

Wednesday, June 17th Bible Study Notes
Cedarville United Presbyterian Church Facebook Live
Fruit of the Spirit Series: Joy
Text: Nehemiah 7:73-8:12

Summer Series: Fruit of the Spirit

- Love – nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ our Lord. What does it mean to love God, love our neighbor, love our enemy, love ourselves?
- Sunday – 1 Thessalonians 5 – “rejoice always”
- Tonight: “the joy of the Lord is my strength”

Background of Nehemiah: (paraphrased from Bible Knowledge Commentary)

- God had promised Israel if they obeyed Him, He would bless them as a nation. If they did not, He would judge them and cause them to be taken into captivity (Deut. 28).
- King Solomon sinned against God, particularly by marrying foreign wives and worshiping their false gods (1 Kings 11:1–5). The kingdom was split in 931 B.C. The 10 Northern tribes were initially ruled by Jeroboam, and the Southern tribes (Judah and Benjamin) were ruled at first by Rehoboam.
- Both kingdoms, however, continued to sin. As God had forewarned, His judgment fell on all Israel. The people of the Northern Kingdom were taken into captivity by the Assyrians in 722BC. The Babylonians captured the Southern Kingdom in 586BC.
- In 538BC, the first group returned to Judah under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:1–2:2). In 458BC, a second group returned, led by Ezra (Ezra 7:1–10). The Jews in Israel had intermarried with the unbelieving peoples of the surrounding nations and were participating in pagan practices. However, through Ezra’s faithful teaching ministry, the majority once again followed God’s will for their lives.
- In 444BC, 14 years after Ezra’s return to Jerusalem, Nehemiah returned and God used him to guide Judah in rebuilding the city’s walls and in reordering the people’s lives.

Confronting Their Sin

- People came to grips with the fact their sin led to their captivity – God had graciously brought them out of captivity and they were now rebuilding their lives.
- Part of rebuilding was coming to an understanding of how God wanted them to live.
- They stood and listened to God’s commands – they no longer took Him for granted.
- Have you ever found that you are more attentive to something after realizing you had almost lost it for good? These people understood they had traded a relationship with the Almighty God for immediate pleasure – their lives and the lives of their ancestors had been self-focused and self-indulgent. It was about being happy in the moment.
- In what ways might you be living for happiness vs. the joy of the Lord?

Joy of the Lord

- Nehemiah 8:10 – Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”
- From Meg Bucher, www.biblestudytools.com:
 - Nehemiah was illustrating the inward faith that we now know as a relationship with Christ. A true expression of worship comes from deeper motivation.

- God forgives us on a deep level. It doesn't end at our heartfelt sacrifice and repentance. He ushers in true change and a heart shifted to the seat of joy. Joy from His strength erases guilt and shame and the death we deserve for our sin.
- Ezra the scribe gathered all the people. He read to them from God's book and skilled ministers explained the words and their meaning to the people. Neh 8:8 says, "They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading." Once the people understood — really understood — they wept. God's Word was opening their eyes to the way they had failed Him, but Nehemiah was quick to remind them of who the Lord is. "They could delight in the joy of the Lord because he is a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate."

Biblical Joy

- Hebrew is "chedvah," meaning joy or gladness.
- "Strength" is "a place or means of safety, protection refuge, or stronghold."
- The joy of the Lord is an inner strengthening—not about happiness (which is based on circumstances), but transcends whatever is going on in our lives. When Jesus died for us, He restored us to a peace with God that cannot be taken away from us.
- "Your joy rests on God's joy." (Tony Reinke)
- "But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13). Jesus experienced the fulfilling joy that stemmed from His Father's strength, and wanted us to be filled and overflowing with it (John 15:11).

How You Can Find Joy in the Lord

- Joy isn't a giddy feeling. True joy stems from the unwavering strength of the Lord. It reminds us how far we have come and encourages us throughout the long road of sanctification.
- Nehemiah knew that to experience joy there had to be an inner restoration (contrast this to the rebuilding of the city that was going on at the same time). We, too, must rebuild from within, so that the joy of the Lord can radiate from within.
- Joy shifts our hearts to worship regardless of circumstances.

The Lord's Strength...

- "I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13)
- "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak" (Isaiah 40:29)
- "The way of the Lord is a stronghold to those with integrity, but it destroys the wicked" (Proverbs 10:29)
- "The Lord gives his people strength. He is a safe fortress for his anointed king" (Psalm 28:8)
- "The Lord is my light and my salvation- so why should I be afraid? The Lord is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble?" (Psalm 27:1).
- "God is my strong fortress, and he makes my way perfect" (2 Samuel 22:33)
- "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30)
- "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Nehemiah 7:73-8:12
(New International Version)

⁷³When the seventh month came—the people of Israel being settled in their towns— **8** ¹ all the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel.

² Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. ³ He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

⁴ The scribe Ezra stood on a wooden platform that had been made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand; and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. 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.

⁶ Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, “Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the law, while the people remained in their places. ⁸ So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

⁹ And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and 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 or weep.” For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, “Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

¹¹ So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, “Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.”

¹² And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.