



### Advent 3 - "Joy" - Lessons for Living © 2017 by Pastor Faber McMullen

When I was in high school my friend Mike Jones came over to my house to "jam". For you old-timers in here that means to play music together, His repertoire was limited as he only knew how to play "Jeremiah was a Bullfrog" by Three Dog Night on his huge tenor saxophone. He told me the first song that he wanted to play was a cool song about joy. Here's how it went.



Jeremiah was a bullfrog  
Was a good friend of mine  
I never understood a single word he said  
But I helped him drink up his wine  
And he always had some mighty fine wine - Singin'  
Joy to the world - All the boys and girls now  
Joy to the fishes in the deep blue sea - Joy to you and me

I kept trying to figure out what the group Three Dog Night was trying to say in the song. Who was the bullfrog? How did he become this guy's friend. What was the joy they were singing about after drinking some 'mighty fine wine'? How can a bullfrog drink wine? "Joy to the world.... all the boys and girls now... joy to the fishes in the deep blue see..... joy to you and me."

Last week we learned all about love. We learned together that the world has a very different understanding of love than we do as believers. Remember that the world's definition revolves around "feelings". I LOVE this or I love that because of how it makes me feel. The world looks at joy in a similar sort of way. If you look for the meaning of "joy" in a Google search, the first definition you will come to is "a feeling of great pleasure and happiness". We learned that love really doesn't have much to do with feelings at all. So what about joy? Is joy really always about having "a feeling of great pleasure and happiness"? **P:1** The world defines love, joy, and other emotions on the basis of feelings. Feelings are passing, they are changing, they are fleeting.

The Bible has a HUGE AMOUNT of things to say about joy. The Bible tells us that joy isn't about a euphoria that we can put on and take off of ourselves. True Joy is not a mental condition that we psyche ourselves into maintaining. Joy is not a euphoria that we can feel now and then. JOY is an anchor. Joy is based on the deep and profound understanding that whatever may come in our lives we can find strength and the ability to carry on by knowing the Joy of the Lord.



When the Jewish people were taken into captivity they were paralyzed in mourning over their condition. Remembering those emotions David writes, "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. <sup>2</sup> On the willows there we hung up our lyres. <sup>3</sup> For there our captors required of us songs and our tormentors, mirth,

saying, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!'" The Jewish people were at the end of themselves. They couldn't even sing a song.

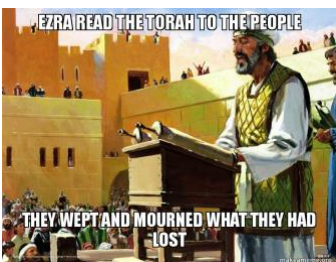
At the end of the Babylonia exile, a remnant of Jews went back to Jerusalem where they tried to start over. They were struggling and weren't doing very well. Remember that Persia had conquered the Babylonians and in the process God raised up a man named Cyrus. He made decrees that benefited the Jews and then in the Biblical chronology he is followed by the story of Esther and her King Ahasuerus. Then we come to a King titled Artaxerxes and we learn that a fellow named Nehemiah was his cup-bearer.

One day Nehemiah showed a sad and mournful countenance, and the king asked him what the problem was. Nehemiah told him about the problems of his people back in Jerusalem. Artaxerxes made him a governor in Judaea and sent him to oversee the rebuilding of the walls that had been destroyed prior to the captivity in Babylon.



Just as soon as Nehemiah began work on the wall, three guys showed up (Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arab). They began to create problems for Nehemiah, and they threw every road block they could at his work. **P2:** This opposition reminds us that there is usually eventual opposition when you are doing God's work. It is easy to get discouraged in those times. In

Nehemiah Chapter one the Bible tells us, "<sup>10</sup> When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard *of it*, they were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel." And after Nehemiah and the construction crew started having great success these three came to inspect the wall and to heap ridicule on his work. Sanballat furiously mocked the Jews and scripture tells us that he said, "Who do these Jews think they are? Are we going to sit by and let them return and make sacrifices to their God?" Tobiah (who sounds sort of like a helper-stooge) jumps into the conversation and says, "Yeh... and even if a fox jumped up on that wall it would crumble under the weight." People will come out of nowhere to tell you what can't be done.



**P3:** You see guys, you can be loving the Lord and serving Him and even when Satan knows he can't have your soul he'll try to steal your joy. Nehemiah 4:4 and following tells us that Nehemiah's response was that he just lifted up his burden to the Lord. He encountered hardship after hardship as people refused to build sections of the wall, and the text tells

us that others ran off with designated monies for the project. But then by Chapter 6 as the wall is returned to its greatness we read, "<sup>16</sup> And it happened, when all our enemies heard *of it*, and all the nations around us saw *these things*, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God." So in the end, the wall was built and Jerusalem was secure. The nations took note and God was glorified.

Then a curious account begins that turns us to the topic of joy. Chapter 8 tells us Ezra stood before the whole assembly to read the Torah to the people. I read, "<sup>3</sup> Facing the open space in front of the Water Gate, he read from it to the men, the women and the children who could understand from early morning until noon; and all the people listened attentively to the scroll of the *Torah*."<sup>4</sup> 'Ezra the *Torah*-teacher stood on a wood platform which they had made for the purpose;<sup>1</sup> Church, this is the same Ezra that I've spoken of every Sunday morning when we've studied a Torah portion.

The text is not clear as to exactly what happened, but as Ezra the priest read, the people began to weep. The old men wept. The old women wept. The young couples wept. The children wept. People were wailing and crying. I think they were weeping for their grandparents who had lost so much when Nebuchadnezzar came into Judah and took them into captivity. **P4:**They were weeping that their ancestors had lost their cultural and spiritual identity. Many times we go through trauma and hardship in our lives and the loss is too great to bear. That's why people become so desperate at this season of the year. They often stop long enough to see and sense great loss in their lives. The sense of what "could have been" becomes too overwhelming. If we can't get beyond the loss, we end up living in our past unable to live in the present or in the future. The people were moved to tears by God's Word, but they were overwhelmed by their own grief. What do we do when we have these realizations of tremendous loss in our lives?

God doesn't want us to mourn as the heathen do who have no hope. **P5:**Did you know that the Jewish Calendar has **only one** feast day for mourning; and that is the Day of Atonement. Every other Jewish Feast day is to be experienced in Joy. That is God sending us a message about joy. You see life brings enough sorrow, and God intends for us to set aside days for rejoicing. These are *Moedim* (appointed times) The text tells us,

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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."

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<sup>1</sup> Stern, D. H. (1998). [\*Complete Jewish Bible: an English version of the Tanakh \(Old Testament\) and B'rit Hadashah \(New Testament\)\*](#) (1st ed., Ne 8:3-4). Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications.

What reason do Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites give to end the sorrow? They proclaim to the people that the "JOY of the Lord is your strength."



Church, do you hear God's message spoken to us through time? Do not sorrow. Do not weep. Do not give up. Why? Because the Joy of the Lord is your strength! So what does the "Joy of the Lord" look like in real terms?

The early church was magnetically attractive because of the joy that early Christians had. The Book of Acts tells us, "6 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:46-47) This week a church member asked me if we'd attract more people if I'd go back to teaching the Book of Daniel. We will attract more people when each one of us experiences the joy of the Lord. If you're gloomy and downcast by every hardship that comes your way, why would anyone want to be around you? Why would anyone want what you have? If your life, your marriage, and your family are in turmoil, who would want to be a part of that? Here are five bullet points about the Joy of the Lord: **P6**

1 - The Joy of the Lord is a **SIGN** of the Holy Spirit being alive and at work in a believer's life.

Paul tells the Roman church that "joy in the Holy Spirit" is a defining mark of the Kingdom of God. (Romans 14:17) "17 for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

[Joy is part of the fruit of the Spirit \(Galatians 5:22\)](#). In fact, it is our Christian duty to rejoice in the Lord ([Philippians 3:1; 4:4](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:16](#)). In Christ, the believer is "filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy" ([1 Peter 1:8](#)).<sup>2</sup>

2 - The Joy of the Lord is **SUPERNATURAL** - It is supernatural because it can be with us even in the difficult tests and trials of life. We can't muster it for long in our own strength, but we can truly have a calm assurance that the Joy of the Lord is our strength even when we find ourselves in the earthquakes, storms, and quick sands of life. There is a great assurance knowing that whatever may come your way, we are joint-heirs to "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade" and no one can take that from us. (1 Peter 1:4)

3 - Joy of the Lord is **SILLINESS** or foolishness to those who don't understand it.

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<sup>2</sup> Walvoord, John F., and Roy B. Zuck. *Bible knowledge commentary*. Bangkok, Thailand: Tyrannus Center (GP Publishers), 1997.

Scripture tells us that the early apostles were arrested twice and ordered to stop preaching in Jesus' name. It tells us that the second time they were hauled into court they were beaten. Yet unmoved by it all they returned to their homes doing what? They returned "rejoicing that they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name [of Jesus]" (Acts 5:41) Adverse circumstances can actually strengthen our faith and increase our joy. It is something the world will not and cannot understand.

As we, the branches, abide in Christ, the vine, we can be full of His strength and vitality, and joy. It is His doing not our doing. ([John 15:5](#)).

4 - The Joy of the Lord can be found in the midst of **STRESS** - James, the brother of Jesus, exhorts us saying, "<sup>2</sup> My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. <sup>4</sup> But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing." (James 1:2-4)

5 - The Joy of the Lord is your **STRENGTH** - Joy is mixing the blessed hope we talked about before with the Trials of Life.

PROMISES OF GOD (BLESSED HOPE) + TRIALS OF LIFE

# JOY

= THE JOY OF THE LORD

Joy results when we surrender our circumstances and trials to Him, believing deep within our souls that God is good and He wants what is best for you and me to conform us into His very best version of ourselves.

This room is littered with broken people. Those of you reading this sermon may have experienced all kinds of brokenness as well. You have experienced broken lives, broken dreams, and broken hopes. God doesn't intend for you to stay there. He gave you one day of mourning and the rest are feast days to be accompanied with the joy of being in His presence. **P7**: David tells us in Psalm 16, "You make known to me the path of life; **in your presence there is fullness of joy**; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Church, I repeat Nehemiah when I say, "Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." I echo Paul when I say, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I say rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4) Let God heal the hurts in your life this morning and bask in His presence. If you do you can repeat David in saying "<sup>11</sup> Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; <sup>12</sup>To the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever. (Psalm 30:11-12)

Let us Pray

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