

The Joy of the Lord Gives Strength

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Date: 04 February 2024

[0 : 00] Notice as we begin our worship by singing to God's praise, we're going to sing in Psalm 96 in the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 96. We'll sing from verse 1 to verse 6, the tune is Glasgow.

We'll sing a new song to the Lord, sing all the earth to God, to God sing, bless his name, show still his saving health abroad. We'll sing from verse 1 to 6 to God's praise.

O sing a new song to the Lord, sing all the earth to God, to God sing, bless his name, show still his saving health abroad.

Among the hidden nations, his glory to the fair.

And now to all the people show, his words that long the star.

[1 : 38] For grace adored and greatly he is to be magnified.

He is to be magnified. He is to be magnified. Even though the universe caelessly on the grandes■ies of his flag is black.

For the God of ■■ ■■■■ stayed below to the ground, He is to be magnified.

O Son, with light and patience here. Our Father, God is the Lord by whom the heavens created there.

Great honor is before His face and majesty divine.

[3 : 08] Strength is within His holy place.

And there the beauty shine. Amen. Let's bow our heads in a word of prayer.

Let us pray. Lord, our gracious God, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You to be able to sing praise to You.

We thank You that the words that we have sung can resonate so much with our hearts. We recognize, Lord, that You are worthy of all our praise.

For great is the Lord, and greatly He is to be magnified. And we pray, Lord, that that is how we would see You this evening. As the one who we want to lift up.

[4 : 12] The one who we want to magnify and bless. The one who we want to come and praise with all our hearts. For we can acknowledge, even as the psalmist speaks of, that there are times when we have other idols that we worship.

There are other things in this life that are magnified before us so often. Things that we look to and sometimes we find joy in and help in and strength in.

And yet ultimately are of no great value to us. And certainly of no great eternal benefit to us. And so we pray that we would be able to say with the psalmist, But our God is the Lord by whom the heavens created were.

That that is a God we would come to know as a mighty God. And also come to know, as even Jesus taught us to pray, That we can come and say of this mighty God, Our Father, who art in heaven.

And we pray, Lord, to know You in all of these ways. For we see Your power around us in so many ways. And yet we see Your care towards us too.

[5 : 27] We see the consequences of sin. And we are reminded of the judgment that that brings. But we are reminded too of Your compassion and Your grace.

And we pray, Lord, that You would come in Your power. That You would come into our midst here this evening by Your Spirit. That You would help us to be still in Your presence.

And to know You as God. And we thank You that we come in and through the name. Above every name. We come not in our own names. We come not in our own status or our own weakness.

We come through our Lord Jesus Christ. And we thank You that we can approach You through Him. And that we are assured that whenever we come to Him, He will never turn us away.

He will never tell us to go. For indeed the gospel is a gospel that says, Come, come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give You rest.

[6 : 32] And we pray, Lord, that we will be able to come and approach You in that manner this evening, seeking to find rest with the Lord Jesus, seeking to find rest for our souls.

We thank You, Lord, that we come in prayer to You, knowing that every need that we have already known unto You, that You delight to hear us sharing with You, that You delight as Your children come to You in prayer.

For in prayer we acknowledge our dependence upon You, for apart from You, without You, we can do nothing. And so as we come, we thank You to be able to bring all our prayers to You for the cause of Your kingdom near and far, for our own individual needs and for the needs of others around us, and for the growth of Your church, Lord, near and far.

And we thank You that we can come remembering who You are, that You are the God who has done mighty works in the past, the God who is doing even powerful works today, and the God who will be the same into the future, that You will be with Your people, that You will watch over Your people, that You will bring Your people to Yourself on that great day appointed as the day of judgment.

And we thank You for Your constancy towards us, that You are a God who never fails us, a God whose steadfast love, whose great love towards us is so faithful each day.

[8 : 08] And we thank You that today, as a new day, we can come to You. And thank You for the blessings of this day. We can thank You for being able to gather round Your Word, to be able to gather together, to be able to share in this way.

And we thank You and bless You for these opportunities that we have. And help us, Lord, not to take them for granted, help us to be wise with our time, and to use it to seek Your will for us.

And we do pray, Lord, for every individual and home represented here, and all who tune in online as well. We thank You for the means that we have to meet with one another in so many different ways, that we are not confined here, but that Your Word goes out far and wide.

And remember us in all our homes and our families. Remember us with all our different needs. Remember their young people. Lord, we thank You for them. We thank You for each one who we see coming through these doors week by week, both to church services and to explorers groups, to the YF.

Even this evening, we pray Your blessing on those who will gather in the hall next door as they gather for the YF there. May Your blessing be with them. Encourage them, Lord, and watch over them in their young years.

[9 : 32] We thank You too for those who are involved in the trip to Scalladale this weekend. We thank You for the blessings of that, being gathered together in fellowship and enjoying learning from Your Word and building relationships there.

We thank You for their safety and for encouragement in their time. We pray, Lord, Your blessing on all who are involved in arranging that and in leading it over this weekend as well.

We thank You too, Lord, for the blessings of the wider church too. We thank You for our own denomination and for all the congregations up and down our land who faithfully proclaim Your gospel week by week.

We thank You for encouraging news in different parts. We hear so often of discouragement around us, Lord, but we thank You for even the gathering in Portree yesterday where the new church building was officially opened.

We thank You for the vision that You gave to the people there to begin that work and to see it through. And as they are encouraged now in its opening, that they will be further encouraged in the years ahead to see it used for Your glory and for the goodness of the community there.

[10 : 52] So we ask Your blessing on the minister there, the Reverend Donny G. MacDonald. We thank You that even though he has been through a period of ill health himself, that he is in better health now and able to be involved in the ministry there once again and continue to uphold him and to strengthen him and all of the congregation there.

We pray that for ourselves as well as our congregation, Lord. We look forward to a time of communion in these coming weeks and we pray that it will be a time of encouragement to us as we gather for word and sacrament.

And we pray for the Reverend Angus MacRae and Reverend Carl MacDonald as they prepare to come to us. May You use them, Lord, and encourage them through the ministry of Your word to us.

We pray for those who may long to sit at Your table, for those who would profess in their hearts that they are saved by You, that they would come to have the strength to profess it publicly, to be encouraged and to be an encouragement to others.

We pray, Lord, for Your help and every preparation to be made in all our hearts as we look to You and turn to You for Your blessing over us in these things.

[12:08] And we pray, too, for our own minister here, Reverend James McKeever and his wife Donna. As we heard this morning of an announcement of his upcoming retirement, Lord, we want to thank You for his ministry and support to us as a people here and to the church at large as well.

We pray, Lord, that You will continue to use him in these remaining months here, Lord. Use him and bless him mightily as he continues to preach the word.

And we pray for prayers to be answered, even offered up over these last number of years and maybe even decades, Lord, to see Your glory in this place, to see Your Spirit working.

We pray for them as a couple, too, remembering Donna, thankful for her most recent surgery and pray for her going forward as well, that together they will know Your goodness and mercy upon them.

So we ask all these things looking to You. We ask all these things as undeserving of the least of Your mercies, but thankful for Your love and Your steadfast love towards us.

[13:17] Hear our prayers, Lord. Watch over us. Guide us in our worship and in our praise. May we lift our hearts to You with much thankfulness as we have much reason to rejoice.

So go with us now and pardon all us and as we ask all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing again to God's praise, this time in Psalm 30, in the Singed Psalms.

Find this on page 34 of the Psalm books. Psalm 30. We're going to sing from verse 1 down to verse 8. O Lord, I will exalt Your name, for You have rescued me.

You did not let my foes rejoice and gloat triumphantly. We'll sing from verse 1 to verse 8, and the tune is Kilmarnock. We sing to God's praise.

Amen. O Lord, I will exalt Your name, for You have rescued me.

[14:33] Give in the day, my foes rejoice and no triumphantly.

Lord, I will exalt Your name, I will exalt Your name, and You have rescued me.

And You have rescued me. And You have restored my health. O Lord, You brought me from the grave, and saved my soul from death.

You holy ones sing to the Lord, sing and with joyful hearts.

When you read all His glory, then please Him and rejoice.

[15:59] His anger, His anger, but have obeyed us, life on His chamber's cage.

Though tears play us throughout the night, joy comes with morning's lips.

I never shall be would I say, in my prosperity.

You made my country, you made my country firm and strong, when you Lord favored me.

But when you hid your face on me, my heart was terrified.

[17:28] For you, O Lord, I call thou life.

For bless me, O Lord, I cry. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. We'll turn to read God's Word in the Old Testament, in the book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah chapter 8.

You'll find this around page 482, depending what version of the Bible you have. Nehemiah chapter 8. We can read the whole of this chapter.

Nehemiah chapter 8. And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the water gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel.

[18:32] So Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women, and all who could understand what they heard on the first day of the seventh month.

And he read from it, facing the square before the water gate, from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand.

And the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose.

And beside him stood Mattathiah, Shema, Ananiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Messiah on the right hand.

And Padaiah, Mishel, Malchijah, Hashim, Hashbadanah, Zachariah, and Meshulam on the left hand.

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people. And as he opened it, all the people stood. And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, Amen, Amen.

[19 : 42] lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akub, Shabithiah, Hodiah, Messiah, Kelita, Asariah, Josabat, Hanan, Peliah, Nehemiah, the Levites, they helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places.

They read from the book of the law of God clearly, and they gave the meaning so that the people understood the reading. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites, who taught the people, said to all the people, This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep. For all the people wept as they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, Go on your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing, who has nothing ready.

For this day is a holy day to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, Be quiet, for this day is holy.

Do not be grieved. And all the people went on their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

[21 : 18] On the second day, the heads of the fathers' houses of all the people with the priests and the Levites came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the law.

And they found it written in the law that the Lord had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should proclaim it and publish it in all their towns and in Jerusalem.

Go out to the hills and bring branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees to make booths as it is written. So the people went out and brought them and made booths for themselves, each on his roof and in their courts and in the courts of the house of God and in the square at the water gate and in the square at the gate of Ephraim.

And all the assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and lived in the booths. For from the days of Jeshua, the son of Nun, to that day, the people of Israel had not done so.

And there was very great rejoicing. And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the book of the law of God that kept the feast seven days.

[22 : 36] And on the eighth day, there was a solemn assembly according to the rule. Amen. And may God bless that reading from his word.

Before we turn back to this passage, we'll read again, sing again, in Psalm 47. We'll sing Psalm's version, page 62 of the psalm books.

Psalm 47, we'll sing the whole of this psalm, the tune is Duke Street. All nations, clap your hands and shout. Let joyful cries to God ring out.

How awesome is the Lord Most High, great King, who rules the earth throughout. We'll sing the whole of this psalm to God's praise. Amen. Amen.

All nations, clap your hands and shout. Play joyful cries to God ring out.

[23 : 44] How awesome is the Lord Most High, great King, who rules the earth to rise.

He has subdued believe the free, the nations who have in our foes.

In blessing, Jacob, whom he loved, a heritage for us, he chose.

God has gone up with shams of joy, the Lord, how it let have a sound.

Sing, grace, sing, pledge to God Most High, God to God our King, let grace happen.

[25 : 13] For God is King, O Holy Earth, sing sounds of praise to Him alone.

God rules the nations from on high, He sits upon His holy throne.

Godifies it. God bless your crown To Him beyond the shields of earthängen Exalted great, the extra Lord.

We'll turn back to our reading in Nehemiah chapter 8. We can read again at verse 9 through to verse 12 there. Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.

For all the people wept as they heard the words of the law. Then he said to them, Go on your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine, and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready.

[27 : 09] For this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, Be quiet, for this day is holy. Do not be grieved.

And all the people went on their way to eat and drink, and to send portions, and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

Well, our study in Nehemiah comes to this point now, where we find ourselves in chapter 8. And if you think it's hard reading through the beginning of chapter 8 with all these names, if you turn back to chapter 7, you'll see the reason why we jumped over it.

It's because there's a whole host of names there of people who returned from the exile. Now, we're not just jumping over to ignore it. We see its importance because it breaks down to us the number of people who were involved in this and who returned to Jerusalem after the exile, after the walls had been restored.

And it's these people that we find who have gathered there, as we read in verse 1 of chapter 8, all the people gathered as one man into the square before the water gate.

[28 : 29] There's this whole host of people who have gathered. And what is our vision? That's the question that we often find arising as we study Nehemiah.

It's a question that keeps arising as you're going through this great book. And the reason it keeps arising is because it's there before us all the time.

What is our vision? It's there as the book starts because Nehemiah himself, we find, is given a reminder.

He's told what is happening back in Jerusalem. And he's not happy with how things are in Jerusalem when he hears that the walls are broken down, that the people are in great trouble. He's concerned. He's troubled. He mourns over this. But we find that God gives him this sense of vision to be a man who will come and begin the work of restoring Jerusalem.

[29 : 34] Nehemiah is a visionary. And through the vision that God has given to him, we see that he returns to Jerusalem. He returns. It's a great journey in itself just to return to Jerusalem.

It takes a while to get there. And when he arrives, he finds the walls are just all broken down. There's hardly anything left of it. And it would be easy to be discouraged.

It would be easy for him to lose heart and think this task is impossible. But he knows that God has given him a vision. And when we've looked through this book of Nehemiah, I've quoted this maybe once or twice before as we've gone through.

It's a quote from George Barna. I think it's helpful to always have this quote before us as well because it helps us remind ourselves that we need to be a people of vision as well.

George Barna once said, Vision is the ability to understand the history, the present condition, and the potential of the church, and to conceive a plan for action that will maximize the ministry potential.

[30 : 47] It goes on a little bit after that as well. And what we've seen is the vision that Nehemiah was one that had history behind it, the history of Jerusalem as a great city.

It had the present condition involved in it as well, that Jerusalem was a city that's walled. The walls were broken down. The gates were burned. It was a place in trouble.

But as George Barna says, It's the potential of the church as well. And to conceive a plan for action that will maximize the ministry potential.

And really that's the stage we're at now. We've seen the history. We've seen the condition it was in. But now we're seeing the great potential that there is in Jerusalem.

And we ask ourselves too, for our own context here today, what is our vision? Has going through Nehemiah stirred up our vision for the church here, in terms of its history, in terms of its present condition, and in terms too of its potential.

[31 : 59] To see what God has done, to see where we are today. It's not where we would want to be, to see the troubles that are around us, but not to fall short there and think, well, what can we do now?

To be like Nehemiah coming back and not seeing a place in disarray and disillusionment and thinking, what is possible here? There's nothing. It's just a place of ruin.

But to have a vision and to see a God-given vision and a God-given potential for where we are at today. When we think of our own vision in a physical sense, there are a number of things that can hinder our vision physically.

There's blindness. Caused by maybe a number of different things. We can be a people who are blind. Our vision can also be hampered by darkness.

If there's darkness all around us, our vision is hampered because we cannot see where we're going. But there's a third one as well that hampers our vision.

[33 : 09] And that is sleeping. When we're sleeping, we're not seeing. We're not aware. We're not aware of what is happening around us. And when you think of these three things in a spiritual sense, you could say the same applies.

There are three things that can hinder our vision spiritually. There is darkness. There is blindness. These two are often maybe the ones that we look at most often.

Blindness, the Bible speaks of so often. We don't see God. We are blind. We're dead, as it were, in our trespasses and sins, as the Bible says.

We don't see our need of God. And yet what we read in the Bible is that God can save us. God can restore our sight.

We're surrounded by darkness as well. The Bible again reminds us of that so often. There's darkness all around us in this world.

[34 : 13] But it says to us, too, as you read through, that Christ has come to be the light of the world, that there is a cure for both of these.

But what about when it comes to sleeping? As a church, as a people, if we're spiritually sleeping, it's not that we're dead, but we're not alive either.

We're not living for God. We're just in this slumber. We're not aware of what's going on around us. We're ignorant to it. It can lead to discouragement.

It can lead to dismay for us. And what's the cure for that? Well, again, it's about Christ and having a vision of him and of what he can do for us.

We heard this morning how the psalmist was saying to God, are you asleep? Will you not awaken and come and help us?

[35 : 19] Well, God sometimes says to his people as well, it's time for you to wake up. We're reminded this morning, God does not sleep, but we sometimes do.

Ephesians chapter 5, verse 14. There the context is talking about darkness and light and which one we're walking in. And it says in verse 14, awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine in you.

A wake-up call. And that is what Nehemiah came to his people with. It was a wake-up call for them, calling the people to awake and arise and to get on with the work of restoration of Jerusalem.

And this evening, we come to the point in the book where we almost see this vision that Nehemiah had for his people and for Jerusalem fulfilled.

Almost, but not fully. And what we find here is that the fulfillment is found in the Lord. And these verses that we read in verse 9 to 12 in particular, here we see a culmination of all this work where he says, do not mourn or weep.

[36 : 42] For all the people wept as they heard the word of the Lord. Then he said to them, go on your way, eat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing. Ready for this day is holy to our Lord.

And do not be grieved for the joy of the Lord is your strength. For the joy of the Lord is your strength.

This was a momentous moment for the people as they returned to Jerusalem. And we're going to see that. We're going to see the potential that Nehemiah is beginning to see fulfilled in this place.

Potential that is found even in the midst of difficulty, in the midst of weeping, in the midst of grief.

We find that the Lord is speaking. The joy of the Lord is your strength.

We were reminded this morning too of how it's often in trials that we see and need the Lord more and more. William Cowper, God moves in mysterious ways.

[37 : 49] We heard how he wrote that in difficult personal circumstances himself. Well, another one who wrote in very difficult personal circumstances was Horatio Spafford.

He wrote that wonderful hymn, It is well with my soul. He said, When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my Lord there has taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.

I think, well, he must have been in a wonderful place in his life to write these words, to say it is well with my soul. Well, it wasn't a wonderful time in his life.

He had lost a son aged four, not long before this. He wrote these words. He had lost financially. His business was ruined through a great fire in Chicago. He had lost four daughters who he had sent with his wife over to England by boat and the boat was tragically sunk.

[39 : 02] It was a time of great dismay and sorrow in his life. And it was as he was sailing to England himself and as he was passing the spot where his daughters had drowned that he went back to his cabin and wrote these words where he could find that even in the midst of that he could say it is well, it is well with my soul.

The joy of the Lord was a strength to him. Do you have that strength from that joy of the Lord? There's three things I want us to see from these verses before us this evening. When we think of these words, the joy of the Lord is our strength.

And the first thing we want to see is how these words humble us. Then we see how these words lift us up.

And then thirdly, we'll see how these words they keep us going. And the first thing we see here is these words humble us.

[40 : 13] What did Nehemiah want as he came to Jerusalem? What was his great desire? What was his great vision? And when would his vision be fulfilled?

At what point was it the work done? You might have said in chapter 6 verse 15 there you could see well that's it.

The work is done. His vision is complete. What does it say? So the wall was finished on the 25th day of the month of Elul in the 52 days.

You might think there. That's the point where his vision was complete. The walls are finished. But that's not it. That's not the fulfillment of his vision.

You might then say well it must be chapter 7 then. When you read through chapter 7 and you see all these great numbers returning to Jerusalem was this the point where he could say my work is done?

[41 : 17] My vision is fulfilled? No it wasn't. It's what we find in chapter 8.

And what we find in chapter 8 is a reminder to us that the great burden that Nehemiah had was not just for the walls of Jerusalem.

It was not just for a material outlook on Jerusalem. His great burden was for the people. It was the people who were in trouble.

And this is where we begin to see his vision fulfilled. as the people hear in the beginning of verse 8, they command the hearing of the word.

Ezra brings the book before them. The book of the law of Moses it says in verse 1. And it was a book that was to be opened up and to be heard by them.

[42 : 22] The people had had much to be distressed about. They had been in exile. They were returning from this period of exile. They were returning to a place that had been a shambles, that had been broken down, their homes ruined, the city ruined.

And they had returned hearing and knowing that it was because they hadn't listened to God, that they had rejected God. And this is brought home to them as they hear Ezra read the word of God to them.

And what did this word do? Well, as they hear the word read, it humbled them. And when you look at this, you find that they were here together on the first day of the seventh month.

They were hearing the word read, it says in verse 3, from early morning until midday. Around five or six hours they were gathered together hearing the word of God.

And you notice three things that this was doing for them, that was happening in their midst here. First of all, they listened. And you see that in verse three.

[43 : 43] They were there before God, they were hearing this word. And at the end of verse three it says, all the ears of the people were attentive to the book of the law.

They were listening to every word that was being spoken. They were beginning to understand every word that was being spoken as well, because that's the second thing we see here.

They were helped to understand. In verse seven and eight you have the list of all these people. And it says there, they helped the people to understand the law.

So there's these two things going on as a reminder to us of what we are about, isn't it? That we are a people who are to be under the word, but that we are also to be helped to understand the word.

If we have questions we should ask, we should be gathered around God's word in this way to help one another to understand. Yes, to listen to the word preached, but then to encourage and to help one another to understand what the word means.

[44 : 58] And the third thing you see here is that as these things were going on, they were convicted by the word. In verse six, we see that Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, Amen, Amen, lifting up their hands to God.

And so there was this response to the word, they were convicted by it, initially with a sense of Amen to the word of God. But then you see later on, as you read down into verse nine onwards there, the end of verse nine, it says, for all the people wept as they heard the words of the law. the people wept as they heard the words of the law. They were convicted by it, they needed this word.

We need this word ourselves too, because it is this word that helps us to see how far from God we have fallen away, but it helps us to come back to him as well.

It is the word of God that brings healing. And that is what we need. Every one of us, that's what our people all around us need, that's what our nations need, the word of God to convict, to remind us who God is.

[46 : 29] And we can say Amen to so many things, but that to remind us who we are, and to bring us to that point of mourning and weeping. yesterday in Port 3, it was a day of vision being realized there with the official opening of the church.

A great day for them and for all concerned. But is that it? Is the work done? Of course not. The vision is ongoing because the vision is to make Jesus known through the preaching of the word in that place.

It won't be, come and see this new building. Come and see how warm this space is. Come and see the technology we have. That's not what it will be about.

It's about something else, something greater. Come see a man who knows everything about you. Could this be the Christ?

It's about the preaching of the word. The city of Glasgow motto as it was originally had that at its very core. Let Lord, let Glasgow flourish through the preaching of the word and the praising of thy name.

[47 : 53] Now they've shortened it to let Glasgow flourish. But there's no thought of what is going to make it flourish. We have to get back to that Lord, let Glasgow, let everywhere flourish through the preaching of thy word and the praising of thy name.

Being humbled under the word of God. That is where we start. Peter says in 1 Peter chapter 5, humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you.

So Nehemiah's vision begins here being fulfilled with being humbled under the word of God. They wept and mourned under it, but it doesn't stay there.

And that's important for us as we move on because the joy of the Lord lifts us up. And that is what we all want to know as well.

The joy of the Lord, the strength that it gives, it lifts us up. God doesn't want to leave his people in a pit of despair.

[49 : 11] Yes, he wants us to be humbled, but only so that he can lift us up. And Nehemiah and Ezra here, we see the vision too, is not just to bring a people under the word, to despair in their sin, but that they would come and rejoice in the Lord.

The joy of the Lord is your strength. Nehemiah is not just a man to talk, he's a man of action.

He returned to Jerusalem to spur people on in the work. And now he shows them the fulfillment of his work is to come under the word to know the joy of the Lord as their strength.

The source of every help and need that they have can be fulfilled in the Lord. There's always a time for reflection and a time for mourning as we mourn over sin.

It's always a part of our life to repent of our sins. But we should never constantly remain in that frame where we're despondent under sin because that paralyzes.

[50 : 28] There is no joy in that. There is no strength from the Lord in that because the Lord wants to lift us up above that and use us for his glory.

And that is what is happening in Jerusalem here. So from Jerusalem and as you go forward in the Old Testament into the New Testament this would be a place that the vision is continuing to be

fulfilled.

That the word of God would be proclaimed. That the people would be under it. That they to forgive. This joy is to be infectious. This joy is to be at the heart of what they are doing. There are two characters in Winnie the Pooh.

I don't know if any of you watched or read Winnie the Pooh but there's two characters that maybe often stand out as complete opposites. You have on one hand Tigger and on the other hand you have Eeyore.

[51 : 33] And they are just complete opposites. Tigger is ever the optimist. He always has a vision of doing and doing excitement and keeping going in different things with a sense of anticipation.

Eeyore on the other hand is a pessimist. The one who's often glum. The one who's often got a negative outlook. When our children were young we had a wee toy Tigger and it was operated by batteries and sprung tail as you know Tigger has so if you switched it on the Tigger would start bouncing around and making a noise and the children would see this and sitting they weren't quite walking but they were sitting up and they would start bouncing trying to copy Tigger because it was infectious it had this impact on them where they were seeing this and excited about it and trying to copy it now God doesn't expect us all to be bouncy Tiggers but neither should we resign ourselves to be glum ears because we have this joy of the Lord as her strength we have this to go on and you notice here what this joy is surrounded in it is by knowing the assurance of

God's blessing verse 9 speaks about this day is holy to the Lord your God do not mourn or weep they were approaching an important time in the year at the end of chapter 7 as we come into chapter 8 it speaks about the first day of the seventh month and this was significant because it was a time of festival it was a time of reminding the people of what great joy they had in the Lord that the festival of booths as we read a little bit of but they also had the day of atonement a reminder of the forgiveness of God towards his people through sacrifice and this is a time not to grieve and to mourn that day was past now he's saying you've had that you've mourned you've wept as you've heard the word but they're saying now do not grieve go your way eat the fat drink the sweet wine send portions to anyone who has nothing ready for this day is holy to our

Lord do not be grieved for the joy of the Lord is your strength God there there was this powerful reminder to them the great hope that there is in God and for us Christ has come to fulfill that joy for us we can look forward to a day ourselves in a couple of weeks a time of communion as a congregation where we will rejoice in the offering of Christ for us when you think of Jesus as he was with his disciples in John 15 he's there in the upper room with them the evening before the crucifixion what does he have to say to them he says in verse 11 these things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full and then you go into chapter 17 you read about the great prayer of

Christ for his people about abiding in him when you think of the context of the disciples in the upper room it was a time of great worry and fear but Jesus has these words to them I have said these things to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full the joy of the Lord is your strength Peter again reminds us of the vision that we are to have in this way in 1 Peter 1 verse 8 though you have not seen him you love him though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory obtaining the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls that is the joy the joy that

[56 : 25] Horatio Spafford knew the peace for his soul that is the joy we can have in Christ not joy that is immune to all the troubles and griefs of this world not joy that changes out on the outside but joy that is within joy that comes from the Lord and the strength that he gives day by day the joy of the Lord is to be our strength the final thing I want us to see here is this joy in the Lord the strength that it gives gives us a vision and a hope looking forward as well the outcome of our faith as Peter speaks the salvation of your souls what great joy there is in that to know the salvation that there is in

Christ Jesus you've heard perhaps talk in these last number of weeks of what they call the doomsday clock it's supposed to reflect the situation of the world in terms of the potential for destruction and it's now set at 90 seconds to midnight the closest it's been since it started in 1945 it's about the fear in this world the fear of all that's happening in this world and if you've heard about it does it shake you does it make you afraid afraid for the future afraid for all that lies ahead of us when you look at the book of Nehemiah and the people they had been in their own doomsday they had been taken into exile into Babylon Jerusalem had been put to ruin destroyed but they had all

these things transformed by

God giving a vision to Nehemiah but the vision isn't full the vision isn't complete because there's still more to come and what Nehemiah is pointing us towards is a greater fulfillment of an exile that will be completely restored in the day of the Lord's return and we live in a day of fear ourselves today but that fear should not paralyze us it should drive us to the Lord in repentance in humbling ourselves but to restoration and to knowing the joy of the Lord as our strength because a day is coming when the Lord's people will put up a final cheer praising God as he restores and takes his people home a vision that we see complete in revelation reminding us what is to come then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude revelation 19 says like the roar of many waters like the sound of mighty peals of thunder crying out hallelujah for the Lord our God the almighty reigns let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory for the marriage of the lamb has come and the bride has made herself ready there is this outlook of God's people hallelujah it says for the Lord our God the almighty reigns how often have you shouted the Lord our God reigns hallelujah when we think of the dismay of our world when we think of the dismay of our sin what is the cure it is to know the joy of the

Lord as our strength that is what can enable us to sing hallelujah our God reigns but do we do we have the joy of the Lord as our strength do we have the vision that Nehemiah had that he gave to his people a vision of encouragement a vision for a people who were in dismay but who could know restoration Nehemiah gives encouragement here but he also gives them encouragement to share it says in verse 10 in the middle of it send portions to anyone who has nothing ready those who are poor those who are hungry those who have nothing send portions to them and then in verse 12 all the people went on their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing why because they had understood the words that were declared to them do we understand the word of [62:00] God do we understand what it means when it speaks about the need for us to mourn and weep over our sin do we understand when it speaks about the great price that has been paid for our sin that Christ came that sacrifice was made that we might find forgiveness of our sin and do we understand what it means to know the joy of the Lord as our strength to say hallelujah our God reigns do we understand what it means when it says to share this with all around us Nehemiah came back and saw a city in ruin and a people in trouble where did it start by one by one the stones going back into the wall and the building work beginning a man was once walking on a beach a beach that was deserted apart from thousands upon thousands of starfish that had been washed up by the tide and were now stuck there in the sand because the tide had gone out and as he was walking along the beach seeing this sight before him he saw a little boy who was one by one picking up the starfish and throwing them back into the sea but as the man came to the boy he asked the boy what he was doing and he said why bother what difference are you going to make can you not see that there are thousands upon thousands of them well the little boy bent down picked up another starfish threw it back into the sea and said to the man well it made a difference for that one it started with one he couldn't save all the starfish but he was doing his bit and it's the difference of how we see things isn't it a man saw a task that was impossible a boy saw a task that he could be involved in even if it was one by one what's our vision what's our vision for the people around us

Nehemiah's vision was the stones to go into place so that the walls could be built so that the people would have a home for themselves and above all a place to worship God the people were in trouble but through a vision they were brought to this place where they rejoiced where the joy of the Lord was their strength for ourselves we can look around and see a task that in many ways is impossible or we can see a task that God has called us to a vision for a people all around us to see the lost saved to see a people coming to repent under the word of God to be humbled but to be lifted up and to know the joy of the Lord as their strength and to go on one by one sharing the wonderful word of the gospel of Jesus

Christ that he would do marvelous things in our midst let us pray our father in heaven we thank you for your word and for every encouragement and challenge that it gives but may we see you in it all as the one who is able for the things that are impossible to us are possible with you and so Lord humble us under your word that we might be lifted up even if we come through tears and much mourning may we be lifted up and come to know the joy of the Lord as our strength as we ask it all in Jesus name Amen we're going to conclude by singing to God's praise Psalm 24 Psalm 24 we're going to sing from verse 7 down to the end of the psalm ye gates lift up your heads on high ye doors that last foray be lifted up that so the king of glory enter me we're going to sing the last four

stanzas the tune is

St. George's Edinburgh and we'll have an opportunity to sing hallelujah our God reigns Videoplan in quantity standard to begin forain But who only is the King?

The mighty Lord exists, in that sin, Lord, that great in might, and strong in that is.

[68 : 07] In that sin, Lord, that great in might, and strong in that is.

Ye kings, let the Lord bless you, Lord, that's not true as for a.

He lifted up, that's all the King of glory entering.

But who is He that is the King of glory who exists?

The Lord of hosts and and and and and the King, the King of glory is.

[69 : 23] The Lord of hosts and and and the King, the King of glory is.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen.

Amen. Amen. After the benediction, I'll go to the door to my left.

We'll close with the benediction. Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, rest upon and abide with you all now and forevermore.

[70 : 36] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.