

**Q: Where do the Saints run for shelter, when confronted with the weight and reality of their own sin?**

**Q: Where do the Saints turn for relief, when God's Word cuts to their heart, exposing their waywardness before Him?**

I believe *Nehemiah 8:9-12* gives you and I that answer today by teaching us this truth:

**Doctrine:** God's people are not to be overcome with grief because He has given them divine joy which is their refuge.

Brief Context of Nehemiah:

Nehemiah is cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. He hears that the walls of Jerusalem have been destroyed and he is overcome with sorrow. City walls in this day were a sign of strength and true protection from one's enemy. With the walls broken down and the city exposed, Nehemiah is met with the reality that his people and his city are on the brink of ruin. He comes before the LORD and prays confessing his sin and the sin of Israel and extolling God for His steadfast love and mercy towards His people whom He promised He would not forsake. God, in His mercy, provides an opportunity when King Artaxerxes sees that Nehemiah is downtrodden. Nehemiah explains to him what has happened and asks permission to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of his city. The king grants his request and commissions the project to take place. Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem where he begins the work of rebuilding the walls. God grants Nehemiah success in rebuilding the walls and the people of God come together in great number, some 42,000, to begin a time of celebration and remembrance before the LORD for all that He has done.

They gather together as one, on the first day of the seventh month and Ezra the priest and scribe begins to read the Law of God in the presence of God's people assembled before him. Ezra is standing high above the people with men on his left and his right.

Ezra preached the Word of God and the people of God understood what was said and it is here in verse 9 that we see this...

"Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and teacher of the Law, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is holy to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law."

- I. God's people have been cut to the heart because His Word has exposed their sin before Him. It has exposed their generational sin as his covenant people and their individual sin and they are overcome with grief.
- II. Godly grief over our sin is good. We have warrant from the Scripture that we should be sorrowful before God for our sin. You should not take lightly the sin which put Christ upon the cross. You and I should never be flippant in what cost Christ so dearly.
- III. But there comes a time when we are to lift our heads, when the mourning must cease and the gaze of the heart of God's people must be set upon their Redeemer in all His beauty and Majesty to see all that He has done in their stead, in order that their joy and strength may increase.

And it is this that you and I are in need of this morning: You and I need constant reminder in the midst of our sin, that the Joy of the LORD is our strength.

Let us consider first this point:

## **I. GOD'S PEOPLE ARE NOT TO BE OVERCOME WITH GRIEF, BECAUSE HE HAS GIVEN THEM DIVINE JOY (V.10a)**

**"Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD"**

Exposition: In the midst their weeping Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites command the people of God not to weep or be grieved. The reason why was due to the fact that this day was holy unto the LORD. It was the Feast of Trumpets. Leviticus 23:24 tells us that this day the trumpets were to blow louder and longer than on other days, a day of great sacrifice, a holy convocation, a day of rest, and day of memorial. There are several possibilities as to what was to be remembered and celebrated:

1. To remember when the Law was given on Sinai
2. To remember the creation of the world
3. To remember God rescuing Isaac from the sword of his father Abraham by providing a sacrifice in the ram.

I am not sure which is to be in view here, but what is plainly in view is that God is at the center of each of these. And because God is at the center, God's people are to be filled with the joy he provides in order to rightly ascribe the glory due His name.

Let you and I consider this morning the many ways in which God has given His people joy which overcomes our sorrow.

## I) Divine joy flows from the hearts of God's people as they remember that God is God and He is their God.

Psalm 93:1-2, "The Lord reigns; he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed; he has put on strength as his belt. Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved. 2 Your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting."

He reigns, He is robed in majesty, He has as his belt strength, he has established the world and it shall never be moved because he shall never moved. He is eternal.

**Q:** Do you marvel at Him this morning? Are you in awe at his majestic beauty? Do you gaze upon His might in wonder? Do you dwell on the fact that He has created all things, He spoke all things into existence, He sits sovereignly above all things and though kings of this earth plot against Him, He sits in the heavens and laughs...because He is LORD and they are but His creation.

**Not only is He God, but if you are in Christ, if you are a believer, HE IS YOUR GOD.**

2 Samuel 7:24, "And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever. And you, O Lord, became their God."

Psalm 16:2, "I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."

Psalm 118:28, "You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you."

If you are in Christ, you can say with the Psalmist, that God is your God. You are united to Him by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and you are His. Nothing can snatch you from His hand. "I am my beloved's and He is mine."

Spurgeon: "All the attributes of God become well-springs of joy to the thoughtful, contemplative believer; for such a man says within his soul, "All these attributes of my God are mine: his power, my protection; his wisdom, my guidance; his faithfulness, my foundation; his grace, my salvation." He is a God who cannot lie, faithful and true to his promise; he is all love, and at the same time infinitely just, supremely holy."

**Children:** Did you know this God is your God if your faith is in Christ Jesus, that you belong to Him and nothing can separate you from His love in Christ Jesus? Did you know the more and more you think about this throughout your life, that more and more joy fills your heart?

As God's Word exposes your sin before and you find yourself in good Godly sorrow, is it not this truth that lifts your head above your sin to see your Savior? Are you not overcome with gladness as you cling to Him as the anchor of your soul? Can there be anything more assuring and more life giving than knowing that God is God and He is your God if you belong to Him?

There is a second way in which divine joy is produced:

## II. Divine joy flows from the hearts of God's people when they think of His sweet salvation.

Exposition: The day of atonement is just a few days away from the feast of trumpets. In their view was a reminder of God's rescue from the land of Egypt. From the final plague of death. That all who had above their door post the blood of the lamb, death would Passover.

And it is this truth that you and I must dwell on regularly as God uses this to bring great joy into the hearts of His people.

### 1. Consider the cost of your salvation:

Philippians 2:5-8, "5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,[a] 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,[b] 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,[c] being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

### 2. Consider the planning of your salvation:

Ephesians 1:4-5, "4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us[b] for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will"

Romans 8:29, "Those whom He foreknew."

### 3. Consider the agent of your salvation:

Ephesians 2:8-9, "8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

What joy fills the heart of the Saints when you and I reflect on the great salvation that afforded us in Christ.

## III. Divine joy flows from the hearts of God's people when they remember that their Good Shepherd never leaves them in their time of trial.

Exposition: City walls have been destroyed, but Nehemiah comes to God and prays to Him the promises that God Himself declared. That He keeps covenant and steadfast love for His people.

John 10:11-13, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep."

**Q:** Has this truth come into your heart as you go through the dangers and toils of this life? Are you not reminded that Christ is the Good Shepherd who not only cares for His sheep, but gives his life for them?

Romans 8:38-39, “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

**Q:** Has the wolf come into your pasture as of late? Are you overwhelmed by the weight of this life? Do you find yourself discouraged when you fail to carry out your duties the LORD has commanded you to walk in?

1. Husbands/Fathers: Leading family worship, washing your wife in the Word, laying your life down as Christ has laid his down for His bride. Vocation when not working as unto Him...repent of this and look to see Christ who has all authority promises that He will never leave you.
2. Wives/Mothers: Does the weight of your duties in the home and raising your children ever bear heavily upon you? Do you feel weighed down when the plans you have made for the day completely fall apart due to unforeseen circumstances?
3. Christian: Has weight of persecution come upon your life as you seek to live obediently before Him?

Find joy as you are reminded that Christ never leaves His sheep. He is near. He has given you His Spirit to dwell within you to comfort you, lead you and reorient your gaze upon Him when we stray as sheep so often do.

Look at the apostle Paul with me:

2 Corinthians 11:24-28, “24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food,[a] in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.”

2 Corinthians 12:9-10, “9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

**Q:** How can Paul say he is strong, when he is weak, when has been battered and beaten? The JOY OF THE LORD IS HIS STRENGTH.

## II. GOD’S PEOPLE ARE NOT TO BE OVERCOME WITH GRIEF, BECAUSE HIS JOY IS THIER REFUGE (v. 10b)

“For the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

*“Strength” means refuge, a strong tower, a mighty fortress as it were.*

**Exposition:** Israel had very often looked horizontally for strength rather than vertically.

1. Desiring to go back to Egypt instead of trusting in the LORD as their refuge and provider.
2. Choosing Saul to be a king like all the other nations, instead of trusting and relying upon God as king.

It is because of this that the people of God in Nehemiah’s day are cut to the heart. They understand their iniquity before their Creator and they weep. They feel weak and exposed. But they are reminded that divine joy from the LORD is their strength. They are to seek refuge in Him and know that they are secure in Him alone.

### I. The joy of the LORD is a refuge against the temptation of finding strength in our sin.

You and I are tempted regularly to find our refuge in sin.

**Spurgeon:** “Since man fell in the garden, he has too often sought for his enjoyments where the serpent finds his.”

3 Ways:

1. The World: Find strength and power in all that the world offers.
2. The Flesh: Find strength in your own pride and foolish wisdom.
3. The Devil: Find strength in going opposite of what God has revealed as right and true.

1 Peter 5:8, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

But you Christian, have a Redeemer in Heaven as your refuge, who is the LION OF JUDAH, He is the Prince of Peace, He is the Conquering King, He is from Everlasting to Everlasting, He sits upon the throne of David, He is the Lamb who was slain, He is the Alpha and the Omega, He is preeminent, He is in whom all things hold together, He is the head of the Church, and if this be your Christ...He is your refuge. There is nothing this life can offer that could strengthen you like Him. Won’t you life your gaze there brothers and sisters and find refuge from all the troubles of this life and the weight of your sin.

**Sinner:**

You have not this refuge: You have decided to be your own refuge. When the storm of God's wrath comes upon your life, you will fall, you will be cast out by the winds of His perfect justice and you will perish in Hell forever under the curse of your own sin.

But there is a refuge in which you can find rescue. There is a mighty fortress in whom the wrath of God was poured out upon and He has endured. This fortress is Christ Jesus. Oh that you would run to Him in faith, repenting of your sin, and seek forgiveness in Him in order that you with the assembly of God's people can say with a loud voice, Blessed be the name of the LORD.

**USES:**

1. The joy of the LORD produces Gospel proclamation

Nehemiah 8:12a, "And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions."

2. The joy of the LORD produces rejoicing

Nehemiah 8:12b, "and to make great rejoicing