

I am sure you have often sung the little chorus “I’ve got that joy, joy, joy, down in my heart!” Yet often our lives can feel quite joyless. What is the joy God promises us and how can we know more of that joy in our every day lives.

Nehemiah had led the people of Jerusalem to rebuild the walls in just 52 days and now they are gathered inside the city, surrounded by its still ruined houses, and Ezra is reading the book of the Law to them.

“The Joy of the Lord is my Strength”

READ Nehemiah 8:2-3, 5-11 below and mark the Law with a and “joy” with a

Nehemiah 8:2-3, 5-12

² 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. ³ 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.

⁵ 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. ⁶ And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

⁷ Also ..., the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. ⁸ They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Go your way. Eat the fat 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.” ¹¹ So the Levites calmed all the people, saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.” ¹² And all the people went 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.

Underline the word “understand”

What do you learn about the people gathered?

What is their attitude to the Law? How can you tell?

What role do the Levites have? Why does it matter?

As the people listen to the first 5 books of the OT being read, what would they hear? Reflect on some of the stories and events.

In v 9-12 what is the peoples’ response to hearing the Law being read? Why do you think they are crying? (think of the context)

How does Nehemiah encourage them?

What is the final outcome of this event in v12?

What do you think it means when Nehemiah says “the joy of the Lord is your strength”?

Strong’s—strength—4581—a fortified place, a stronghold

Job 38:4-7

⁴ “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. ⁵ Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? ⁶ On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, ⁷ when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

Luke 1:41-42

⁴¹ And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, ⁴² and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

Luke 2:8-11

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Hebrews 12:1-2

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.


Luke 15:3-8

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Jude 24-25

²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

The people of Judah came to understand that their strength and security came in knowing that they were God’s joy. His joy was a safe place.

Read the passages in the sidebar and mark the word “joy” with a . As you read each one list what you discover about joy and its relationship to God’s plans of salvation.

Job 38:4-7 Creation

In what type of atmosphere did the world begin?

Luke 1:41-42, Luke 2:8-11 Incarnation

How did God feel about sending Jesus?

Hebrews 12:1-2 Crucifixion

What was the joy that was set before Jesus?

(read on to help you answer!)

Luke 15:3-8 A Parable of Jesus

Who initiates the search in this parable?

What is the shepherds reaction on finding the sheep?

What lesson is Jesus teaching in this story?

Jude v24-25

How will God receive us when we finally meet Him?

In what ways is the joy of the Lord our strength?