

The Joy of the Lord, the Strength of His People

A Sermon

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"The joy of the Lord is your strength."—[Nehemiah 8:10](#).

"And the singers sang aloud, with Jezrahiah their overseer. Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off."—[Nehemiah 12:42-43](#).

LAST Sabbath day in the morning I spoke of the birth of our Saviour as being full of joy to the people of God, and, indeed, to all nations. We then looked at the joy from a distance; we will now in contemplation draw nearer to it, and perhaps as we consider it, and remark the multiplied reasons for its existence, some of those reasons may operate upon our own hearts, and we may go out of this house of prayer ourselves partakers of the exceeding great joy. We shall count it to have been a successful morning if the people of God are made to rejoice in the Lord, and especially if those who have been bowed down and burdened in soul shall receive the oil of joy for mourning. It is no mean thing to comfort the Lord's mourners; it is a work specially dear to the Spirit of God, and, therefore, not to be lightly esteemed. Holy sorrow is precious before God, and is no bar to godly joy. Let it be carefully noted in connection with our first text that abounding mourning is no reason why there should not speedily be seen an equally abundant joy, for the very people who were bidden by Nehemiah and Ezra to rejoice were even then melted with penitential grief, "for all the people wept when they heard the words of the law." The vast congregation before the water-gate, under the teaching of Ezra, were awakened and cut to the heart; they felt the edge of the law of God like a sword opening up their hearts, tearing, cutting, and killing, and well might they lament: then was the time to let them feel the gospel's balm and hear the gospel's music, and, therefore, the former sons of thunder changed their note, and became sons of consolation, saying to them, "This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. 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 our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength." Now that they were penitent, and sincerely turned to their God, they were bidden to rejoice. As certain fabrics need to be damped before they will take the glowing colours with which they are to be adorned, so our spirits need the bedewing of repentance before they can receive the radiant colouring of delight. The glad news of the gospel can only be printed on wet paper. Have you ever seen clearer shining than that which

follows a shower? Then the sun transforms the rain-drops into gems, the flowers look up with fresher smiles and faces glittering from their refreshing bath, and the birds from among the dripping branches sing with notes more rapturous, because they have paused awhile. So, when the soul has been saturated with the rain of penitence, the clear shining of forgiving love makes the flowers of gladness blossom all around. The steps by which we ascend to the palace of delight are usually moist with tears. Grief for sin is the porch of the House Beautiful, where the guests are full of "The joy of the Lord." I hope, then, that the mourners, to whom this discourse shall come, will discover and enjoy the meaning of that divine benediction in the sermon on the mount, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

From our text we shall draw several themes of thought, and shall remark: first, *there is a joy of divine origin*,—"The joy of the Lord;" and, secondly, *that joy is to all who partake of it a source of strength*—"The joy of the Lord is your strength." Then we shall go on to show that *such strength always reveals itself practically*—our second text will help us there: and we shall close by noticing, in the fourth place, *that this joy, and, consequently, this strength, are within our reach today*.

I. THERE IS A JOY OF DIVINE ORIGIN—"The joy of the Lord." Springing from the Lord as its source, it will necessarily be of a very elevated character. Since man fell in the garden, he has too often sought for his enjoyments where the serpent finds his. It is written, "upon thy belly shalt thou go and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life," this was the serpent's doom; and man, with infatuated ambition, has tried to find his delight in his sensual appetites, and to content his soul with earth's poor dust. But the joys of time cannot satisfy an undying nature, and when a soul is once quickened by the eternal Spirit, it can no more fill itself with worldly mirth, or even with the common enjoyments of life than can a man snuff up wind and feed thereon. But, beloved, we are not left to search for joy; it is brought to our doors by the love of God our Father; joy refined and satisfying, befitting immortal spirits. God has not left us to wander among those unsatisfactory things which mock the chase which they invite; he has given us appetites which carnal things cannot content, and he has provided suitable satisfaction for those appetites; he has stored up at his right hand pleasures for evermore, which even now he reveals by his Spirit to those chosen ones whom he has taught to long for them.

Let us endeavour to analyze that special and peculiar pleasure which is here called "The joy of the Lord." *It springs from God, and has God for its object*. The believer who is in a spiritually healthy state rejoices mainly in God himself; he is happy because there is a God, and because God is in his person and character what he is. All the attributes of God become well-springs of joy to the thoughtful, contemplative believer; for such a man says within his soul, "All these attributes of my God are mine: his power, my protection; his wisdom, my guidance; his faithfulness, my foundation; his grace, my salvation." He is a God who cannot lie, faithful and true to his promise; he is all love, and at the same time infinitely just, su-

premely holy. Why, the contemplation of God to one who knows that this God is his God for ever and ever, is enough to make the eyes overflow with tears, because of the deep, mysterious, unutterable bliss which fills the heart. There was nothing in the character of Jupiter, or any of the pretended gods of the heathen, to make glad a pure and holy spirit, but there is everything in the character of Jehovah both to purify the heart and to make it thrill with delight. How sweet is it to think over all the Lord has done; how he has revealed himself of old, and especially how he has displayed his glory in the covenant of grace, and in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. How charming is the thought that he has revealed himself to me personally, and made me to see in him my Father, my friend, my helper, my God. Oh, if there be one word out of heaven that cannot be excelled, even by the brightness of heaven itself, it is this word, "My God, my Father," and that sweet promise, "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people." There is no richer consolation to be found: even the Spirit of God can bring nothing home to the heart of the Christian more fraught with delight than that blessed consideration. When the child of God, after admiring the character and wondering at the acts of God, can all the while feel "he is my God; I have taken him to be mine; he has taken me to be his; he has grasped me with the hand of his powerful love; having loved me with an everlasting love, with the bands of lovingkindness has he drawn me to himself; my beloved is mine and I am his;" why, then, his soul would fain dance like David before the ark of the Lord, rejoicing in the Lord with all its might.

A further source of joy is found by the Christian, who is living near to God, in *a deep sense of reconciliation to God, of acceptance with God, and yet, beyond that, of adoption and close relationship to God*. Does it not make a man glad to know that though once his sins had provoked the Lord they are all blotted out, not one of them remaineth; though once he was estranged from God, and far off from him by wicked works, yet he is made nigh by the blood of Christ. The Lord is no longer an angry judge pursuing us with a drawn sword, but a loving Father into whose bosom we pour our sorrows, and find ease for every pang of heart. Oh, to know, beloved, that God actually loves us! I have often told you I cannot preach upon that theme, for it is a subject to muse upon in silence, a matter to sit by the hour together and meditate upon. The infinite to love an insignificant creature, an ephemera of an hour, a shadow that declineth! Is not this a marvel? For God to pity me I can understand, for God to condescend to have mercy upon me I can comprehend; but for him to love me, for the pure to love a sinner, for the infinitely great to love a worm, is matchless, a miracle of miracles! Such thoughts must comfort the soul. And then, add to this, that the divine love has brought us believers into actual relationship with God, so that we are his sons and daughters, this again is a river of sacred pleasure. "Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son." No minister of flame, though perfect in obedience, has received the honour of adoption; to us, even to us frail creatures of the dust, is given a boon denied to Gabriel, for through Jesus Christ the firstborn, we are members of the family of God. Oh!

The abyss of joy which lies in sonship with God, and joint heirship with Christ! Words are vain here. Moreover, the joy springing from the spirit of adoption is another portion of the believer's bliss. He cannot be an unhappy man who can cry, "Abba, Father." The spirit of adoption is always attended by love, joy, and peace, which are fruits of the Spirit; for we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but we have received the spirit of liberty and joy in Christ Jesus. "My God, my Father." Oh how sweet the sound. But all men of God do not enjoy this, say you. Alas! we grant it, but we also add that it is their own fault. It is the right and portion of every believer to live in the assurance that he is reconciled to God, that God loves him, and that he is God's child, and if he doth not so live he has himself only to blame. If there be any starving at God's table, it is because the guest stints himself, for the feast is superabundant. If however, a man comes, and I pray you all may, to live habitually under a sense of pardon through the sprinkling of the precious blood, and in a delightful sense of perfect reconciliation with the great God, he is the possessor of a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

But, beloved, this is not all. The joy of the Lord in the spirit springs also from *an assurance that all the future, whatever it may be, is guaranteed by divine goodness*, that being children of God, the love of God towards us is not of a mutable character, but abides and remains unchangeable. The believer feels an entire satisfaction in leaving himself in the hands of eternal and immutable love. However happy I may be today, if I am in doubt concerning tomorrow, there is a worm at the root of my peace; although the past may now be sweet in retrospect, and the present fair in enjoyment, yet if the future be grim with fear, my joy is but shallow. If my salvation be still a matter of hazard and jeopardy, unmingled joy is not mine, and deep peace is still out of my reach. But when I know that he whom I have rested in hath power and grace enough to complete that which he hath begun in me, and for me; when I see the work of Christ to be no half-way redemption, but a complete and eternal salvation; when I perceive that the promises are established upon an unchangeable basis, and are yea and amen in Christ Jesus, ratified by oath and sealed by blood, then my soul hath perfect contentment. It is true, that looking forward there may be seen long avenues of tribulation, but the glory is at the end of them; battles may be foreseen, and woe unto the man who does not expect them, but the eye of faith perceives the crown of victory. Deep waters are mapped upon our journey, but faith can see Jehovah fording these rivers with us, and she anticipates the day when we shall ascend the banks of the hither shore and enter into Jehovah's rest. When we have received these priceless truths into our souls we are satisfied with favour and full of the goodness of the Lord. There is a theology which denies to believers this consolation, we will not enter into controversy with it, but sorrowfully hint that a heavy chastisement for the errors of that system of doctrine, lies in the loss of the comfort which the truth would have brought into the soul. For my part, I value the gospel not only for what it has done for me in the past, but for the guarantees which it affords me

of eternal salvation. “I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.”

Now, beloved, I have not yet taken you into the great deeps of joy, though these streams are certainly by no means shallow. There is an abyss of delight for every Christian *when he comes into actual fellowship with God*. I spoke of the truth that God loved us, and the fact that we are related to him by ties most near and dear; but, oh, when these doctrines become experiences, then are we indeed anointed with the oil of gladness. When we enter into the love of God, and it enters into us; when we walk with God habitually, then our joy is like Jordan at harvest time, when it overfloweth all its banks. Do you know what it means—to walk with God—Enoch’s joy; to sit at Jesus’ feet—Mary’s joy; to lean your head upon Jesus’ bosom—John’s familiar joy? Oh yes, communion with the Lord is no mere talk with some of us. We have known it in the chamber of affliction; we have known it in the solitude of many a night of broken rest; we have known it beneath discouragements and under sorrows and defamations, and all sorts of ills; and we reckon that one dram of fellowship with Christ is enough to sweeten an ocean full of tribulation, and that only to know that he is near us, and to see the gleaming of his dear eye, would transform even hell itself into heaven, if it were possible for us to enjoy his presence there. Alas! Ye do not and cannot know this bliss, ye who quaff. Your foaming bowls, listening to the sound of stringed instruments, ye do not know what this bliss means—ye have not dreamed of it, nor could ye compass it though a man should tell it unto you. As the beast in the meadow knows not the far-reaching thoughts of him who reads the stars and threads the spheres, so neither can the carnal man make so much as a guess of what are the joys which God hath prepared for them that love him, which any day and every day, when our hearts seek it, he revealeth unto us by his Spirit. This is “the joy of the Lord,” fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. Beloved, if we reach this point, we must labour to maintain our standing, for our Lord saith to us “abide in me.” The habit of communion is the life of happiness.

Another form of “the joy of the Lord” will visit us practically every day in *the honour of being allowed to serve him*. It is a joy worth worlds to be allowed to do good. To teach a little child his letters for Christ, will give a true heart some taste of the joy of the Lord, if it be consciously done for the Lord’s sake alone. To bear the portion to those for whom nothing is prepared, to visit the sick, to comfort the mourner, to aid the poor, to instruct the ignorant, any, and all of such Christian works, if done in Jesus’ name, will in their measure array us in Jehovah’s joy. And happy are we, brethren, if when we cannot work we are enabled to lie still and suffer, for acquiescence is another silver pipe through which “the joy of the Lord” will come to us. It is sweet to smart beneath God’s rod, and feel that if God would have us suffer it is happiness to do so, to fall back with the faintness of nature, but at the same time with the strength of grace, and say, “Thy will be done.” It is joy, when between the millstones crushed like an olive, to yield nothing but the oil of thankfulness; when bruised

beneath the flail of tribulation, still to lose nothing but the chaff, and to yield to God the precious grain of entire submissiveness. Why, this is a little heaven upon earth. To glory in tribulations also, this is a high degree of up-climbing towards the likeness of our Lord. Perhaps, the usual communions which we have with our Beloved, though exceeding precious, will never equal those which we enjoy when we have to break through thorns and briars to be at him; when we follow him into the wilderness then we feel the love of our espousals to be doubly sweet. It is a joyous thing when in the midst of mournful circumstances, we yet feel that we cannot mourn because The Bridegroom is with us. Blessed is that man, who in the most terrible storm is driven—not from his God, but even rides upon the crest of the lofty billows nearer towards heaven. Such happiness is the Christian's lot. I do not say that every Christian possesses it, but I am sure that every Christian ought to do so. There is a highway to heaven, and all in it are safe; but in the middle of that road there is a special way, an inner path, and all who walk therein are happy as well as safe. Many professors are only just within the hedge, they walk in the ditch by the road side, and because they are safe there, they are content to put up with all the inconveniences of their walk; but he who takes the crown of the causeway, and walks in the very centre of the road that God has cast up, shall find that no lion shall be there, neither shall any ravenous beast go up thereon, for there the Lord himself shall be his companion, and will manifest himself to him. You shallow Christians who do but believe in Christ, and barely that, whose bibles are unread, whose closets are unfrequented, whose communion with God is a thing of spasms, you have not the joy of the Lord, neither are you strong. I beseech you, rest not as you are, but let your conscious feebleness provoke you to seek the means of strength: and that means of strength is to be found in a pleasant medicine, sweet as it is profitable—the delicious and effectual medicine of “the joy of the Lord.”

II. But time would fail me to prolong our remarks upon this very fruitful subject, and we shall turn to our second head, which is this: that THIS JOY IS A SOURCE OF GREAT STRENGTH.

Very rapidly let us consider this thought. It is so because this joy arises from considerations which always strengthen the soul. Very much of the depth of our piety will depend upon our thoughtfulness. Many persons, after having received a doctrine, put it by on the shelf; they are orthodox, they have received the truth, and they are content to keep that truth on hand as dead stock. Sirs, of what account can this be to you, to store your garners with wheat if you never grind the corn for bread, or sow it in the furrows of your fields? He is the joyful Christian who uses the doctrines of the gospel for spiritual meat, as they were meant to be used. Why, some men might as well have a heterodox creed as an orthodox one for all the difference it makes to them. Having the notion that they know, and imagining that to know sufficeth them, they do not consider, contemplate, or regard the truths which they profess to believe, and, consequently, they derive no benefit from them. Now, to con-

template the great truths of divine election, of eternal love, of covenant engagements, of justification by faith through the blood of Christ, and the indwelling and perpetual abiding of the Holy Ghost in his people, to turn over these things is to extract joy from them; and this also is strengthening to the mind. To press the heavenly grapes by meditation, and make the red wine flow forth in torrents, is an exercise as strengthening as it is exhilarating. Joy comes from the same truths which support our strength, and comes by the process of meditation.

Again, “the joy of the Lord” within us is always the sign and symbol of strong spiritual life. Holy vivacity betokens spiritual vigour. I said that he who had spiritual joy gained it by communion with God, but communion with God is the surest fosterer of strength. You cannot be with a strong God without getting strength yourself, for God is always a transforming God; regarding and looking upon him our likeness changes till we become in our measure like our God. The warmth of the South of France, of which you often hear so much, does not spring from soft balmy winds, but from the sun; at sunset the temperature falls. You shall be on one side of the street in Italy and think it May, cross the street into the shade and it is cold as January. The sun does it all. A man who walks in the sunlight of God’s countenance, for that very reason is warm and strong. The sunlight of joy usually goes with the warmth of spiritual life. As the light of joy varies so does the warmth of holy strength; he who dwells in the light of God is both happy and strong. He who goes into the shade and loses the joy of the Lord becomes weak at the same time. So the joy of the Lord becomes our strength, as being an indicator of its rise or fall. When a soul is really vigorous and active, it is like the torrent which dashes down the mountain side, which scorns in winter to own the bonds of frost: in a few hours the stagnant pools and slowly moving streams are enchained in ice; but the snow king must bring forth all his strength ere he can manacle the rushing torrent. So when a soul dashes on with the sacred force of faith, it is hard to freeze it into misery, its vigour secures its joy.

Furthermore, the man who possesses “the joy of the Lord,” finds it his strength in another respect, that it fortifies him against temptation. What is there that he can be tempted with? He has more already than the world can offer him as a reward for treachery. He is already rich; who shall ensnare him with the wages of unrighteousness? He is already satisfied; who is he that can seduce him with pleasing baits? “Shall such a man as I flee?” The rejoicing Christian is equally proof against persecution. They may well afford to be laughed at who win at such a rate as he does. “You may scoff,” saith he, “but I know what true religion is within my soul, and your scoffing will not make me relinquish the pearl of great price.” Such a man is, moreover, made strong to bear affliction; for all the sufferings put upon him are but a few drops of bitterness cast into his cup of bliss, to give a deeper tone to the sweetness which absorbs them.

Such a man becomes strong for service, too. What can he not do who is happy in his God? By his God he leaps over a wall, or breaks through a troop. Strong is he, too, for any kind of self-sacrifice. To the God who gives him all, and remains to him as his perpetual portion, such a man gives up all that he hath, and thinks it no surrender. It is but laying up his treasure in his own peculiar treasure house, even in the God of his salvation.

A joyous man, such I have now in my mind's eye, is to all intents and purposes a strong man. He is strong in a calm restful manner. Whatever happens he is not ruffled or disturbed. He is not afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. The ruffled man is ever weak. He is in a hurry, and doth things ill. The man full of joy within is quiet, he bides his time and croucheth in the fulness of his strength. Such a man, though he is humble, is firm and steadfast; he is not carried away with every wind, or bowed by every breeze, he knows what he knows, and holds what he holds, and the golden anchor of his hope entereth within the veil, and holds him fast. His strength is not pretentious but real. The happiness arising from communion with God breeds in him no boastfulness; he does not talk of what he can do, but he does it; he does not say what he could bear, but he bears all that comes. He does not himself always know what he could do; his weakness is the more apparent to himself because of the strength which the Holy Ghost puts upon him; but when the time comes, his weakness only illustrates the divine might, while the man goes calmly on, conquering and to conquer. His inner light makes him independent of the outward sun; his secret granaries make him independent of the outer harvest; his inward fountains place him beyond dread though the brook Cherith may dry Up; he is independent of men and angels, and fearless of devils; all creatures may turn against him if they please, but since God himself is his exceeding joy, he will not miss their love or mourn their hate. He standeth where others fall, he sings where others weep, he wins where others fly, he glorifies his God where others bring dishonour on themselves and on the sacred name. God grant us the inward joy which arises from real strength and is so linked with it as to be in part its cause.

III. But now I must hasten on to notice in the third place that THIS STRENGTH LEADS TO PRACTICAL RESULTS. I am sure I shall have your earnest attention to this, because in many of you I have seen the results follow of which I now speak. I would not flatter any one, but my heart has been full of thanksgiving to the God of all grace when I have seen many of you rejoicing in the Lord under painful circumstances and producing the fruits of a gracious strength. Turn then to our second text, and there you shall observe some of the fruits of holy joy and pious strength.

First, it leads to *great praise*. "The singers sang aloud," their ministrelsy was hearty and enthusiastic. Sacred song is not a minor matter. Quaint George Herbert has said—

"Praying's the end of preaching."

Might he not have gone further and have said, *praising's the end of praying*? After all, preaching and praying are not the chief end of man, but the glorifying of God, of which

praising God vocally is one form. Preaching is sowing, prayer is watering, but praise is the harvest. God aims at his own glory so should we; and “whoso offereth praise glorifieth me saith the Lord.” Be ye diligent then to sing his praises with understanding. We have put away harps and trumpets and organs, let us mind that we really rise above the need of them. I think we do well to dispense with these helps of the typical dispensation; they are all inferior even in music to the human voice, there is assuredly no melody or harmony like those created by living tongues; but let us mind that we do not put away an atom of the joy. Let us be glad when in the congregation we unite in psalmody. It is a wretched thing to hear the praises of God rendered professionally, as if the mere music were everything. It is horrible to have a dozen people in the table-pew singing for you, as if they were proxies for the whole assembly. It is shocking to me to be present in places of worship where not a tenth of the people ever venture to sing at all, and these do it through their teeth so very softly, that one had need to have a microscope invented for his ears, to enable him to hear the dying strain. Out upon such mumbling and murdering of the praises of God; if men’s hearts were joyous and strong, they would scorn such miserable worship. In this house we all try to sing, but might we not have more praise services? We have had a praise meeting every now and then. Ought we not to hold a praise meeting every week? Should not the prayer meeting be more than ever cheered by praise. The singing of God’s people should be, and if they were more full of divine strength would be, more constant and universal. How sinners chant the praise of Baechnus in the streets! You can hardly rest in the middle of the night, but what unseemly sounds of revelry startle you. Shall the votaries of wine sing so lustily, and shall we be silent? We are not often guilty of disturbing the world with our music; the days in which Christian zeal interfered with the wicked seem to have gone by; we have settled down into more orderliness, and I am afraid also into more lukewarmness. Oh for the old Methodistic shout. Brethren, wake up your singing again. May the Lord give us again a singing-time, and make us all praise him with heart, and with voice, till even the adversaries shall say, “The Lord hath done great things for them;” and we shall reply, “Ay, ye speak the truth; he hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.” Perhaps there has not been so large a blessing upon the churches of England, because they have not rendered due thanksgiving. In all the time in which we are in trouble we are anxious and prayerful; when a prince is sick bulletins are issued every hour or so; but ah, when the mercy comes but few bulletins are put out, calling upon us to bless and praise the name of God for his mercies. Let us praise the Lord from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, for great is the Lord, and greatly is he to be praised.

The next result is *great sacrifice*. “That day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced.” What day is that in which the church of God now makes great sacrifices? I have not seen it in the calendar of late; and, alas! If men make any sacrifice they very often do so in a mode which indicates that they would escape the inflection if they could. Few make great sacrifices

and rejoice. You can persuade a man to give a considerable sum; a great many arguments at last overcome him, and he does it because he would have been ashamed not to do it, but in his heart he wishes you had not come that way, and had gone to some other donor. That is the most acceptable gift to God which is given rejoicingly. It is well to feel that whatever good your gift may do to the church, or the poor, or the sick, it is twice as much benefit to you to give it. It is well to give, because you love to give; as the flower which pours forth its perfume because it never dreamed of doing otherwise; or like the bird which quivers with song, because it is a bird and finds a pleasure in its notes; or like the sun which shines, not by constraint, but because, being a sun, it must shine; or like the waves of the sea which flash back the brilliance of the sun, because it is their nature to reflect and not to hoard the light. Oh, to have such grace in our hearts that we shall joyfully make sacrifices unto our God. The Lord grant that we may have much of this; for the bringing of the tithes into the storehouse is the way to the blessing; as saith the Scripture: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in thine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

Next to that, there are sure to follow *other expressions of joy*. They "rejoiced, for God had made them to rejoice with great joy." It was not all singing and giving. When the wheels of the machine are well oiled the whole machine goes easily; and when the man has the oil of joy, then in his business, and in his family, the wheels of his nature glide along sweetly and harmoniously, because he is a glad and a happy man. There are some professors who imagine the sorrow of the Lord to be their strength; they glory in the spirit of bondage and in an unbelieving experience, having great acquaintance with the corruption of their hearts, sometimes of a rather too practical character. They make the deformities of the saints to be their beauty-spots, and their faults to be their evidences. Such men denounce all who rejoice in the Lord, and only tolerate the unbelieving. Their strength lies in being able to take you through all the catacombs of nature's darkness, and to show you the rottenness of their evil hearts. Well, such strength as that let those have who will, but we are persuaded that our text is nearer to wisdom: "The joy of the Lord is your strength." While we know something of our corruption, and mourn it, know something of the world's troubles, and sometimes lament as we bear them; yet there is a joy in the perfect work of Christ, and a joy in our union to him which uplifts us far above all other considerations. God becomes to us such a strength that we cannot help showing our joy in our ordinary life.

But then the text tells us that holy joy leads to *family happiness*. "The wives also and the children rejoiced." It is so in this church. I have lately seen several children from households which God has blessed, and I have rejoiced to see that father and mother know the Lord, and that even the last of the family has been brought to Jesus. O happy households where the joy is not confined to one, but where all partake of it. I dislike much that Christianity

which makes a man feel, “If I go to heaven it is all I care for.” Why, you are like a German stove which I found in the room of an hotel the other day—a kind of stove which required all the wood they could bring up merely to warm itself, and then all the heat went up the chimney. We sat around it to make it warm, but scarce a particle of heat came forth from it to us. Too many need all the religion they can get to cheer their own hearts, and their poor families and neighbours sit shivering in the cold of ungodliness. Be like those well constructed stoves of our own houses, which send out all the heat into the room. Send out the heat of piety into your house, and let all the neighbours participate in the blessing, for so the text finishes, “The joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.” The joy of the Lord should be observed throughout our neighbourhood, and many who might otherwise have been careless of true religion will then enquire, “What makes these people glad, and creates such happy households?” Your joy shall thus be God’s missionary.

IV. And now I have to close. THIS JOY, THIS STRENGTH, ARE BOTH WITHIN OUR REACH! “For the Lord had made them glad with great joy.” God alone can give us this great joy. Then it is within the reach of any, for God can give it to one as well as to another. If it depended upon our good works or our natural abilities, some of us could never reach it; but if God is the source and giver of it he may give it to me as well as to thee, my brother, and to thee as well as to another. What was the way in which God gave this joy? Well first, he gave it to these people by their being *attentive hearers*. They were not only hearers, but they heard with their ears, their ears were into the word; it was read to them and they sucked it in, receiving it into their souls. An attentive hearer is on the way to being a joyous receiver. Having heard it they *felt the power of it*, and they wept. Did that seem the way to joy? It was. They received the threatenings of the law with all their terrors into their soul, they allowed the hammer of the word to break them in pieces, they submitted themselves to the word of reproof. Oh! That God would incline you all to do the same, for this, again, is the way in which God gives joy. The word is heard, the word is felt. Then after this, when they had felt the power of the word, we see that *they worshipped God devoutly*. They bowed the head. Their postures indicated what they felt within. Worshippers who with penitent hearts really adore God, will never complain of weary Sabbaths; adoration helps us into joy. He who can bow low enough before the throne shall be lifted as high before that throne as his heart can desire.

We read also that these hearers and worshippers *understood* clearly what they heard. Never be content with hearing a sermon unless you can understand it, and if there be a truth that is above you, strain after it, strive to know it. Bible-reader, do not be content with going through the words of the chapter: pray the Holy Ghost to tell you the meaning, and use proper means for finding out that meaning; ask those who know, and use your own enlightened judgment to discover the sense. When shall we have done with formalism of worship and come into living adoration? Sometimes, for all the true singing that there is,

the song might as well be in Latin or in Greek. Oh! To know what you are singing, to know what you are saying in prayer, to know what you are reading, to get at it, to come right into it, to understand it—this is the way to holy joy.

And one other point. These people when they had understood what they had devoutly heard, were *eager to obey*. They obeyed not only the common points of the law in which Israel of old had furnished them with examples, but they found out an old institution which had been buried and forgotten. What was that to them; God had commanded it, and they celebrated it, and in so doing this peculiar joy came upon them. Oh, for the time when all believers shall search the word of God, when they shall not be content with saying, “I have joined myself with a certain body of Christians, and they do so; therefore I do so.” May no man say to himself any longer, “Such is the rule of my church;” but may each say, “I am God’s servant and not the servant of man, not the servant of thirty-nine articles, of the Prayer-book, or the Catechism; I stand to my own Master, and the only law book I acknowledge is the book of his word, inspired by his Spirit.” Oh, blessed day, when every man shall say, “I want to know wherein I am wrong; I desire to know what I am to do; I am anxious to follow the Lord fully.” Well, then, if your joy in God leads you to practical obedience, you may rest assured it has made you strong in the very best manner.

Beloved brethren and sisters, we had, before I went away for needed rest, a true spirit of prayer among us. I set out for the continent joyfully, because I left with you the names of some eighty persons proposed for church-membership. My beloved officers, with great diligence, have visited these and others, and next Lord’s-day we hope to receive more than a hundred, perhaps a hundred and twenty fresh members into the church. Blessed be God for this. I should not have felt easy in going away if you had been in a barren, cold, dead state; but there was a real fire blazing on God’s altar, and souls were being saved. Now, I desire that this gracious zeal should continue, and be renewed. It has not gone out in my absence, I believe, but I desire now a fresh blast from God’s Spirit to blow the flame very vehemently. Let us meet for prayer tomorrow, and let the prayer be very earnest, and let those wrestlers who have been moved to agonizing supplication renew the ardour and fervency of their desires, and may we be a strong people, and consequently a joyous people in the strength and joy of the Lord. May sinners in great numbers look unto Jesus and be saved. Amen, and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Nehemiah 8.