

THE JOY OF THE LORD IS OUR STRENGTH

Introduction

- A. Text: **Neh. 8:9-12**.
- B. As Christians, we spend a great deal of time thinking about how *greater spiritual strength* can be attained, both for ourselves and others.
- C. But what is the best *source* of strength? What is the most *solid foundation* upon which it can be built?
- D. In this lesson, we want to consider a relationship that many people seem not to have discovered: the relationship between *joy* and *strength*.
- E. Is it not true that "the joy of the Lord is [our] strength" (**Neh. 8:10**)?

I. IT WAS FOR THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM THAT THE LORD ENDURED THE CROSS

- A. We are told that the Lord "learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him" (**Hb. 5:8,9**).
- B. What strengthened Jesus Himself to endure the suffering that was necessary to procure our salvation?
- C. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who *for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross*, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (**Hb. 12:2**).

II. THE JOY SET BEFORE US IS OUR GREATEST MOTIVATION

- A. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (**Jn. 14:15**).
 - 1. Is it not *love for the Lord* — and *the joy of showing our love to Him* — that moves us to obey Him?
 - 2. "Love is the fulfillment of the law" (**Rom. 13:9,10**). The other commandments are things we will want to do if we are sufficiently motivated by love, joy, etc.
- B. There is no motivation more powerful than *the prospect of intense, genuine joy*. The vision of joy in **Mt. 25:21** must be the goal that pulls us forward as Christians: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. *Enter into the joy of your lord.*"
- C. The joy involved in the "love of Christ" is what must "compel" (constrain) us - **2 Cor. 5:14,15**. Cf. the "labor of love" in **1 Thess. 1:3**.
- D. "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, *that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me*. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, *I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*" (**Phil. 3:12-14**).

III. THE JOY SET BEFORE US IS OUR GREATEST STRENGTH

- A. Along with the "breastplate of faith and love," the "helmet" that protects us is to be "the hope of salvation" (**1 Thess. 5:8**). Cf. **Eph. 6:17**.

- B. The strengthening power of joy can be seen in Paul's life.
1. In regard to great difficulties that awaited him, he said, "None of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may *finish my race with joy*, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (**Ac. 20:24**). Cf. **2 Tim. 4:7,8**.
 2. "For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for *I know whom I have believed* and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (**2 Tim. 1:12**).
 3. Cf. "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (**2 Cor. 4:16-18**).
- C. Consider Jesus' promise in **Mt. 11:28-30**: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For *My yoke is easy and My burden is light*."
1. In many respects, Jesus' requirements of us are "hard." What is it, then, that makes His yoke "easy"?
 2. Is it not the *joy* that we experience in our love for Him? "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. *And His commandments are not burdensome*" (**1 Jn. 5:3**).
 3. "Love feels no burden, thinks nothing of trouble, attempts what is above its strength, pleads no excuse of impossibility; . . . It is therefore able to undertake all things, and warrants them to take effect, where he who does not love, would faint and lie down" (Thomas à Kempis).
 4. Cf. "I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart" (**Psa. 40:8**).
- D. The brute force of will power alone is not enough to keep us from the temptation to sin. In the end, it is the joy involved in *God's grace* that "teaches" us to say no to sin - **Tit. 2:11-14**.
1. "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive *the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him*" (**Jas. 1:12**).
 2. "It is good that the *heart be established by grace*" (**Hb. 13:9**).
- E. *Faith, hope, and love* are all involved in our *joy* — and they all are a part of the forward-looking strength that results from our salvation - **1 Thess. 1:3**. Cf. **1 Cor. 13:13**; **1 Tim. 1:5**.
- F. The spiritual strength that comes from being joyfully "rooted and grounded in love" is emphasized in **Eph. 3:14-21**.

IV. CONSTANT FAITHFULNESS TO GOD REQUIRES CONSTANT FOCUS ON OUR JOY

- A. Even the most powerfully motivating and strengthening vision will lose its power if we don't keep our *focus* on it, *meditate* on it, *remember its importance* to us, etc.
- B. Hence, we are urged to "gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and *rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you* at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (**1 Pt. 1:13**). Cf. **vv.6-9**.
1. The case of the church in Ephesus illustrates what can happen when our love and joy in the Lord begin to fade - **Rev. 2:2-5**.
 2. Many scriptural passages exhort us to keep our focus on the hope and joy of our salvation - **Col. 1:23**; **Hb. 3:6**; **6:4-6,11,12,19**; etc.
- C. Keeping focused on the *joy of the Lord* involves at least two things:

1. Maintaining our eagerness to bring glory to God.
 2. Maintaining our joy in showing gratitude for God's grace.
- D. If we are interested in being strong spiritually, there is no more important prayer than Paul's prayer for the Ephesian brethren: "the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is *the hope of His calling*, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is *the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe*, according to the working of His mighty power" (**Eph. 1:18,19**).

Conclusion

- A. Love, which is very closely related to joy, "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (**1 Cor. 13:7,8**).
1. Is there *so little real spiritual strength* today because there is *so little real love for the Lord and joy in His salvation*?
 2. And is there so little love and joy because we take our spiritual blessings for granted and have *so little appreciation for the wonder of God's grace toward us*?
- B. "For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height; to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (**Eph. 3:14-21**).