

## The Joy of the Lord is my Strength.

**Nehemiah 8:9-10 ( NRSV )** <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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.”

Joy has become such a depleted virtue in today's world. There is humour, bawdry humour, slapstick comedy, black humour but joy...Where can one find joy, pure joy, unadulterated joy?

That is why it is always lovely to watch babies and little children. With what abandon they laugh! Even a little colour paper will set the child laughing and clapping with joy.

As we grow older, so many things press our hearts and at times we even forget to smile at each other. We have so many expensive toys like cars, mobile phones, houses etc, yet where is the joy it is supposed to bring?

Happiness for a short time at least may be dependent on commodities that we buy for money, but we can never be joyful over these.

Can you imagine the recent moment you were joyful? Where you were spilling over with laughter, forgetting the world around you? No no not in response of a movie comedy, but real joy.

Khalil Gibran is a Lebanese mystic poet his poems are so soul stirring. In one of these he writes, “ The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain. Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven? And is not the lute that soothes your spirit the very wood that was hollowed with knives?” These lines have enough Biblical overtones. Gibran's many themes were taken straight out from the Scriptures.

In Nehemiah 6 we read the building of the wall has been completed and in 8 we read there is a public consecration where all people were assembled and the Word of God

is read. It is a very emotional moment for the people, for at last they are secured inside a walled city. Wall always occupies a position of singular importance in Jewish history.

So at this momentous occasion, people started weeping as they heard the Word of God, and only at this juncture Nehemiah actually stepped in and exhorted the people not to cry but to rejoice.

Sometimes it is only during these moments of weeping and mourning that the Word of God comes to us bringing an understandable joy into our hearts. In my life I have seen the most joyful people are the ones who at the same time can grieve deeply. The deeper the valley, the more water it could hold. When we know sorrow and pain, our hearts will also be filled with joy. **Psalms 84:6 (NLT) <sup>6</sup> When they walk through the Valley of Weeping, it will become a place of refreshing springs. The autumn rains will clothe it with blessings.**

Yet the Lord calls us to rejoice in Him, the works of His hands and His promises. Our hearts soar with joy when we suddenly see a singing bird rise above our head or to feel the cool breeze with thousands of stars twinkling overhead. Sometimes when our personal problems press our hearts to the ground, let us ask God to awaken our hearts to the joy He has placed in our hearts and in all the works of His creation.

Yes the Joy of the Lord is our Strength. Who can bear a broken spirit?

My friend if you have been crying and weeping ask the Lord to turn your mourning into joy. Joy does not come by any self effort. But the Lord will pour out the oil of joy when we ask of Him. I pray that the Joy of the Lord be your strength.

**Psalms 45:7 (NKJV) <sup>7</sup> You love righteousness and hate wickedness;**

**Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You**

**With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.**

Jesus though known as a Man of Sorrows is also the most joyful person. He laughed a lot and that is why some Pharisees accused Jesus as dining with sinners and not fasting enough... Yet Jesus was joyful!