Chapter 8 described how that could be obtained.

Before we go into Chapter 8 in details, the following is the background. In chapters 1-7, Nehemiah recounts the events of his temporary return to Jerusalem from Persia. The Persian King allowed him to go back for his people. Book of Ezra talked about the first 2 groups of people went back to Jerusalem and the surrounding area from the Babylonian region (from location now call Iraq) where they were exiled and slaved for 70 years. Nehemiah led the 3rd group return after the first two group returned (from locations now called Iran and Iraq). Nehemiah led and directed the Jerusalem wall re-build project which each family built the section of the wall close to the front of their houses. With hard work, the wall was amazingly completed within 52 days. This accomplishment allowed this group of Jews to feel an identity and uniqueness in their part of repairing the walls of Jerusalem.

Chapters 8-13 cover the time of the Jews finding and reestablishing themselves again as a nation, after the long period of the exile in Babylon. Priest Ezra, accompanied by Nehemiah, led all the Jews in a renewal ceremony. This incorporated a public teaching of the Law, in which it was read and explained. It was such a long time period where the Jews had not gathered together to hear God's word. Then the recognition of the Sabbath Day was reinstated.

1) His word bring us joy and convict us in sorrow

After many years where the Jews were taken away from their homeland and served as slaves and servants in Babylon, they were not able to gather together as God's people and hear God's word in details. Chapter 8 described the first major gathering of worship and hearing God's word. They were full of joy because of the wonderful God's word and His faithful promises. They were finally freed like their ancestors many years ago. (Note, in fact, this generation might speak mainly Aramaic due to Babylon exile instead of the typical Hebrews. First time hearing God's word in Hebrews might also be remarkable and special for them.)

God's word also convicted them of their sins, especially unfaithfulness of mix marriage, and their little faith in the past. Neh. 8:9 described as "all" the people were weeping. Today, when we read the Bible, we should "see" God (know God's will & His deeds) and be filled with joy, at the same time, we are convicted of our sins from knowing God's standard.

2) We have joy when we repent

The Jews did not continue on weeping. Once they repented, they have the joy because they know God's grace has giving them forgiveness. Repentance brings joy to oneself, brothers and sisters, and God. Luke 15:7 states "there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents..."

3) Joy through restoration (spiritual revival) today

They got restored from being in slavery for many years. Today, 100% of people live in the western world have freedom including spiritually one can worship God. We can always count our blessings such as freedom. They restored the temple and the city. More important, they restored their faith and now are committed to follow God closely. Restoration or spiritual revival gives us joy. When we start to follow God closely, we have joy from God. He restored you with internal peace and confidence. Spiritual revival or restoration often leads to healthier body & soul and more willing to share your joy and love with others.

4) Joy and strength going forward

The Jews looked at the past and they have joy and sorrow. The Jews at that day begin to have full joy due to restoration. Neh. 8:10 Nehemiah said "...Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Therefore, we shall be the same. We need to have 'Joy of the Lord is my strength' going forward. We need to count our blessings, have joy in the Lord and knowing He is a faithful God. That in turn will give you strength. As stated in Psalms 29:11, God gives strength and peace to His people. Some of you might had a painful past or am suffering in the present, but going forward you can have joy of the Lord that is the source of your strength. The Jews had a big feast later that day and had a great joy. More important, they continue to gather, read/study God's word and worship. Joy of the Lord is your strength goes hand-in-hand with continue devotion, fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ, and be consistent in worship. May the joy of the Lord is your strength!