



Studies in Ezra & Nehemiah

Text

Nehemiah 8:1-18

Topic

Nehemiah tells the Israelites listening to the reading of God's Law to quit crying

Title

*"You **Can** Hide Your **Cryin'** Eyes"*

Tony Stark quipped, "Everything special about you came from a bottle."

He was insulting Steve Rogers, whom a super-serum transformed into super-soldier Captain America - The First Avenger.

We are all too familiar with [sports stars seeking super-serum to supercharge skill and strength.](#)

Sammy Sosa... Mark Maguire... Barry Bonds...
Were serum-enhanced and thereby exhibited
meta-human strength to more often hit a
baseball very, very far.

In our text today we will encounter the amazing
phrase, “the joy of the LORD is your
strength” (v10). Is “joy” a spiritual super-serum
that gets us pumped up on our journey
homeward?

We’ll need to determine what the Holy Spirit
might have meant when He inspired Nehemiah
to say it to the returnees, and to record it for
future generations of believers.

I’ll organize my comments around two points: #1
The Lord’s Joy Is Your Salvation, and #2 The
Joy Of The Lord Is Your Strength.

#1 The Lord’s Joy Is Your Salvation

(v1-12)

Let me tell you up front how we are going to
define “the joy of the LORD.”

It is the joy He has. It is the joy **OF** the LORD, not the joy *from* the LORD.

- Yes, joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit - produced in believers as we abide in Jesus (Galatians 5:22-23).
- Yes, believers are commanded to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4).

The fruit of joy, and the choice to rejoice - Those manifestations of joy do not in any way contradict the biblical fact that Jesus has His own joy. In the New Testament Book of Hebrews we read,

Heb 12:2 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.

A joy was “set before” Jesus that would be His only *after* He “endured the cross.”

Since there is disagreement among scholars as to precisely what the Holy Spirit intended, I'll quote a few godly men:

1. Citing scripture along the way, Warren Wiersbe comes to this conclusion: “The “joy that was set before Him” would include Jesus’ completing the Father’s will, His resurrection and exaltation, **and His joy in presenting believers to the Father in glory.**”
2. William MacDonald put it this way: “He kept His eyes fixed on the coming glory **when all the redeemed would be gathered with Him eternally.**”
3. Another commentator said, “Jesus pursued the greatest imaginable joy, namely, the joy of being exalted to God’s right hand **in the assembly of a redeemed people.**”

Each of those men emphasized Jesus’ joy in believers, redeemed and assembled with Him forever.

I don't think it's going too far to say that you who are in Christ - **You** are the Lord's joy. **Your salvation** was what was *after* the cross that Jesus endured.

What Jesus did, in obedience to His Father, He did to be the Savior of all men - especially those who believe. His work culminates in salvation for all who call upon His Name.

We read, twice, in the Gospel of Luke that, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (15:7, 10). While I'm sure angels rejoice, Jesus said there'd be joy "in their presence." Maybe He was referring to His joy.

Our text begins with the public reading of Scripture.

Neh 8:1 Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe

to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel.

Nehemiah was the builder. Ezra was the builder-upper. That's how God gifted them in their calling.

You are called and gifted. There are times when, regardless your gift from the Lord, you have to step up and fill a spiritual gap.

Timothy was a pastor, but the apostle Paul encouraged him to “do the work of an evangelist.”

Stir-up your gift or gifts *and* remain open and flexible to step-up and serve.

Neh 8:2 So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who *could* hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month.

Think of this as a one-day, all-day, outdoor Bible conference.

“All who could hear with understanding” means young adults and children who could pay attention and understand. I think sometimes we make too much of this - whether we interpret it as being inclusive of children or restrictive of them. It doesn't set any precedent either way. It wasn't a normal service. We are free in the Lord to determine our own inclusions or restrictions.

Neh 8:3 Then he read from it in the open square that *was* in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* to the Book of the Law.

Conferences or retreats usually have a theme. For this one I'd suggest, *First Five* - since they read the first five books of the Bible, called the Pentateuch. Or maybe, *Five Talkin'*.

Neh 8:4 So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood [13 guys with hard-to-pronounce Hebrew names]

Mattithiah, Shema, Anaijah, Urijah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishaiah, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

They built a raised platform large enough to easily accommodate at least fourteen men. It's been suggested these other guys took turns with Ezra reading portions of the Law of Moses.

Neh 8:5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was *standing* above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up.

Biblical acoustics always amaze me. This was a huge crowd - numbering in the tens of thousands, according to the census. Yet all could both see and hear.

The people stood in reverence to the Word. Again - no precedent was set. We might want to stand for a reading of Scripture; we might not. Whether it's hats or head coverings, we have freedom in our choices.

Neh 8:6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with *their* faces to the ground.

If this is chronological, Ezra opened the scroll; prayed; then there was some sort of worship service. Maybe the thirteen guys on the platform were the worship band - *The Moses 13... Or The First Five Faction... Or (maybe) The Pentateuch-tonix.*

Neh 8:7 Also [13 more guys with hard-to-pronounce Hebrew names] Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiiah, **and** the Levites, helped the people to

understand the Law; and the people *stood* in their place.

These thirteen guys may have been Ezra's disciples. Together with the Levites, they mingled with the crowd, clarifying and answering questions. There must have been pauses during the reading. Think of these as 'break-out groups' that received more focused application.

Neh 8:8 So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped *them* to understand the reading.

The "book," meaning the first five books, was preeminent. An onlooker would conclude that these were people who understood that everything needed for life and godliness was to be found in its words. They were not interested in comparative religion, or any philosophy of men.

Read... “Give the sense” by explaining the text in context... “Help to understand” would include making application. It’s a simple method - but powerful. We should do no less.

Neh 8:9 And Nehemiah, who *was* the governor, 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 nor weep." For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the Law.

God’s covenant with Israel included unconditional and conditional promises. The Promised Land, for example, was granted to Israel unconditionally. It’s why you see them back today after centuries of being scattered.

The possession of, and the enjoyment of, the Promised Land, however, was conditional upon their obedience. Standing there, not that far removed from their 70 year captivity in Babylon, with Jerusalem largely uninhabited, and a lesser Temple, it was easy to mourn and weep.

Nehemiah straight-up told them to stop crying. Did your dad ever tell you to stop crying, then add, "Or I'll give you something to cry about?"

Nehemiah doesn't come across like that. This seems like a supernatural word of wisdom. The Holy Spirit was active in the lives of these guys, and He told them what to say. When they said it - thousand and thousands of Israelites stopped crying. Just like that. As the Newsboys say - It's a Spirit thing.

It's probably not appropriate for us, normally, to tell others to stop crying. We are told to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15). You **can** always encourage mourners that Jesus wipes away their tears, and saves them in a bottle (Psalm 56:8).

Neh 8:10 Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared; for *this* day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

The reading of the Law was not intended to produce sorrow, but to renew hope. Despite Israel's failures, God was in their midst - keeping His promises to His special nation. It was a time for feasting; a time for rejoicing.

Since the Law prohibited eating "the fat," this must be an idiom. "Eat the fat, drink the sweet," or as we might say, "Let's get this party started!"

Neh 8:11 So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, "Be still, for the day *is* holy; do not be grieved."

The Levites enforced the "no weeping" rule. Circulating among the crowd, they'd hear sniffing, and rush to it with these words. "You there, crying; snap out of it!"

Neh 8:12 And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

Quit crying; feast; share your feast; rejoice. That was the application of the first five books of Scripture on that day. That was the take-home.

Every Sunday, we reserve time as we are closing for you to contemplate the “take-home,” for you, from God. He brings you here to minister His grace to you. Make sure you leave knowing more about it and Him.

You should abide in Jesus and cultivate the fruit of joy. You should choose to rejoice always. **AND** you should often dwell on the truth that **you** are why Jesus “endured the cross.”

#2 The Joy Of The Lord Is Your Strength

(v13-18)

There are 1500 national days, national weeks, or national months. We’re celebrating Memorial Day tomorrow. Today, May 26, is National Cellophane Tape Day, and National Grape Popsicle Day.

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Nehemiah 8:1-18

“You Can Hide Your Cryin’ Eyes”

In our text, the Jews in and around Jerusalem were in a holiday season. It was their seventh month.

They were supposed to observe the Feast of Trumpets on the first day, the Day of Atonement on the tenth day, and the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days - from the fifteenth day until the twenty-first day.

Neh 8:13 Now on the second day the heads of the fathers' *houses* of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law.

Neh 8:14 And they found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month,

The Bible conference added a second day. That sometimes happens when there is revival; the meetings are extended.

Maybe they had heard about the feasts in the readings the day before, and realized they weren't keeping them. They checked the calendar and understood that Tabernacles was coming up in a few days.

Neh 8:15 and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, "Go out to the mountain, and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths, as *it is* written."

During Tabernacles, the Jews built makeshift shelters from branches and camped outdoors. It was to commemorate the Exodus of their ancestors when they were miraculously delivered from Egypt, and brought through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

Neh 8:16 Then the people went out and brought *them* and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards or the courts of the house of God, and in the open

square of the Water Gate and in the open square of the Gate of Ephraim.

Neh 8:17 So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so. And there was very great gladness.

A partial observance of the Feast had been kept by the first exiles who returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel (Ezra 3:4). Before that, *it had been about a thousand years since the Jews last celebrated Tabernacles.*

Neh 8:18 Also day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day *there was* a sacred assembly, according to the *prescribed* manner.

They'd just heard all five books read a few days before, but they couldn't get enough.

Revival is marked by many things - and one of them is a return to the authority of God's Word.

Revival has jokingly been referred to as 're-Bible.' This was the 'Re-Bible at Watergate.'

How is the joy of the LORD your strength?

Think of a few things that accompany our salvation:

- Since we are saved, we are certain that He **will** complete the good work He has begun in us.
- Since we are saved, we are confident that all things **will** work together for the good.
- Since we are saved, we comprehend that we **will** awake in His likeness, having now been predestined to be conformed into Jesus' image.
- And since we are saved, we are convinced that our light affliction **is** but for a moment, and

is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

I may at times identify with the future martyrs of the Great Tribulation, who cry out, “How long, O Lord?” But I know that no weapon against me can prosper, and that nothing and no one can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

It doesn't do it justice to call it super-serum, but the joy of the LORD - *that is real strength for living.*