

***Nehemiah 8:9-12***

*“And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, 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. 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. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.”*

**The Joy of the Lord**

When the prophet Nehemiah declared to the people of Israel that the "Joy of the Lord" was their strength (Nehemiah 8) he was not speaking in terms of mind over matter, or the power of positive thinking. Nehemiah spoke of the real abiding peace available through the ministering presence of God to His believing children. The Lord himself restated that promise in the context of abiding in His love: "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." (John 15:11 NIV).

While accompanying her father on a trip to Gothenburg, Linda Sandell (1832-1903) saw her father fall overboard and drown, yet through that tragedy she penned these words: "Day by day and with each passing moment strength I find to meet my trials here, trusting in my Father's wise bestowment, I've no cause for worry or for fear." Horatio Spafford, upon hearing of the death of all four of his daughters was moved to write these familiar words: "When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say It is well, it is well with my soul". To these and thousands like them, the joy of the Lord was a real, abiding strength.

But you may ask: Where does this joy come from?

Perhaps Charles Spurgeon answers this best: "If there is one place where our Lord Jesus most fully becomes the joy and comfort of His people, it is where He plunged deepest into the depths of woe. Come hither, gracious souls and behold the Man in the garden of Gethsemane: behold His heart so brimming with love that he cannot hold it in, so full of sorrow that it must find vent. Behold the Man as they drive the nails into His hands and feet. Look up, repenting sinners, and see the sorrowful image of your suffering Lord." In the faith that looks up and beholds Jesus dying for us, there is found life, and with that life there is the abiding presence of God to confirm His personal care and to acquaint the believer with the assurance of God's eternal promises in contrast to our temporal troubles (John 16:13-14).

With news of His pending death burdening their hearts, the Lord stated this clear promise to the disciples: "Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no-one will take away your joy." (John 16:22 NIV). This joy is the privilege of those who will put their faith in Christ as Saviour.

Aaron's staff budded and produced almonds as a confirmation of the genuine presence of God in his ministry (Numbers 17). Similarly, the Joy of the Lord blossoming in the life of a believer, though beset by difficulties, is a confirmation of the real presence of the risen Lord in that life. May the Joy of the Lord be your strength.

***What is my response:***

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