

"The joy of the Lord is your strength"

Nehemiah 8:10

The Bible is full of verses that surprise. This is one such verse. We don't normally think of strength in relation to joy. We think of strength in terms of physical or emotional strength or even moral strength. It is associated with exercise, fortitude, effort or opposition. It is almost never associated with joy. Moreover, this passage says that the source of our strength lies outside of us and *with* God Himself. That is contrary to our normal way of thinking of strength. We think of strength in terms of self: "I must be strong" or "I must be stronger." We don't think of strength as deriving from a source outside ourselves. This passage is a diamond hidden in plain sight. It highlights the infinite love of God for His children.

The passage begs the question: "How *does* God's joy strengthen us?" Another verse helps to answer this question: "The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; *he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.*"¹ God has saved us through the atoning death of Jesus Christ. God saves us because He loves us. God wants us to have an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. God rejoices in the relationship between Christ and believers. God has given believers as a *gift* to Christ: "I have manifested your name to the people *whom you gave me* out of the world. Yours they were, and *you gave them to me.*" Believers are the Father's gift to the Son.

¹ Zephaniah 3:17

The Holy Spirit turns our hearts to Jesus Christ so that we will receive the salvation Jesus alone offers by His death and resurrection. The Father turns our hearts to Jesus because He loves us. Because He loves us He rejoices in us. When God sovereignly committed Himself to love us He already knew all the sins, mistakes and failures we would commit throughout our lives. Our actions may disappoint God, but they will never surprise Him. God's sovereign choice to love us was made with perfect foreknowledge of who we are together with all of our faults, sins and shortcomings. The knowledge that God loves us *no matter what* can strengthen us to face all of life's trials and heartache. We draw deep inner strength from the knowledge of God's steadfast, unshakeable love. Jesus voluntarily died on the cross for each and every person who believes Him. We haven't done anything to earn God's love. We will never deserve God's love. God has sovereignly chosen to love us for all eternity. He will not change His mind because God is eternal and unchanging.

The fact that God has *joy in us* while knowing everything about us must be accepted by faith because it makes no sense. Jesus is God's joy. Every believer can, therefore, say: "I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."²

We can draw great spiritual strength from the knowledge that the eternal God Almighty loves us and *takes joy in us* for eternity *no matter what*. Because God loves

² Romans 8:38-39

us, He rejoices in us. The knowledge that God rejoices in us through Jesus Christ has enabled martyrs to withstand torture, parents to continue to pray for wayward children, believers to endure ridicule,— all for the cause and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we want to grow stronger in Christ, we must grow in our understanding that God takes joy in us. Conversely, if we lose sight of the joy God takes in us and instead continually berate ourselves or look elsewhere for strength, our God-based strength will seep away. The next time you feel weak, overpowered, depressed, burdened, turn to God and remember that He rejoices over you with superabundant love. We thank God that the *source* of our strength is eternal, incorruptible and inexhaustible.