

The Joy of the Lord Is Your Strength

Speaker: David D.

Date: August 30, 2026

Church Name: 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel

References: **Nehemiah 8**, Nehemiah 8:1-10; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; James 1:22; Ezra 7:10; Song of Solomon 1:6; 2 Peter 3:18; Nehemiah 8:7-8; Nehemiah 8:12-13; Matthew 13:19; Luke 8:12; Matthew 13:23; Romans 6:23; Nehemiah 8:10; Acts 8:8; Nehemiah 12:27; Nehemiah 12:43; Psalm 69:30-31

Reading and Revering the Law

And you'll learn a lot from it. And when you get to chapter 8, you'll skip over it because you'll know everything about it today. No, not really. You'll study that as well. There will be many more lessons to be learned. But there's so much, really so much in the book of Nehemiah. So I'm very glad that you're learning it, you're studying it beginning tonight.

So we began a little bit earlier, and I know some new ones have come in. So what I want to do is read, give a sense for what we were looking at before. We're going to read the first ten verses again, and get a sense of it. And then we'll dive into a little review, and then we'll dive into the chapter.

So chapter 8, and beginning at verse 1:

[Nehemiah 8:1-2 NKJV]

¹ Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded Israel. ² So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly of men and women and all who could hear with understanding on the first day of the seventh month.

So children were also there. And then it says this was on the first day of the seventh month, a Feast of Trumpets. It was an agricultural feast, a feast to cease from working, to eat together, fellowship together. And then it says:

[Nehemiah 8:3-4 NKJV]

³ Then he read from it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate from morning until midday, before the men and women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law. ⁴ So Ezra the scribe stood on a platform of wood which they had made for the purpose; and beside him, at his right hand, stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Urijah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah; and at his left hand Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

So these were not Levites, because Levites are mentioned later, but these are coworkers. And these are godly men and leaders that will, as we go through this chapter, be teaching the word of God. And so we read about them, and their names are given:

[Nehemiah 8:5-6 NKJV]

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 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. Then all the people answered, "Amen, Amen!" while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

So there was this reverence. There was this reverence for the word of God. Why did they stand up when he began to read? They had a reverence. They had an appreciation for the word of God. They realized that they were not walking the way they should. They weren't living the way they should. And so they bowed their heads to the ground and they worshiped the Lord. And then there were a group of people, still a group of Bible teachers:

[Nehemiah 8:7-8 NKJV]

⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. ⁸ So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.

And there were Levites. Levites would be those who would teach Israel. And there were Levites who caused the people to understand the Law. And the people stood in their place, and they read the book of the Law distinctly. They gave the sense of it and they caused them to understand the reading.

[Nehemiah 8:9 NKJV]

⁹ 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.

Why did they weep? They wept because they realized the things they were not doing. And they realized who God was when he read these six hours from the break of day till noonday. He was reading through Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. And he was teaching the word of God. And there's instructions, and there's ordinances, and there's commandments. And they realized there are many things they were not doing. And in those chapters and in those verses, there's also judgments. And there's also consequences and responsibilities. And so he read all those to them, and they realized what they had done wrong.

The same thing happened during the revival under Josiah. When they read the word of God to him, which had been lost for generations, he wept, and more than he wept, he tore his clothing. And it says he humbled himself before the Lord. And the prophet of God said to him, because your heart was tender, God would withhold these judgments from the people of Israel. And so they wept because they saw these things. They said, "Do not weep. This is a day of feasting. This is a day of rejoicing."

And so then down in verse 10, he says:

[Nehemiah 8:10 NKJV] - 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."

Yes.

A Call to Prayer and Application

Well, let's bow in a word of prayer.

Our God and Father, we thank You for this time this morning. We thank You for this portion of the word of God. We thank You that:

[2 Timothy 3:16-17 NKJV] - ¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We acknowledge that Your word is truth. And so, Father, we want to take Your word to heart. We want to learn it. We want to apply it to our lives. We want to go out and obey it. We don't want to be hearers only of the word of God. We want to:

[James 1:22 NKJV] - But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

We want to be like Ezra who:

[Ezra 7:10 NKJV] - For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

And so, Father, help us as we look into this portion of Your word, and we ask these things, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, one of the things that we see—we see that there was a gathering of men and women and children, that the word of God was read to them. It had a powerful effect. The Spirit of God was drawing all of these Israelites together. They had moved over the years. They had worked together. They had built the walls. They had repaired the doors. But they had gotten farther and farther away from the Lord.

And sometimes we do that. We can be busy about things in the church and in the work of God, but we can get further and further away from God because we're not spending time with Him. There's a verse in Song of Solomon chapter 1, I believe it's verse 6:

[Song of Solomon 1:6 NKJV]

Do not look upon me, because I am dark,
Because the sun has tanned me.
My mother's sons were angry with me;
They made me the keeper of the vineyards,
But my own vineyard I have not kept.

And we have to watch that we keep our relationship with the Lord strong. That's the kind of man Ezra was. But these Israelites, these Jewish believers, had not done that. And so they felt the burden of the Holy Spirit to come back, to hear the word of God, to be challenged by the word of God, and have the Spirit of God work in their lives, and bring them back to the right relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so that's what we need. That's what believers in every generation and every local gathering of believers, those that are here, we need to get into a right walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. There'll be joy in our lives when that takes place. We see at the end of this: the joy of the Lord is our strength.

I want to challenge you. If you're walking with the Lord Jesus, praise the Lord, keep on doing that. But if you're not walking, if you feel a lack in your life, you feel like you need to get closer to the Lord Jesus Christ, make an effort towards that. And may the Spirit of God teach you. The way you get back to a right relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is what takes place in this chapter. And in this chapter, what takes place is a teaching of the Word of God.

Understanding the Word of God

So I want to look at that with you: teaching of the Word of God. Look what happens. They call Ezra to come, to read the Scriptures, to bring the Word of God. And the reason is because they were away from God, away from a close relationship with God. They believed in God, they served God, but they're away from a close relationship, and they brought him and said, "Teach us the Word of God. We want to get in a closer relationship. We want to walk in a better way with the Lord Jesus Christ." And so they do that.

And Ezra reads the word of God, but as they begin to read it, there's also a teaching of it. Now, notice something with me. Look at verse 8 for a moment. So these Bible teachers mentioned earlier in the chapter, and the Levites that are mentioned:

[Nehemiah 8:8 NKJV] - So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.

That was the first thing they did. They gave the context of what they were reading. What was the background? Who was speaking? How was it different from other portions? So they read it distinctly. What do some of the words mean? So they gave background. They gave a sense to it. They gave an understanding to it.

But then they do something else: they gave the meaning to it. What does it mean? The sense of it, the meaning of it. There's background. There's context. There's meaning: how it's different from other portions, other chapters. But then what does it mean? We have to know what the word of God means and not what it "means to me." But what did the writer mean? I've heard people say, "Well, this verse means to me..." Well, no, what did the writer mean? What did **God** mean when He put it in His book?

And so that's what these scribes were doing. That's what these Levites were doing. That's what these chosen Bible teachers were doing. They were saying: What is the context? What is the background? What does it mean? And then, how do I apply it to my life?

Look at the last part of verse 8: and they caused them to understand. They caused them to say, "How do I apply it to my life? How do I put this into practice?" And that's something we should be asking ourselves when we read any portion of the word of God. How do I apply it to my life? How do I apply it to my life? How do I apply it to my life? When I read something about prayer, how do I apply it to my life? When I read another portion, how do I apply it? The Lord wants us to do something with what we read in the word of God. And so they explained it, gave the meaning of it. They caused them to understand it. And so they're teaching the word of God.

Now, something else that's very interesting in this chapter, as they began to do this, look what it says in verse 7. The last part of verse 7, as they began to teach, the end of verse 7, the people stand up. Somehow you have this very large group of teachers, and they must have separated all these Israelites into smaller groups. They stood up. They're all standing. And you have all these different teachers. You get Levites and other men that are mentioned in different verses. And you see in verse 12, they're reading and giving explanation and giving interpretation. They must have gotten these people into small groups as they would teach them. So they could teach these in smaller groups.

And I think that's very important. It's very important to get together. We would say get together in a church or get together in a Bible study, get together in a smaller group of 30

people or 50 people, whatever it may be, but have a smaller group where they could speak to that group. Maybe they could ask questions. They could understand it and they can grow in their knowledge of understanding the word of God.

At the end of Second Peter, I think it's chapter 3, the very last verse says:

[2 Peter 3:18 NKJV] - but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

That's what we need to do. Not just knowledge, but knowledge that transforms us, not just accumulation of knowledge. But understand the word of God and living it out and having it work its way in our lives, have its work done in our lives.

But I want you to look at something with me. There's something that's mentioned over and over again that's very important. We see it in verse 7:

[Nehemiah 8:7 NKJV] - Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place.

Look at verse 8, which we're looking at, the very last part of verse 8:

[Nehemiah 8:8 NKJV] - So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.

Same thing. Now drop down with me to verse 12. We didn't read verse 12. But look at verse 12 and 13:

[Nehemiah 8:12-13 NKJV]

¹² And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions and rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them. ¹³ Now on the second day the heads of the fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and Levites, were gathered to Ezra the scribe, in order to understand the words of the Law.

Understand. Now drop down a little further to verse 13. The second day, they didn't have enough teaching the first day. Ezra asked the heads of the families, heads of the tribes. And the second day, they were gathered together, the heads of the fathers and all the people and the priests and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, to understand the words of the law.

Over and over again, not just hearing it. Yes, hearing it is important. But notice this word over and over again: understanding it. What's involved in understanding it? Partly what's involved is they know the meaning of it. They know the application of it. And you know different aspects depending on the context and depending on the situation. You begin to get a grasp of what God is teaching us and what we need to do with our lives. And this is crucial.

The Parable of the Sower: Hearing and Understanding

Now, I want you to put your finger, take a piece of paper—you know, I hope you have little index cards and stuff like that, you know, in the Bible, like I do. So you just put it in there. And you might want to take notes until you write on that little piece of paper. But go over to Matthew. I want to think about this important word, understand. It is very important in our Christian lives. We need to have some amount of knowledge. You need to know certain things, but we need to understand it.

Now, Matthew chapter 13 and verse 19. Matthew chapter 13. We want to look at this word that is mentioned here in chapter 13, in verse 19. Now, just a little background for a moment. Now, this is about the sower, the parable of the sower and the seed. And the parable of the sower and the seed is one of the most important parables because it's mentioned in three of the gospel accounts. And when the Lord Jesus teaches this parable of the sower and the seed, He gives the longest interpretation of it of any of the other parables. He gives more of the meaning and more of the interpretation of the parable. In fact, sometimes the interpretation is longer than the parable itself. It's explaining it. And He explains it in three of the four gospels. It has to be one of the most important things.

And it's about sowing the seed. And the seed is the gospel. And the sower is the Lord Jesus Christ. And the work that He wants to see accomplished is salvation. People who receive the seed come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Their sins are forgiven. And they come into a right relationship. They're redeemed. They're reconciled. Come into a proper relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. They're children of God. They're sons of God. We can't be sons of God, we can't be children of God without coming into a living relationship and have our sins forgiven.

And so that's what this parable is all about. It's about the gospel, about the gospel being sown and people believing, and opposition. You don't have to turn to it here. I want to quote this verse to you. This is chapter 8 and verse 12 of Luke. It has to do with this same parable. And He says this:

[Luke 8:12 NKJV] - Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.

The people who it was sowed to, they heard. Remember, the first thing is they heard. They heard the gospel. And then it says the gospel had lodging in their hearts. Now, just to back up for a minute, this is the hardest-to-reach person, the hard, packed-down soil. Hard, packed-down soil. The seed was sown and laid on top of the hard soil. But it says they heard. The hardest-to-reach person, I want to encourage you, the hardest-to-reach person hears the gospel when you speak it to them. It goes in their ears or their minds or their hearts. And it says in that particular verse, had lodging in their hearts.

But there is one reason why they did not get saved. They were this close to being saved. The hardest-to-reach person is really this close to being saved, not miles apart. Now, again, this is the hard, hard-packed-down soil. And it says in verse 19:

[Matthew 13:19 NKJV] - When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside.

So they're hearing it, but understands it not. If you have a highlight pen, I've highlighted that in my Bible: understands it not. Then comes the wicked one and catches out that seed that was sown in their hearts. This is the one who received the seed of the hard-packed-down, wayside soil. They heard, but they didn't understand it. And when they didn't understand it, Satan comes.

Now, drop down with me to verse 23. What about the person who gets saved? What happens when the person gets saved? Verse 23 of the same chapter, Matthew 13:

[Matthew 13:23 NKJV] - But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."

Again, got that highlighted: and understands it. Who hears and who bears fruit and brings forth fruit, some a hundredfold, sixty, and thirtyfold. Understand it is crucial.

So what do we need to understand? Understand we're sinners. That's a hard thing for people to understand. Hard people to grasp. Hard people to really get a hold of that. We are in a need of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. Another thing is very hard for people: that all we have to do is believe. The Lord Jesus holds out the offer of salvation. He says we've got to acknowledge our sin. But we also have to believe. There's no works involved. There's nothing we have to do. We have to receive that gift. Amen.

We read in Romans:

[Romans 6:23 NKJV] - For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He's holding out this gift of God to us. The day in my life that I took that gift, I received that. I didn't do any works. There was nothing I was doing, but I received it. I received the gift of God, the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. How important it is.

I think those were some of the things back in Nehemiah chapter 8. Those were some of the things that they were saying to these people. Talk about sin, talk about salvation, talking about faith. All these things were explained to them, and they began to understand them.

The Joy of the Lord and Pure Worship

Now our time is almost finished. I want to look at something with you. Back to Nehemiah chapter 8 and verse 10:

[Nehemiah 8:10 NKJV] - 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."

"The joy of the Lord is your strength." What does that mean? I know some people who—I grew up in New Jersey—who love the New York Knicks. Anybody know who they are? They're a basketball team, an NBA basketball team. They had not won a championship for 52 years. They're a big market, and they had the best players for 52 years, but this year they won. And there was a lot of rejoicing, a lot of joy in New York City over their basketball team.

But this joy is different. This joy is the joy of the Lord. How do we get the joy of the Lord? The joy of the Lord comes when we come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. When you come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, there will be a joy in your life. Some people are very exuberant in the joy that they have. Some people have a deep-seated kind of joy. It depends on your culture and your background and your emotional makeup. But you have joy.

There's a passage in Acts chapter 8. When the gospel came to a particular city, a city in Samaria, and many got saved, it says:

[Acts 8:8 NKJV] - And there was great joy in that city.

Joy comes when we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. It comes in every life.

Now, turn with me in your Bible to chapter 12, chapter 12 of Nehemiah. Now, some people, when they get saved, they have this joy. But soon after they have that joy, sometimes that joy begins to fade out of their life. Now, why did these people have this joy? They had it because I think they were coming back to faith, coming back to their walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. But something else: they kept their eyes on God. Their eyes were on God.

How do we keep the joy in our life? We keep our eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, what happens a lot of times in the Christian life is we take our eyes off of Christ and our salvation and the finished work of Christ and all that He's done for us, and we bring it on us. And we begin to look at our lives and say, "Oh, I didn't go to the prayer meeting, and I didn't ask forgiveness for this, and I didn't pray enough, and I didn't do this." And you begin to see all your failures and your flaws, sometimes the thinking in your mind, sometimes the jealousy you might have, or sometimes the pride you might have. And you begin to look at all these things and you begin to say, "How can God use me? Or how could God love me? Or how could God..." We begin to think inwardly. And that joy begins to ebb away.

And how do we continue that joy? We continue that joy when we get our eyes on the Lord Jesus. I had a friend, he gave me a good illustration. He said, "You know, when you are driving in your car, you've got a big front windshield. You've got a little rearview mirror. Most cars, a little rearview mirror. And you got some small side mirrors. If you've got these big

monster trucks, they've got the big mirrors, maybe a big truck, you know, big rearview mirror. But most cars, small rearview mirror. We keep our eyes going ahead, don't we? We don't keep our eyes in that mirror, the rearview mirror. You don't look at it all the time. I hope you don't look at the rearview mirror all the time. You're looking going forward. We keep our eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ. We're going forward."

Now we have to use the rearview mirror. You've got to sometimes look at yourself, but don't keep it there. Keep it on the Lord. Keep it on the Lord.

Now let's go back to our passage in chapter 12. In chapter 12, down at verse 27, chapter 12 and verse 27, we have the dedication of the wall:

[Nehemiah 12:27 NKJV] - Now at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought out the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings and singing, with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps.

The wall is built and they're rejoicing at what God has done. Their eyes are on God and all the great things He has done in a short period of time. It says there is gladness. There is thanksgiving. Verse 27, the last part of it: there was singing, there were cymbals and there were stringed instruments and there were harps. The sons of the singers gathered themselves together and they got out the instruments of David, King David, which he commissioned to be built. And this was 500 years previous.

Notice in verse 43, verse 43, what happens when your eyes are on the Lord and you continue to keep them on the Lord. Look at what God has done:

[Nehemiah 12:43 NKJV] - Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and the children also rejoiced, so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off.

So they offered great sacrifices. Now notice how often the word rejoicing is used in this verse: and they rejoiced, for God had made them to rejoice with great joy. And the women rejoiced, and the children rejoiced, and the men—we're not mentioning it, but the men rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem is heard even afar off.

Continue to keep your eyes on the Lord. Get into the word of God and keep your eyes on the Lord. Come to a worship and keep your eyes on the Lord. Now you keep your eyes on what God has done. You keep your eyes on who God is. And you continue to keep your eyes on the Lord, and it leads to worship. What are they doing in verse 43? They are worshipping. They're offering sacrifices and they're rejoicing at what God has done. And it leads to worship. It leads to singing. It leads to exalting the Lord Jesus Christ and giving thanksgiving to Him.

Now we're going to close in one minute. I want you to go to Psalm 69. Psalm 69, another one of these little bits of verses that are just great to underline and highlight:

[Psalm 69:30-31 NKJV]

³⁰ I will praise the name of God with a song,
And will magnify Him with thanksgiving.

³¹ This also shall please the LORD better than an ox or bull,
Which has horns and hooves.

Our singing means so much to the Lord. Our worship means so much to the Lord. More than a bullock, more than an ox, more than the biggest sacrifice, the most expensive sacrifice of the Old Testament. He says our worship is important. When we come together and we sing together, it's valuable. I'm glad we stood up. I'm glad when you stand up, we sing out better. I'm glad we stood up and we sang. We have the words in front of us and we're worshipping the Lord. Our eyes are on the Lord. It pleases the Lord. Worship pleases the Lord.

I want to encourage you in worship. Come together. Come to the times of worship here at this local assembly. Be at the times of the Lord's Supper. Be at the times of singing and worshipping the Lord. Have times in your own homes of worship to the Lord. May the Lord work in your life.

We need revival in this world today, and we need those who are digging into the word of God. There can't be any revival, there can't be any real substantial change without getting into the word of God. And then may the Lord fill you with joy. Keep your eyes upon Him. Let it lead you to worship.

Our God and Father, we thank You for our time together this morning. We pray, Father, that You will work this coming week. We pray for all those that are here, those that are downstairs, those that are on Zoom, Father. We thank You for all those who are hearing the word of God here this morning and so many places throughout North America and

throughout the world. And we pray, Father, that You will do a great work in our communities.
We pray this in Jesus' name, amen.