

The Joy Of The Lord Your Strength

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn again to Isaiah chapter 25, and reading verses 6 and 7. 25, verses 6 and 7.

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well-refined.

And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. Some people think that Christianity is really, really dull, and that the moment that you become a Christian, that you kind of wave bye-bye to enjoyment in life, that you kind of, that life becomes sort of grey, that the fun in life is gone.

And that for the rest of your days you're living out a kind of a code of do's and don'ts, and that life is really quite oppressive.

Well, nothing could be further from the truth. We do know that becoming a Christian does bring its own problems, and that there is, within the Christian faith, there is a battle that goes on every single day.

[1 : 27] We know we're very conscious of the battle within ourselves with regard to sin, with temptation, with a sense of our own failure, with all these things.

And that brings a sense of sorrow into the heart of the Christian's life. It's inevitable. However, having said that, the blessings that outweigh all the heaviness that can be brought because of sin are just a hundred thousand times greater.

Remember when Jesus was born, the angels said that there were three things to give the message. They said that they brought, they were bringing, a message of joy and of peace and of goodwill to all men.

And that's what happens when you become a Christian. The joy, the entering into your heart through the Spirit is joy. The joy of the Lord. The joy of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit brings joy. The peace of God that passes all understanding. And your outlook and your attitude to people changes.

[2 : 41] Because you have this sense of goodwill towards people. It's part of what you are as a Christian. Your attitude changes. And if your attitude doesn't change, then there's something radically wrong.

So, that message that the angels gave is a message that is discovered in the heart of every Christian. That sense of joy. That sense of peace.

And that sense of goodwill. And that's what makes the Christian message such a powerful message. As we live out in this world, this world where there's so much hatred and cruelty and lovelessness and loneliness.

We never turn on our news, but we see there's just wars and rumors of wars. There's atrocities. There's bloodshed. There's anger.

There's hatred. There's pride. There's everything else. And here is a message that's so radically different. It transforms people's lives. And what a wonderful world it would be if everybody had embraced Christ and that this was the way that life was lived.

[3 : 51] It would be so incredibly different. Now, as we say, a lot of people think that Christianity is simply a particular code of practice.

And that to be a Christian, you say to yourself, right, this is how I live. I must, from today on, I must adopt the Christian principles of life.

And once you do that, then, that you're a Christian. Well, that isn't being a Christian. That is certainly being sympathetic to being a Christian. It is, I suppose, you would say to people, if they would ask, what's your religion?

Well, are you a Christian or not? And people might say, well, I am a Christian in the sense that I believe Christianity and I accept Christianity. But all our efforts, supposing, that's what the Apostle said, supposing I give my body to be burned and I don't have love.

If I don't have the love of God and Christ Jesus in my heart, it does me no good. No good at all. And so it's imperative that we realize that to be a Christian is you have to have Jesus Christ as your Lord and your Savior.

[5 : 07] There's no other way. And so our getting to heaven is dependent not upon what we do or what we have done or what we will yet do, but upon what Jesus Christ has done.

Now, that doesn't mean that we just ignore, that we forget the Bible and say, no, the Bible makes it very clear. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

So God is working in you, drawing you and inclining you to his word in order that you will walk in that particular way. So we have our own responsibility, but ultimately it is God who is working in us, God who is enabling us, and it is God who will take us home.

You know, you and I couldn't keep ourselves one single day. We can't save ourselves, we can't keep ourselves, we can't take ourselves to glory. That's all God's work.

Even although we are involved in that working every single day. And so we always have to realize that it is all of grace, it is all his work.

[6 : 22] Now, the Bible, in the Bible, the gospel is often portrayed in different ways. Sometimes it's portrayed as a marriage, other times it's portrayed as a great supper, and here it is portrayed as a feast.

And as you'll see, it's no ordinary feast that is made here, because this is a feast of the richest food. Richest food that you could ever come across, and the best wines that you could ever come across. And this is how the gospel is portrayed. It's portrayed as a feast of the best of food and the best of wines. And you'll notice, the first thing that we have to notice here is the actual location of where this feast is taking place.

The Lord says, on this mountain, the Lord of hosts will make for all people a feast. Now, there are two significant mountains in the Bible.

There is, first of all, Sinai. And we always associate Sinai with the law. That's where God gave the law to Moses for the people, on Mount Sinai.

[7 : 33] And the other mountain is Mount Zion. Because Mount Zion is, we always assume or think of Mount Zion as where Jerusalem and where God's name was honored and worshipped down throughout the centuries.

And it is still, although in a symbolic way, we still look on the promises that are given to Zion as promises that are given to the church.

Today, as you go through the Bible and you see what God is saying of Zion and the promises that he is giving to Zion, that was the place where his people, his church was established.

These promises belong to you today. So, this is where the feast is on Mount Zion. And, of course, that is applied to the church.

So, when we think of the church, the Lord is referring to it and he says, on this mountain. And I suppose one of the questions we have to ask ourselves, in what way is the church like a mountain?

[8 : 39] Well, I suppose one of the things that you'd have to say is that a mountain is not man-made. The heros didn't get together and say, do you know what? We'll build a cliché.

It's one of the things. It's God made. Every mountain, when you see, when you look around this world, and these great mountain ranges, it is God who made this world.

And he made things the way that they are. And so, this is a very fitting picture of the church. The church is not man-made. It is God-made. It belongs to God.

Even although sometimes God's people become a wee bit caught up in themselves, and sometimes egos and pride take over, and they think that they're more important than God would have them be.

Because the church belongs to him. Jesus Christ loved the church so much that he died for it. The church isn't ours. It's his. And that's one of the most important things always to remember.

[9 : 47] That we belong to him. We are part of the church. His bride. And so, the church is his. We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.

Jesus Christ. Another thing about a mountain is, it's immovable. It's always there. You know, you could go away for years. And when you come back, you'd say, whoa. Because you see fields that when you left, they were fields from the time you were born.

They were always fields. When you come back, it's full of houses. So, often things change. But the mountain will stay the same. It's always there. It's one of the things, the landscape is always the same.

And that's the same for the church. The church is immovable. That's Psalm 125. You know what it says there about, They in the Lord that firmly trust shall be like Zion Hill, which at no time can be removed, but standeth ever still.

Isn't that beautiful? And that's the church, which at no time can be removed, but standeth ever still. When you think of all the forces and all the powers that are out attacking the church, when you look at your own life as a member of that church, as an individual belonging to the church, and you see all the forces and powers that are there that you feel could devour you and swallow you up.

[11:17] Yet the Lord is saying, They in the Lord that firmly trust shall be like Zion Hill. You're like a hill that can't be moved. Immovable.

That's another of the great pictures that we have. Again, another thing about the mountain is it's visible. You'll always see the mountain. It's way up.

And sometimes there are some mountains that you can drive around them and you'll see them from different angles, but they're always there. And so it is with the church. The church is visible. The church is noted.

The church, of course, is made up of all the people. And the church cannot be hid. That's one of the things. Of course, there are days, you know, there are days when there's a heavy mist.

And sometimes the mountains, you look out and you can't see, you can't see the Harris Hills, you can't see the South Lochs Hills, you can't see the Oog Hills, because the mist is lying so low.

[12:20] But once the sun comes up and the mist disperses, then once again you can see them.

And sometimes it's like that with the church as well. Sometimes the mists of sin, the mists of mysterious providences come down, and sometimes its impact and its effect is so low that the church's influence and the church's power seems to have almost gone.

And the church that sometimes those, well, the church is made up of individuals, are struggling. It's tough. But you know that when the sun of righteousness arises with healing in his wings, that all changes.

These mists lift. These sorrows are dispersed. Once again there's liberty, freedom, there's power.

The influence of the church is known and experienced. Lord, is that in times of revival?

Something we ought to be always praying for. So again we see how the great illustration of the mountain and the church. And so we see that the Lord says, on this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines.

This is no little snack. Here we have this absolutely amazing, delicious, juicy, succulent feast. It's the best of quantity and the best of quality.

[13:50] This is rich food. And you notice what it says about it. That it's a feast of rich food, a rich food full of marrow.

Now we always think of this as, when you think of marrow, as that which strengthens your bones and such like. Well, here we are. This is what God's word is like.

When the gospel comes in power, and God's word, this is what God's word does. God's word enriches our lives. Just as you eat food naturally, so spiritually.

You know when you have your devotions in the morning and you begin the day and you ask the Lord, Lord, bless your word to me today. And you might be feeling really down.

Might be things bothering you. And it's bothering you so much that you've lost your spark. And you're actually feeling, you can almost feel weak.

[14:52] And you come to the word. And the word just, it opens up before you. And you feel like there's a very strengthening in your bones.

You feel your energy coming back. You feel a new vitality within you. Circumstances haven't changed.

But God's word has entered in. God has given you the faith to lay hold upon that word, to make it your own. And it has gone right in. And it has strengthened you and lifted you up.

And that is why God's word is declared to be sweeter than honey, more precious than gold. Because of sometimes the way when you're feeling, and say for instance, it's through with a death. And you are rightly so, you are broken hearted. And you're at the lowest ebb in your life. And if someone came and said, you know what, I've got 10,000 pounds here for you.

[15 : 54] That at that moment wouldn't lift you at all. Supposing somebody said, you know what, I'm going to give you, I'm going to give you this or give you that. That wouldn't really mean that much.

But you go to God's word. And God gives you the faith to lay hold upon some of the beautiful promises that are there. And in the midst of your grief and your sorrow, a peace comes flooding in that nothing in this world could give.

And that's God speaking into your heart. God's word is a feast. And that's part of what is spoken about in this feast. Because God's word is a feast. And when we come to God's house every day, we're seeking, that's what we're seeking for, for some feeding.

We want some food. We want some nourishment. And we should always say to the Lord, Lord, even if it's just in the singing, if it's in the reading, if it's in the preaching, Lord, give me something that will satisfy me.

Something that will help me along the way. Because it's hard going being a Christian. And we need, we need the strengthening. And so this is what the Lord is promising.

[17 : 03] That he will give this, this nourishment. But you'll notice that it's also, it's not only the most beautiful food, but also the most beautiful wines. Here are wines, we read of, a feast of well-aged wine.

Aged wine, well-refined. If you're looking at that today, these would be wines that would be mega pricey. Incredibly rich, splendid, mature wines.

And in the Bible, wine has always been looked at at a spiritual level as that which brings joy. Now at a human level, the Bible, the Lord, if you go to Psalm 104, and the Lord lists many of the blessings that are brought into this world, many people might find it strange.

But one of the things that is mentioned is wine, which gladdens the heart. Now, we know that there's few things that can be more abused and misused in this world than wine.

And yet, when you come to the Bible in its right, in its own place, in fact, we're told, you know how sometimes when people can be really weak or sometimes they're given a little drink to revive them.

[18 : 21] Well, the Bible actually says that gives strong drink to him that is ready to perish. And you know, when we apply that spiritually, here is a wine that can never be abused.

Here is the richness, the joy that the Lord brings. You see, the world's joy is shallow. It's empty. It's frothy. It doesn't last. But here's a joy that lingers.

It's a joy that goes down deep. It's a joy that gives you strength. The joy of the Lord is your strength. In fact, when we go to the Lord's table, it's bread and wine.

And, of course, the bread is speaking of his broken body and the wine of his blood. But it is also, surely, as we shelter under the blood of Jesus Christ that we then experience his joy.

But, verse 7, very quickly, here's a problem. Well, there was a problem. He will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, a veil that is spread over all nations.

[19 : 30] So, you see, there's a huge hindrance to the blessing because there's a covering, a veil, that is over all the nations, over all people. And what is that veil?

Well, very simply, that veil is a covering of darkness, of ignorance, of unbelief, that covered this world because up until the time of the Lord Jesus Christ, this world was held in a covering of unbelief, ignorance, and darkness.

There was only this small ray of light falling down in the Middle East into this nation that the Lord had set apart for himself, his people there.

and every so often a little ray of divine light would break in as happened in Moab with the likes of Ruth. Little moments where, as happened in Zidon with the widow woman there, where the Lord was giving a little glimpse.

This is what's going to happen in the future. At the moment, it's in this, it's centered here. But when Jesus Christ came and died and rose again and the Holy Spirit came in power, then this veil was lifted.

[20 : 48] And that's where there was a huge, great gospel spread right throughout this world. And it's going on to this very day. Nations, there are so many people today.

It would be really amazing if we could understand or grasp how many people every day are coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We'd be staggered at it. But there is a massive global spread. It is reckoned there's about a hundred million Christians in China alone. I don't know how accurate these figures are and that is why they're beginning to get worried of the state at the spread of Christianity and beginning to police it and go against it because of this massive spread. But this is, you see, the Lord is at work. This is removing the veil, the covering. And of course, it all centered in Mount Zion. This is where it began and God's, amongst God, God's own land and God's people and spread throughout the nations of this world. But the thing is, if today you're still without Jesus Christ, this covering, this veil is still over you because you're not seeing.

[22 : 07] And you know, you will very easily know whether that veil, that covering is on you or not because there are so many warnings in the gospel.

You don't need to go past the words of Jesus. And Jesus spells out 110% clearly to us that except we be born again, except we trust our lives, unless we believe in Him, we will perish. We'll be lost. Not just in this world, but forever. And that's a fearful concept. And yet, when that veil, that covering is over you, that doesn't mean a thing.

You can hear about the threatenings of hell. It doesn't mean a thing. It's like just water off a duck's back. Passes over. Why?

Because of this veil, this covering. You can hear the most beautiful invitations from the words of Jesus Christ, where Jesus is pleading.

[23 : 13] Just as He wept over Jerusalem, there is still that pleading coming. It means nothing when that veil is over you. But just as the Lord removed the veil, and notice how He did it.

He will swallow up on this mountain. I love that. It isn't like He'll kind of move it away. It's like He just it's gone. He swallows it up.

It's not there again. And that's what He does for you. If He has taken that veil away, it'll never return. That doesn't mean that you'll see everything clearly every single day.

But you will never ever go back to where you were. You will never be living in blindness and in darkness and in uncertainty and in carelessness and with no thought of where you're going or what's happening.

Never again. Because the Lord will swallow it up. And I'm saying to you today, if today you don't know Jesus, and you say to yourself, you know, to be honest, it's not bothering me.

[24 : 27] You know what you need to do? You have to go to the Lord and say, Lord, will you for me swallow up this veil, this covering that's blinding me to you and to your truth, so that I'll get to see you, so that I'll lay hold upon you, so that everything will be clear, so you'll help me to believe in you.

Because that's the wonder, the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that's what he's going to do. He will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all the peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations.

We're not going to look at verse 8 just now, maybe another time. And that's what he's going to do with death. He will swallow up death forever. Wow. You know, when you think of death and the grave, that's swallowing.

That's what the grave is always doing. The grave's never satisfied. All of swallowing. It's almost like saying, give me more, give me more. I want more. Well, it's like the Lord is saying, I'm going to swallow it all up.

Forever. End of death. Gone. And this is part of what he has done in and through Jesus Christ. This is part of the impact of the feast.

[25 : 41] This is part of this feast and let me assure you, if you begin to feast on Jesus here, you will feast on him throughout an endless eternity. You'll be there at the marriage supper of the Lamb, the greatest supper ever.

Will you ask the Lord today, Lord, will you remove the covering that is over me and help me to see you and to believe in you and to love you and to follow you?

Let us pray. O Lord, we give thanks for this great word of yours, a word that challenges us, a word that encourages us, a word that shows us how things are.

And we pray, O Lord, that you will make clear to us the gospel of Jesus Christ. Give us a simple understanding of your truth. Take away, Lord, the obstacles that hold us back because there are so many hindrances, so many things.

