

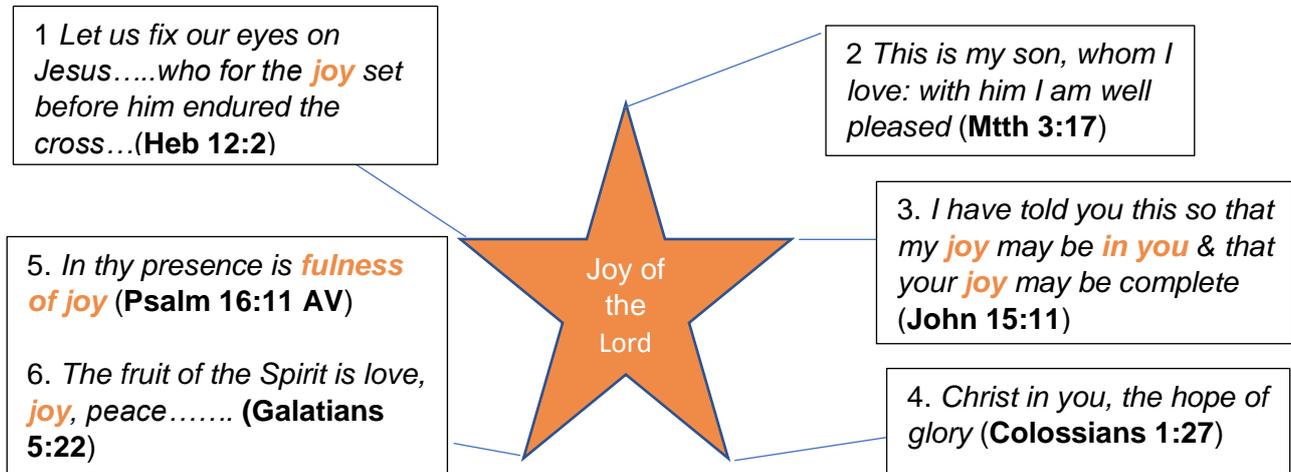


A JOY JOURNEY: some of the scribblings that didn't make it!

I called this **A Joy Journey** because of Nehemiah's promise: ***The joy of the Lord is your strength (8:10)***. When that verse first grabbed my attention some years ago, I found it a bit of a puzzle. I thought it should be the other way round ie ***The Lord's strength gives me joy***. Yet that's not what it says, although I think we'd all agree it's also a true statement! The verse says it's the Lord's joy that gives us strength.

What is the Lord's joy & how does it give us strength?

I scribbled my ideas into a spidergram (this one looks neater than my rough one!):



There are stages of joy in **ch 8** as the people celebrate with food & drink, by listening to God's law & by building booths: **v10 "joy"**; **v12 "great joy"**; **v17 "very great joy"**.

Happiness is good. God tells us that, eg in Proverbs. We all enjoy a good laugh & it can lift our spirits. **But is the joy of the Lord dependent on happy feelings?**

In reading both Nehemiah and Ezra, there's a sense of God stirring up the people to repent, come back to Him & seek His presence. **A revival?** Re-read Nehemiah's 1st prayer.

LORD, the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's family, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.'

They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favour in the presence of this man.

Does this prayer ring true for us today, as we contemplate not just the state of our nation but of the whole world? Does it have any implications for “the church”, God’s people, today?

Is revival something we long to see in our nation today? Is it something we believe we might see before Jesus comes back?

3 TYPES OF PHYSICAL/SPIRITUAL WALLS to reflect on:

- Walls of Protection from the enemy (to build up)
- Walls of Division (to break down)
- Seawalls (to keep God and people at a safe distance)

Any thoughts on any of those?

A SEQUEL re WALLS OF DIVISION

I mentioned my visit to my penfriend, Anschi, in Germany & the impact of the division between east and west. A couple of years later Anschi came to South Shields to spend a few weeks with us. She would be coming to my home church, the Old Friends Mission, and the minister, Uncle Richard (I had an abundance of church uncles and aunties!!), asked if Anschi would read the 23rd Psalm in both English and German. She was happy to do that. I didn’t think too much about it other than it was nice for her to agree to do it. That Sunday evening, as she started to read, there was what I could only describe as a tangible hush. No shuffling, coughing, sniffing, chair-moving etc. Everyone seemed transfixed. The silence lingered for a few seconds when she’d finished, then the bubble popped as the congregation clapped her and moved on to the next part of the service. However, with hindsight, I believe God was healing division in people’s lives, division that was internal because of war experiences. My Mam and Dad told me some time later that Uncle Richard had suffered some bad war experiences and as a result never had a good word to say about Germans. They’d been quite surprised he’d actually asked Anschi to read the Bible. No-one ever divulged anything to me personally, but various people over the following months and years, including Uncle Richard, would refer to “*that Sunday evening*” as being something special. I really believe the Holy Spirit was at work there.

Finally, I tend to think joy and peace have a close relationship with each other. When I sense the Lord’s joy within it inevitably leads to that “**peace which passes understanding**”, which both Mervyn and Matt have referred to recently. **Does anyone else find that?**

With that in mind, let’s conclude with a prayer from **Romans 15:13**

May the God of hope fill you with
all joy and peace
as you trust in him,
so that you may overflow with hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

