



THE JOY OF THE LORD

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With minor editorial changes by
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THE JOY OF THE LORD

"...THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH" Neh. 8: 10

In these days of strenuous living, the Christian can have peace and joy that passeth understanding. When so many are losing the desire to live the normal life, it is essential that the Christian have the full benefits of all that the Lord provided by His atonement on the cross. Christ's atonement provided a three-fold blessing. First, we have the forgiveness of sins, then we have the healing of the body, thirdly, we have the joy of the Lord. Most people accept the first provision, some appropriate the healing provision, but not too many are aware of the fact that Jesus came to bring us peace of heart and joy unspeakable and full of glory. In Isa. 53: 4 we read,

"Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows:"

If Jesus has borne our griefs and sorrows, why do we carry them? 1 Peter 5: 7 declares:

"Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you."

We read further in Matt. 11: 28:

"Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

But so many are like the weary traveler with his heavy packstrapped trudging down the dusty road. Oh how he longs for someone to come along and give him a ride. At length he hears the noise of horse hoofs and the sound of the buggy wheels merrily churning through the cobble stones.

A voice cries out, "Hello there, would you like a ride". With gratitude the exhausted traveler climbs aboard the buggy. As they travel along, the driver notices something strange. The tired traveler is still carrying his packsack on his back. He says, "Friend, why don't you take that heavy load off your back and lay it down while you rest." The weary traveler replies, "Oh no, I cannot take this load off. I- must keep it on my shoulders". How foolish you say, yet that is exactly what so many Christians are doing. They are trying to carry their cares and burdens. Jesus knows we cannot carry our burdens, so He comes along like the kind Samaritan and offers to carry our burdens for us. My friend, is this too simple to believe? Well, the gospel story is simple indeed, and if we will benefit from the wonderful provisions Jesus has made for mankind, by His supreme sacrifice, we must accept the simple, yet all-sufficient, all-encompassing, all-inclusive provisions of Calvary.

A FORM OF GODLINESS

One of the signs of the backslidden state of the modern Church is that she has:

"a form of godliness, but denies the power thereof". (2 Tim. 3: 5)

This condition is very serious when we consider how the Lord regards it. The Lord tells us that we are to "turn away" from those who have a mere form of religion. How applicable this is today! We have beautiful church buildings, we have high-sounding philosophies and theories, we have creeds, dogmas, rituals, ceremonies, - we have all the mechanics and machinery, but without the presence of the Lord, without the anointing of the Spirit and the JOY OF THE LORD our worship is a dead ritual - a form of godliness that denies the power of God.

A BLESSING OR A CURSE

In Deut. 28 Moses lists the many blessings accrued from obedience. Then he gives a long list of the curses that come upon anyone who is disobedient. Included in the pronouncement of disobedience are these words:

"because thou servedst not the Lord thy God WITH JOYFULNESS". see verse 47.

Today medical science has proven that many mental and resultant physical maladies that plague modern mankind are caused by overtaxing the human body with worry, fear, sorrow, grief, despair, prevalent in modern fast living. Well the Bible declared this many centuries before modern science discovered the truth that the "JOY OF THE LORD IS THY STRENGTH".

JOY IS WITHERED AWAY

In Joel 1: 12 we find a very pertinent text:

"The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth, the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field are withered, because JOY IS WITHERED AWAY from the sons of men."

Here God is using an orchard as a picture of the Church. He says all the trees are withered and the fig tree is dried up. The fig tree typifies HEALING. The vine pictures the new wine of the

HOLY GHOST - THE JOY OF THE LORD. The other trees symbolize the GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT. And the Prophet says these trees, or "gifts", are "withered away" because there is no joy in the Church. How simple this is! We don't need a lot of theorizing, we don't need conventions to ascertain the causes of spiritual deadness, we need only to accept the simple Bible formula for spiritual activity, and the presence of the power of God - Praise God with great joyfulness. In the Early Church there were healings and miracles. The "trees of the Lord" were laden with fruit. The Church of God was not ashamed, but a mighty witness of the power of God. But now we see the Church a backslidden, powerless skeleton - a disgrace to the Almighty God Who she pretends to represent. And there will never again be any abundance of healings and miracles until JOY IS RESTORED to the sons of God.

NO JOY, NO PRAISE, NO FAITH

When there is no joy, there is no praise. Where there is no praise, there is no faith. Where there is no faith, there is no power. No power, no healings, no miracles. It is just that simple. Faith is born of JOY. When we rejoice in the Lord, our faith becomes active. Activated faith will produce the miraculous. The fruit begins to appear on all the trees. Some people try to produce the miraculous by other means - trying to live a holy life. Now this is an essential factor. But true holiness only comes as a result of an experience of the new birth. The new birth will produce "great joy". Acts 8: 8. Holiness will be a natural fruit of the fully dedicated and yielded vessel "abiding in the Vine". And when we abide in Him, our joy will be full. (John 15: 11)

THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH

When Israel returned from the captivity and the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood and read all the words of the Law. The people stood up, and when Ezra blessed the Lord, (praised Him), all the people answered, "Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands". (Neh. 8: 4,6) Then as Ezra continued reading in the law of God, the people began to mourn and weep. Then he said unto them,

"Go your way, eat the fat and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is Holy unto the Lord: neither be ye sorry; for THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH". (Neh. 8:9, 10)

We are living in a day when God is again restoring New Testament Praise and Worship. The admonition of Ezra and Nehemiah is applicable today. The Church needs to rise above pious conformity to rituals and ceremonies. The old mournful dirge of fallen Christianity will never produce the fruits and gifts of the Spirit. This day is Holy, for this is the day the Lord is bringing back to the Church the GLORY of His presence. The power of God is not present in a requiem mass or grief-stricken rite. The Bible says the Lord inhabits the praises of His people. (Psa. 22: 3) So we must rise above the old conventional forms and ceremonies to a new status of victory and joy and praise.

PUT ON THY STRENGTH

Isaiah declares to God's people:

"Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion, put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the Holy city ... Shake thyself from the dust, loose thyself from the bands of thy neck O captive daughter of Zion ... Break forth into JOY, sing together ye waste places of Jerusalem:" (Isa. 52: 1,2,9)

The Church today needs to shake off the dust of the bondage and enslavement that was enforced upon the laity by the religious hierarchy of the apostate church. Too long have the false shepherds held dominion over God's heritage. The born-again Christian is not to be enslaved to the regimented, stereotyped forms, and rituals of man-made traditions. It is time to declare freedom to God's people. We need to "break forth". We need to be liberated from fear, doubt, inhibition, discouragement, frustration, and fruitlessness, and we shall become as "willows (trees) planted by the water". (Isa. 44: 4) The same Prophet declares:

"Thou shalt call thy walls salvation. and thy gates PRAISE". (Isa. 60: 18)

In the rebuilding of the spiritual temple the material we must use when we construct the "gates" is "PRAISE". Now the gates are a type of the place of entry into the presence of God. When we break forth into joy and praise we open the gates of the Sanctuary and let the people into the presence of the Lord. Hallelujah! Of course, the devil doesn't want God's people to be strong, so he tries to stop the praises and the rejoicing. And he has many people working for him doing this very thing. But Praise God, many people today are discovering the wonderful freedom and liberty and strength in the joy of the Lord, and they will never go back to the old bondage and slavery of the devil.

DAVID, A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

Perhaps no Bible writer emphasizes the importance of PRAISE and REJOICING as much as David. No doubt, this is why he is called a man after God's own heart. Over and over again he admonishes the people of God to Praise the Lord. The Psalms are predominately a book of Praise. They formed the basis of worship for God's people for centuries. The reader is urged to read the Psalms over and over. David counsels us to:

"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness, come before His presence with singing. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise, be thankful unto Him, and bless His Name". (Psa. 100)

And he says,

"O come let us sing unto the Lord, let us make a joyful noise unto the rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms". (Psa. 95: 1,2)

Again he says,

"O sing unto the Lord a new song; sing unto the Lord all the earth. Sing unto the Lord: show forth His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the heathen, His wonders among all people. For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised". (Psa. 96: 1-4)

MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE!

We notice in the above Scripture David tells us to "make a joyful noise unto the Lord". Well, some people tell us we are supposed to be quiet and orderly in church. But the Bible says we are to make a joyful noise unto the Lord. This doesn't mean we can make any kind of noise. David is referring to the JOY OF THE LORD, rejoicing in the Lord, praising God with a LOUD NOISE (Psa. 33: 3). Notice how David puts it in Psa. 98: 4:

"Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all the earth, make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise."

Of course, this will shock some pious people, but it is simply because they have been taught wrongly, or they just do not have the salvation that brings the joy of the Lord. Surely we, living AFTER the completed work of atonement, have even more reason to praise the Lord than did David. Let us break loose the circumscribed rituals and break forth into a praise that will make the heart of God glad.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Someone may say, 0 that's in the Old Testament! But wait! See what the New Testament teaches on rejoicing in the Lord. First, let us take some examples: When the Samaritans received the gospel "there was great joy in that city". (Acts 8: 8) When the lame man was healed "he leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God." (Acts 3: 8).

"The disciples did eat their meat with GLADNESS and singleness of heart, Praising God ...". Acts 2: 46,47.

On Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem:

"the whole multitude of disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice."
Luke 19: 37.

Oh yes, there was a religious man there who objected to the "irreverent display", and he said unto Jesus, "Master, rebuke Thy disciples". But Jesus said:

"if these should hold their peace the stones would immediately cry out." (vs. 39, 40)

(By the way, the Pharisees have not become extinct, we still have them around today, and they try to do the same thing today as they did in Jesus' day - they try to keep God's people from rejoicing; they say it's sacrilegious, but Jesus said if we don't praise God, the stones would cry out).

THE TEACHINGS OF THE APOSTLES

Let us notice also the direct teachings of the apostles in the New Testament. In 1 Thess. 5: 16:

"Rejoice evermore."

1 Peter 1: 8:

".. ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Phil. 4: 4:

"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say unto you, Rejoice."

2 Cor. 7: 4:

"I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation."

1 Peter 4: 13:

"But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

Rom. 14: 17:

"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and JOY in the Holy Ghost."

GOD INHABITS THE PRAISES

The person that does not have the indwelling Christ is a powerless being. So a church that lacks the presence of the Lord in its worship is dead and formal. God says He will inhabit, (dwell within), the praises of His people. (Psa. 22: 3). Therefore, when we praise the Lord He comes to dwell in the praises. This, God desires to do, for in praise He is honoured and exalted. When God makes Himself present there is power. When Israel marched around the walls of Jericho and shouted, the power of God came down and destroyed the walls of the city. It was then that they were able to subdue their enemies. Today there are many good Christians who, if they would break forth into praise their "Walls" of fear, worry, inferiority, defeat, discouragement, inhibition, unbelief, and many other enslaving circumstances and complexes would disappear. There is power in praise! Try it! It will work today just as it did in Bible days because God has not changed.

CLAP YOUR HANDS

David admonishes God's people to praise God by clapping their hands. In Psa. 47: 1 we read:

"O clap your hands all ye people, shout unto God with the voice of triumph"

Some may say, this is irreverence. But the Bible does not say this. The Bible says we are to clap our hands. In Psa. 98: 8,9 we find this text:

"Let the floods clap their hands, let the hills be joyful together before the Lord;..."

Now we know this is symbolic language referring to God's people. But some may say, "It's all right to clap your hands, but not in church". Well, what does the Bible say? Please notice another Scripture in 2 Kings 11: 12:

"And they brought forth the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and gave him the testimony, and they made him king, and they clapped their hands and said, God save the King"

The next verse tells us this was in the temple. Now the temple was the place of worship, as the church is today. So we see it is Scriptural to clap hands in praise in the church. Another beautiful Scripture descriptive of this demonstration is found in Isa. 55: 12:

"For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace. the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."

We found that in Joel 1: 1-13 the "trees" referred to God's people. So God's people can clap their hands in worship and praise. This does not mean that we are to clap our hands every time we praise the Lord. Sometimes it is more proper to stand up and raise our hands.

STAND UP AND RAISE YOUR HANDS

In Neh. 8: 5,6 we find the people:

"stood up, answering, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands ... they worshipped the Lord."

David declares:

"Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." (Psa. 141: 2)

Here David associates lifting up hands with an act of worship. Notice some further Scriptures:

Psa. 28: 2:

"...I lift up my hands toward Thy Holy oracle."

Psa. 63: 4:

"I will lift up my hands in Thy name."

Psa. 134: 2:

"Lift up your hands in the sanctuary,"

1 Tim. 2: 8:

"I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up Holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

When we lift up our hands, we express our submission to God, our surrender to His divine will and plan. It is an act of worship. It will raise one up into heaven's realm when done in true faith and humility. Oh let us lift our hands unto the God of our salvation and render praise that is comely and beautiful.

DANCE UNTO THE LORD

There are times of great victory in the battle against the enemies of the Lord. At such times, there could be an expression of great joy and rejoicing in dancing before the Lord. One such example is found in 2 Sam. 6: 14 when David danced before the Lord with all his might. This was not a private affair; this was before all God's people as the ark was returning to the camp of Israel. Some people will protest, "Flesh! Irreverence! Disorder! Confusion!" Well, so did David's wife (v.20), and the Bible says she became barren and had no child unto the day of her death (v.23). Perhaps this is why there is so much barrenness in the church today. Another time of great victory for Israel is recorded in Ex. 15: 20,21 when Miriam the prophetess led all the women in singing and in dancing. Other Scriptures that support dancing are found in Psa. 149: 3; 150: 4; Eccl. 3: 4; Jer. 31: 4. The last text describes the manifestation of dancing when

God's people are set free from bondage. David declares further,

"Thou hast turned my mourning into dancing:..." (Psa. 30: 11)

In Luke 15: 25 we have a picture of the nominal Christian typified by the elder son protesting the demonstration of joy and dancing when his prodigal brother returned home and was received with such lavish display. This is the way some people react today when there is a demonstration of joy in the dance. Again, we wish to say, however, that dancing is not the only way to express joy and victory, but the Bible does give us examples worthy of repeating. Every Scriptural demonstration has a uniqueness and brings a blessing cannot be derived from another. Dancing before the Lord is, in itself, an expression of exuberant joy that cannot be duplicated in other ways. But we must not allow any of the manifestations to degenerate into a mere form. To have the genuine demonstration God's people must be free from hypocrisy and be spiritually minded.

SING A NEW SONG

The Bible says that we are to sing a new song (Psa. 33: 3). This does not mean that we cannot sing the old ones also. But the Lord can give a new song; that is through the anointing of the Spirit. The Lord will give the inspiration to sing a new song. In 1 Cor. 14: 15 Paul says we can sing "with the Spirit". The Spirit of God will give the anointing and the words to sing a new song. This can come through the understanding or through direct utterance by the Spirit. Hence the terminology "I will sing with the spirit". This is evidenced when people sing in tongues. These tongues are not necessarily understood by the one speaking or singing, for the person is singing "unto the Lord". There is an edification in this manifestation (1 Cor. 14: 2) not derived in any other manifestation of joy and rejoicing. The writer has been privileged to witness such singing both in solo and in unison by more than one person. It is like a heavenly choir. It lifts one into a realm far above the ordinary. The spirit of man is caught up into a heavenly realm, and there comes forth an expression of joy and praise inexpressible in ordinary language - ineffable utterances by the Spirit, yet through the lips of mortal beings. Oh what a glorious experience! Yes, dear friend, and this can be yours if you will believe and receive. Hallelujah!

CHRIST IS COMING FOR A JOYFUL CHURCH!

The church for which Jesus will come will be a "glorious church, without spot or wrinkle" (Eph. 5: 27). She will be Holy. But this means more than mere form, ceremony, ritual, or tradition. It means more than a chain around the neck, more than images, or idols, or candles, or incense. It is more than long black robes and collars turned backwards. He is not coming for a robed choir, a social club, or a group of people listening to an intellectual lecture. The Church of Jesus Christ is a group of "called out" ones. They are called out of the world and the worldly system of nominal profession. They are the ones who have overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. They cast out devils. They heal the sick.

They speak in other tongues. (Mk. 16: 17,18). The thing that makes the church glorious is her power. This power comes into operation when the victorious church breaks forth into joy and praise. The joy of the Lord becomes her strength, her power. My friend, you can be a member of this church if you only believe.