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## **Maintaining the Joy of the Lord**

***By David Wilkerson***

May 17, 2010 Dearly Beloved:

### DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD?

The Bible says, "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God... Some must enter therein" (Hebrews 4:9, 6).

We are to pray, seek and ask, and then simply trust that God is at work. We are to believe he is leading us. And whether everything ends up in loss or gain, God has a plan. He closes one door to open another. Why the Lord has subjected his miracle-working power to our human faith, I can't explain. All I know is that Christ shows us that unbelief paralyzes his work.

Time after time under Moses' leadership, the children of Israel refused to lay hold of God's past promises to them. Every word that God had said to them was useless in their minds. Because his glorious promises were not mixed with faith, they became void and ineffective.

Often the Israelites wanted a new word from the Lord. Despite his great promises to them, they asked in crisis after crisis, "God, are you with us or not?" In other words: "Lord, give us your word that you're with us. We can't see any evidence that you are. Give us a new revelation, some new evidence."

In spite of their murmuring and accusations of unfaithfulness, God gave Moses a reminder: "Dread not, neither be afraid... The Lord your God shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt." Note this was not a new word. Rather, God was saying, "I told you in Egypt I would go before you, I would fight for you, I would dwell among you." The same reminder is echoed in both the Old and New Testaments: "The Lord shall fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (Exodus 14:14).

Over and over God had told them, "I am with you. I will fight for you. Lay hold of my promise, and forget it not." But here they were again, trembling before their enemies, voicing all kinds of fear, saying, "We are not able to go up." They doubted God's call on their lives, doubted God loved them, doubted his presence in their midst.

Many of us are so like Israel! We wonder, "God, are you really with me in this? I know what you promised me, but is it really true? Oh, Lord, I've got to hear from you. Please, speak a new word. Give me some new assurance. Will I be delivered from this?"

Why do we fear and tremble before our enemy? It is because we do not truly believe what God has already promised us. Often we act as if he has never said a word to us! The Holy Spirit does send us a special word of comfort, assurance or direction. But the surest word is always found in the Scriptures.

Do you tremble before an enemy stronghold? Remember what God has said to you: "I will fight for you! Dread not, neither be afraid. Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world. No man or devil can pluck you out of my hand. I will keep you and sanctify you by my Spirit." Dear one, lay hold of the promises already provided. Trust God's revealed Word!

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In Christ,  
DAVID WILKERSON

DW:bbm 5.17.10

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## **Newsletter: Maintaining the Joy of the Lord**

May 17, 2010 The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). At the time these words were proclaimed, the Israelites had just returned from captivity in Babylon. Under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the people had rebuilt Jerusalem’s ruined walls. Now they set their sights on reestablishing the temple and restoring the nation.

Nehemiah called a special meeting at the city’s water gate within Jerusalem’s rebuilt walls. “All the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate” (Nehemiah 8:1). Some scholars believe this was a gathering of about 50,000 people.

First came the preaching of God’s Word. Scripture says the people were hungry to hear it: “They spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses... Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding” (8:1–2).

These people didn’t need to have God’s Word urged on them. A consensus of hunger had developed among them. And they were fully prepared to submit to the authority of God’s Word, wanting to be governed by it and to conform to its truth.

Amazingly, Ezra preached to the crowd for five or six hours, “from the morning until midday” (8:3). Yet no one present noticed the time passing. Instead, “The ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law” (8:3).

What an incredible scene. I believe it would be hard to find such an occurrence in the modern church. Yet true restoration can never take place without this kind of all-consuming hunger for God’s Word.

Make no mistake, at that scene at the water gate in Jerusalem there was no eloquent preaching. Ezra didn’t deliver a sensational sermon. Rather, he preached straight from the Scriptures, reading for hours on end and explaining the meaning. And as the people listened they grew excited.

At times Ezra was so overcome by what he read that he stopped to “(bless) the Lord, the great God” (8:6). The glory of the Lord came down powerfully and everyone raised their hands in praise: “All the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands” (8:6). In repentance and brokenness, “they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground” (8:6). Then they stood up to experience more.

There was no manipulation from the pulpit, no dramatic testimony. There wasn’t even any music as yet. These people simply had an ear to hear everything God said to them.

Beloved, I believe the Lord desires to move among his people in the same way today. Yet the kind of reviving and restoration we see happening to God’s people in Nehemiah 8 requires a ministry and congregation as excited by the Scriptures as Ezra was.

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It also requires a people who are just as anxious to hear God's Word and walk in it. Even the most fiery preacher can't stir up a complacent congregation if they're not hungry to hear God's truth.

The result of this powerful preaching was a continuing wave of brokenness among the hearers. A half-day of preaching wasn't enough for the hungry Israelites. They wanted even more of God's Word. They formed groups, with seventeen elders besides Ezra leading them in Bible studies the rest of the day.

“(They) caused the people to understand the law...so they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (Nehemiah 8:7-8).

As the people grasped God's law they began to mourn over their sin. “All the people wept when they heard the words of the law” (8:9). Try to picture it: 50,000 people bowing to the ground, mourning their transgressions in unison. Like a hammer, God's Word had broken their pride, and their weeping echoed over the hills for miles.

I ask you: Is this what an awakening is all about? Is it a word so piercing that people are driven to their knees, weeping and repenting before God? I have experienced such holy gatherings myself. When I was a child, our family attended “camp meetings” at the Living Waters Camp Ground in Pennsylvania. Jesus' second coming was preached with such power and authority that everyone was convinced Christ could return any moment.

Yet as genuine as these manifestations were, none of these things in themselves can draw sinners into God's house. Imagine an unconverted person trying to bear up under life's stresses, with marital problems, hurting and confused, afraid his life has no meaning. Such a person is joyless, with no hope. Nothing he tries satisfies his inner thirst. It is the manifestation of the genuine joy of Jesus that touches him in the midst of his pain and sorrow.

We have to understand: The water-gate revival in Jerusalem wasn't for sinners. It was for the back-slidden children of God. The Lord was trying to restore his people, to deliver them from bondage and baptize them with joy to make them strong. Indeed, the testimony he wants to bring forth in his people is lasting, genuine joy. “The joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). This joy, which comes from true repentance and trust in God's Word, brings strength to his people and draws sinners into his house.

I believe this deep, abiding joy is largely missing today. I have heard Christians say, “We prayed down a revival in our church.” Yet this cannot happen by prayer alone. There can't be any such awakening unless people hunger diligently for God's Word. And they must wholly commit their lives to being governed by the Scriptures. We simply can't obtain heaven's joy until the pure Word has convicted us of our backslidings.

When David disobeyed, he lost the joy of the Lord. That joy could only be restored by true

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repentance. And David knew this; so he prayed, “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me ...Purge me” (Psalm 51:2–3, 7). David also prayed to regain what he’d lost: “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation” (Psalm 51:12).

When God’s Word is revered, the result is an outpouring of genuine “Jesus Joy.” Ezra told the crowds, in essence, “You have hungered for God’s Word and allowed it to work in your heart. You have repented and mourned, and God is pleased. But now it is time to rejoice. Take out your handkerchiefs and wipe away your tears. It is a time for joy!”

The glory of the Lord fell on Israel, and the people spent the next seven days rejoicing: “All the people went their way to eat, and to drink...and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them” (Nehemiah 8:12).

The Hebrew word for “mirth” here means “gladness, happiness.” This isn’t just a good feeling, but a deep, inner exuberance. It is clear to everyone around that this wellspring of joy has come from heaven.

When we started Times Square Church in 1987, we quickly realized we were pastoring in a modern-day Corinth, one of the most carnal areas in the world. Therefore, we had to preach a convicting message that would awaken hearts. When we first opened our doors, our services were attended by many Christians who worked in the entertainment industry on stage, TV and film. Some had chosen to stay in careers that clearly dishonored the Lord.

We wondered whether we could evangelize unsaved show people if our own congregants were still involved in unsavory aspects of the business. So we preached a message of “separation,” and the Lord began to deal with the people. Many gave up lucrative careers in show business and God blessed them marvelously. One former actor now pastors a church in Israel.

We discovered that God had kept a godly remnant for himself in Times Square, a people who loved his Word. In every service the people sat like hungry birds, their mouths wide open for food. Afterward, they took home sermon tapes to listen to. Our church experienced a spirit of repentance, an eagerness to obey and a readiness to conform to God’s Word.

As we all came under the power and government of God’s Word, ministers and congregation alike, our services were filled with more than tears of repentance. The sanctuary was filled with sounds of victory, joy and gladness. There was great rejoicing because we had begun to understand the great truth of God’s Word. People cried with joy when they began to see who they were in Christ — that at the Cross all their sins were judged, and that they were no longer under God’s wrath.

To maintain the joy of the Lord among his people Israel, God called for an even deeper work in the nation. God had heard the Israelites’ cry and he had shown mercy to them. He had turned their

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mourning into mirth, allowing them to shout and rejoice. And now he called them to gather for yet another meeting. In short, if Israel's joy was to be maintained — if it was not to be lost once again — God had to dig a little deeper.

Certain areas of people's lives still weren't conformed to his Word. Yet the Lord had allowed everyone to rejoice for a season because he wanted them to know they were loved and secure. Now, during this state of acceptance and joy, he asked them all to commit to a greater separation from the world.

God said to these joyful souls, "I am well pleased with you. You have revered my Word, repenting of your sin, rejoicing in my mercy and committing to obey me. Now it's time for you to act on my love. I want you to separate yourselves wholly, to break away completely from the worldly influences that have crept into your hearts and homes."

The simple fact is, God's people can't go forward to fullness in Christ if we don't increasingly separate ourselves from the spirit of this world. If we're not becoming more heavenly minded and less attached to worldly pleasures surrounding us, we also will be drained of the joy of our salvation. The sad truth is, many believers are unable to enjoy their salvation because they neglect obeying God's Word. Obedience to his Word is the place that blessing and joy begin!

Israel didn't want to lose their great spirit of rejoicing. So they assembled again to obey God on this matter: "The seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins" (Nehemiah 9:2). "They...entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law...and that (they) would not give (their) daughters unto the people of the land, nor take their daughters for (their) sons" (10:29-30).

Note that Israel's circumstances and trials didn't change; God changed *them*. Nehemiah reminded a rejoicing Israel of how God had provided for their forefathers in the wilderness. The Lord had poured out manifold mercies on them. He had taught them by his Spirit and led them by the cloud and the pillar of fire. He had supernaturally provided them with manna and water. And, miraculously, he didn't allow their clothes or shoes ever to wear out (see Nehemiah 9:19-21).

Likewise today, God has promised to pour out these same mercies on his people. In the midst of our afflictions, we must quietly go to God's Word and pray that the Holy Spirit will write it on our hearts. That is how we begin to enter his rest and peace.

Yet we can still choose to live in a wilderness as Israel did. Nehemiah pointed out that Israel's forefathers had ignored God's law: "They were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs...Yet many years didst thou forbear them...yet they would not give ear" (Nehemiah 9:26, 30).

Only the joy of the Lord supplies us with true strength. We can talk about our ten- or twenty-year walk with Christ, but if we're not trusting the Holy Spirit to quicken God's Word to us, our joy will be

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short-lived. We must continually hunger for his Word; that is where joy begins and continues.

How do we maintain the joy of the Lord? We do it the same way we obtained his joy in the beginning: We love, honor and hunger for his Word. And we continually walk in obedience by the power of the Holy Spirit.

On a personal note, I found gladness and peace in my own heart the day I claimed my position in Christ. It happened when I fully believed that in Christ I could come boldly to God's throne with assurance. I was no longer charged with sin, with no wrath facing me. The judgment for my sins was never to be on me again because God had already judged them through his Son on the cross.

Today God's people have what the Old Testament saints could not even conceive: a righteousness by faith alone and not by works. Moreover, we have a blessed peace knowing that God no longer imputes sin to us because we are in Christ. This is the living Word of God; this is believing the Scriptures. This is the hope that brings a believer into unspeakable joy, peace and rest. And this joy is our daily strength, our portion to face all our afflictions!

May our precious Lord bring you into this place of rest in all your trials. And may his joy become your strength. Amen!

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