

Revival (Part 2)

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[0:00] Amen. Tonight is the second of two lessons in Nehemiah chapter 8.

! The chapter is all about revival.! Last week we covered the first eight verses of chapter 8. But because the chapter covers the seventh month of the Jewish calendar, we spent quite a bit of time looking at that month's significance.

And we'll start tonight by just doing a quick review. On the Jewish calendar, the first day of the seventh month is the date for the Feast of Trumpets. In our calendar today, that occurs in late September.

For the Jews, the tenth day of the seventh month is the Day of Atonement. In our calendar, that's early October. The Feast of Booths, also known as the Feast of Tabernacles, occurs on the fifteenth day of the seventh month.

That's also in early October in our calendar. And that feast lasts for a week. Last week we also looked at Leviticus 23, 23-43, and that's where we found God's requirements for those feasts.

[1:13] When we referred to those verses last week, we saw why the seventh month on the Jewish calendar was so important to them with all of the celebrations that they have. Then we also looked at Deuteronomy 31, 10-13 last week.

There we learned that some Feast of Tabernacles were more important than others. So let's just look at Deuteronomy 31, 10-13, because that really sets the stage for what we see in Nehemiah 8. In Deuteronomy 31, 10-13, it says, And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God in the place which he chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing.

Gather the people together, men and women, and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the Lord your God, and carefully observe all the words of this law, and that their children who have not known it may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live in the land which you crossed the Jordan to possess. Considerably more than seven years had passed since the last reading of the law to all of the people. The people realized that and wanted to do something about it, and that led to the revival that we see in Nehemiah 8.

[2:38] In part one of this lesson, we looked at the reason for the revival. You have that blank repeated on your handout tonight. The reason for the revival is that the people recommitted themselves to knowing God's word.

So let's read some of the verses from Nehemiah 8, 1-8 to remind ourselves of the setting. Starting with verses 1-3, those verses say, 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. 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.

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.

Verse 4 told us that 13 men stood with Ezra on the platform. They may have been priests or they may have been prominent lay leaders. Standing with Ezra showed agreement with what he would read.

[3:50] It also showed their support for the reading. Verse 6 told us that before he read the law, Ezra began teaching, or he began the teaching with prayer.

And when Ezra did read from the law, several men and other Levites helped to explain the law to the people. Look at verse 8. It says, So they read distinctly from the book and the law of God, and they gave the sense and helped them to understand the reading.

The Levites had the job of making sure the people knew what was being said. They were helping them bridge the cultural gap between the last 70 years in exile with their cultural heritage found in Scripture.

That really wasn't an easy task, because although God's Word is authoritative for life and faith and all matters of knowing God, it frequently takes hard work to understand the message of God when it's written in a foreign language and it's written in a distant time and place.

We can relate to that today, can't we? We have to work today to understand the Word of God, and that's why we need people who devote their time to explaining the Scripture to us. We talked last week about how the explanation of Scripture doesn't have the same authority as the Scripture itself, but it is important because the Bible's not meant to be only heard and revered.

[5:09] It's also meant to be understood and obeyed. And that brings us to the section that we'll study tonight. So let's go ahead and read the rest of Nehemiah chapter 8.

These are verses 9 through 18. Starting with verse 9, it says, 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. 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. So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, Be still, for the day is holy.

Do not be grieved. 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.

[6:13] 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. And they found written in the law, which the Lord had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month, and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem, saying, Go out to the mountain and bring olive branches, branches of oil trees, myrtle branches, palm branches, and branches of leafy trees, to make booths as it is written.

Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, or in their courtyards, or in the courts of the house of God, and in the open square of the water gate, and in the open square of the gate of Ephraim.

So the whole assembly of those who had returned from captivity made booths and sat under the booths, for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun, until that day, the children of Israel had not done so, and there was very great gladness.

Also, day by day, from the first day until the last day, he read from the book of the law, and they kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day, there was a sacred assembly, according to the prescribed manner.

As mentioned earlier, we saw the reason for the revival when we studied verses 8, in verses 1 through 8 last week. Every true progress in gospel awakening is conditioned by a renewed and deepened study of the scriptures.

[7:48] Many people, even Christian people, fail to understand the place and importance of the Bible in their daily lives. True spiritual renewal comes only when individuals turn from their lack of effort and moral apathy and turn to God in faith and repentance.

It involves submission to the authority of the scriptures. That last sentence is key. True spiritual renewal involves submission to the authority of the scriptures, and people can only submit to the scriptures when they understand the scriptures.

That's why we'll look at verses 9 through 12 under the heading of the requirement for the revival. So in those verses, we'll see the requirement for the revival.

Here are those verses again. They say, 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. Then he said to them, Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared.

[9:00] For this day is holy to the Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. So the Levites quieted all the people, saying, Be still, for the day is holy.

Do not be grieved. And all the people went their way to eat and drink, to send portions, and to rejoice greatly, because they understood the words that were declared to them.

The requirement for the revival is that the people understand God's word. Let's look at verse 9, starting from the back of the verse. The last sentence of verse 9 says, For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law.

The verse doesn't tell us why the people were weeping, but we can infer it. The word of God, when read, has the power to transform lives. The people realized that the Babylonian captivity was a result of their disobedience.

Only genuine repentance before God could bring about a real change in the community. As the law was read and explained to the people, it was as if God himself was speaking to them and tearing their hearts.

[10:09] They saw themselves as sinners, lawbreakers, who had been more concerned with themselves than with pleasing God. Real guilt, not just the feeling of guilt, but a realization that sin had rendered them liable to God's punishment, now overtook them, and because of that, they began to weep.

We can tell there that they wept collectively with great sobs of contrition and a real sense of unworthiness. The first evidence that revival was truly on the way was the grief over the sin. It was intense grief, though the story doesn't dwell on it. The grief must have been intense because Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites who were instructing the people had to interrupt the reading and they had to interrupt the exposition of the law to deal with it.

They urged the people to rejoice instead. We see that urging to rejoice in the previous section of verse 9. The beginning of verse 9 said, 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. And then verse 10 builds on the command to rejoice. That's where it says, Then he said to them, Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared.

[11:31] For this day is holy to our Lord. Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. There are two reasons for the exhortation to rejoice.

One is that the people had repented. And two, this was the first day of the seventh month. Remember we just read that this was supposed to be the Feast of Trumpets and the Feast was supposed to be a day of rejoicing.

The Feast days in Israel's worship were designed to bring glory to the Lord. Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites remind them of this and instruct them to engage in acts of hospitality to the other people who were less fortunate.

The speaker wasn't suggesting that there was no place for weeping or true expressions of biblical faith that lead to sorrow, but simply that that particular day was a day to be filled with joy.

And here's a quote from C.S. Lewis. He said, Joy is the serious business of heaven. It's kind of an interesting way to think about it, isn't it, is that joy is the serious business of heaven.

[12:34] Remember how Paul ended the epistle to the Romans. He insisted that the kingdom of God is principally about righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. That comes from Romans 14, 17.

When you think about it, joyless religion fosters and demonstrates unbelief, something that Nehemiah, Paul, and C.S. Lewis knew well. They knew that to really be believers, you would be joyful, and we'll talk about that more as we go along the lesson tonight.

Look particularly, though, at the last sentence of verse 10. That's where it says, Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength. That sentence there might be one of the most famous sentences from Nehemiah.

And we also have the essence of our true spiritual experience there. It's possible to become too absorbed with our own failures and shortcomings, and that becomes unhealthy if that happens.

We know that man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Instead of being introspective and self-centered, we need to become focused on others. When we take an interest in others, we begin to experience real joy.

[13:44] Think about what James wrote in James 1.27. He said this in James 1.27, Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their trouble and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

True joy is never something that's separated from reality. Joy actually is a vital part of our experience when we rejoice in our standing before God.

God. And this can only take place as we learn more about what He has done for us and enter into the reality of what it means to belong to Him and be accepted by Him. When this happens and we realize that we're accepted by the Creator of the universe, we begin to experience real joy regardless of what our circumstances might be at the time.

From this time onward, then, our work becomes characterized more by self-forgetfulness and we're able to live more for His glory in thanks for what He's done for us. So, hear that last part again.

Joy becomes a vital part of our experience when we rejoice in our standing before God. This takes place as we learn more of what He has done for us and enter into the reality of what it means to belong to Him and be accepted by Him.

[14:59] We get the sense from verse 11, though, that the people initially failed to heed the urging to rejoice. The Levites had to jump in this time and remind the people to stop grieving.

Verse 11 says, So the Levites quieted all the people saying, Be still, for the day is holy. Do not be grieved. The people must have burst into something of a collective hysteria at the sound of each other's weeping.

Such hysteria was inappropriate. It spoke of uncertainty rather than the assurance of God's forgiveness. The exhortation to rejoice initially seemed at odds with the fact that we're told three times in as many verses that the day was holy.

The day was holy because it was the first day of the seventh month. We know that was the start of a series of festivals on the Jewish calendar. And the first day was supposed to be a month of solemn rest comparable to the Sabbath.

But the day anticipated the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles, which was an especially exciting festival for children. You can imagine that they looked forward to the thought of camping out and sleeping under temporary shelters.

[16:07] And those temporary shelters were to remind them of the protection that their ancestors had in the wilderness during their wanderings. And it appears as though this feast had been forgotten after it was first celebrated again when the people returned to the land in Ezra 3 almost a century earlier.

The Feast of Tabernacles was a family affair and had a ritual of special food and delicacies during that time. It was definitely not a time to be weeping but instead to be giving thanks and recollecting God's goodness and faithfulness to all of Israel.

Despite their past sins, let's talk about why the people of Nehemiah's day had legitimate reasons to be joyful. Current circumstances are different for us but we'll see that the same reasons to be joyful should also apply to us.

The first thing that we learn there is that joy stems from knowing that we are loved and of course more specifically that joy stems from knowing that we are loved by God.

What else could this meeting at the Watergate signify to the Jews but that God had surely loved them despite their sinfulness and waywardness? The judgment of exile was fully deserved but God remembered his covenant with them.

[17:24] In one of the darkest passages of Jeremiah, Jeremiah chapter 2, God speaks to his people like a husband who files for divorce from his faithless bride and prosecutes his case with unrelenting conviction.

Yet the husband's door is still open if she returns to him. For all her harlotry, she still protests that I am innocent. Despite that though, God still says to his people, return, O faithless children, I will take you.

So that's from Jeremiah 3.14 where he says, return, O faithless children, I will take you. And that's the same thing that God says to us and anybody else who's a Christian that has been unfaithful to God for a while.

Knowing that we are loved and cherished should bring joy. God has loved his people from before the foundation of the world. He loved us more than we can ever express.

His love's measure is Calvary and no greater love is imaginable. That's an interesting thought, isn't it? That God's love's measure is Calvary and no greater love is imaginable.

[18:33] The second reason to be joyful is that joy stems from knowing what we have in fellowship with the Lord is the best. There's a profound sense in which Christians, more than anybody else in the world, know what real joy is.

That's because in our relationship with Jesus Christ, we have a sense of purpose and reality. materialism and pleasure should not hold attraction for us, but they do often allure us.

And so, in the gospel, we've discovered what joy is and what really matters. John Newton expressed it well. He said, Fading is the worldling's pleasure, all his boasted pomp and show. Solid joys and lasting treasure, none but Zion's children know. In Jesus Christ, we've discovered the meaning of real treasure.

The third reason for our joy comes from knowing the God of providence. You think about the believers assembled in Nehemiah's day. These believers had assembled in Jerusalem and they could look back on their lives and discern the hand of God, guiding, guarding, and governing them.

[20:02] Few verses of Scripture really encapsulate a believer's confidence in everything that happens than Romans 8.28. And of course, Romans 8.28 says, And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

We have to be careful with that verse because it doesn't say all things are good. It says all things work together for good. Knowing this, Paul seems to say, is what makes all the difference to Christians.

We know also what the good is that God intends for us and that's conformity to the image of His Son. That comes from Romans 8.29. God wants to make us like Jesus, at least in holiness. Sometimes this process of conforming us to Jesus' image is painful. Ease and comfort are not necessarily indications of God's goodness, although we often mistake them as evidences of being blessed by Him.

Those times of ease and comfort may indicate what matters most to us. It might even prove a greater blessing to be deprived of them if in doing so God drew us nearer to Himself because as we get nearer to God we'll experience more blessing.

[21:18] That last sentence is a tough one though, isn't it? Think about that again. It says, those times of ease and comfort may indicate what matters most to us and it would prove a greater blessing to be deprived of them if in doing so God drew us nearer to Himself.

Here's another way that we can summarize the joy of the Lord. The people of Nehemiah's day experience joy because the Lord has again become the center of their lives.

They feel secure in their relationship with Him. This gives them a feeling of well-being, protection, care, and freedom from concern. In that security they become conscious of their worth in Him. With His blessing upon them they feel competent to face the future. The result then is strength and their natural response is obedience to God's will. Once they realized that they did go their way to eat and drink and to send portions and rejoice greatly because they understood the words that were declared to them.

The final part of that last sentence of course comes from verse 12. The people were able to obey God and rejoice greatly because they understood the words that were declared to them.

[22:35] So do you see now why we can say that understanding the Word of God is a requirement for revival? Once they understood that God wanted them to be joyful and why He wanted them to be joyful the revival started to happen.

And that brings us to the last section of the chapter. In verses 13 through 18 we see the results of the revival. So let's talk about the results of the revival.

As you're filling in the blank there here's a confession. We've already seen the results of the revival. These verses overlap somewhat. The results of the revival were that the people obeyed the Lord. Because of that obedience they experienced the joy of the Lord. So let me say that one more time. The results of the revival were that the people obeyed the Lord.

And because of that obedience they experienced the joy of the Lord. Verses 13 through 18 reinforced those results. Listen to those verses again.

[23:37] It says, 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.

And they found written in the law which the Lord had commanded by Moses that the children of Israel should dwell in booth during the feast of the seventh month and that they should announce and proclaim in all their cities and in Jerusalem saying, Go out to the mountain and bring olive branches branches of oil trees myrtle branches palm branches and branches of leafy trees to make booths as it is written.

Then the people went out and brought them and made themselves booths each one on the roof of his house or in their courtyards or in the courts of the house of God and in the open square of the water gate and in the open square of the gate of Ephraim.

So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so and there was very great gladness.

Verse 17 is worth repeating before we go on. It says, So the whole assembly of those who had returned from the captivity made booths and sat under the booths for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun until that day the children of Israel had not done so and there was very great gladness.

[25:03] So for the first time since Joshua the people obeyed God concerning the feast of the booths and it says there was very great gladness because of that. What's another word for very great gladness?

It's joy. It's the same joy that we've been talking about as we've gone through this chapter and you can see where the obedience brings about the joy. The chapter ends with verse 18 and in that verse we see the people still being faithful to obey God.

It says, Also day by day from the first day until the last day he read from the book of the law of God and they kept the feast seven days and on the eighth day there was a sacred assembly according to the prescribed manner.

Every day of the celebration somebody read from the book of the law the Israelites kept the word front and center in their celebrations. We need to likewise be devoted to the word of God in our churches.

The other verses in this section show the effects of keeping the word front and center. Verse 14 shows the change in people's conduct. The people celebrated the feast of booths because they found it written in the law and they found it written in the law at just the right time for the celebration.

[26:21] If we want to know our God-given duties in life we'll have to get into the word of God and study it diligently as well. Neglecting the word of God will make us both ignorant and forgetful of our duties.

In the past the children of Israel had neglected the word. As a result they were ignorant of what they were supposed to do and this made them disobedient to God. it also diminished their blessings from God.

Some people like to turn to the Bible only for the promises of blessing but the Bible also has many precepts for people as well as those promises and if we want to obtain the blessings from the promises we need to busy ourselves in fulfilling the precepts.

Obeying our duty has much to do with obtaining the blessings of those promises. Observing the feast of booths was more than a duty it was a celebration that God designed for the people's benefit.

This feast observed the time when the Israelites lived in the wilderness and had to dwell in tents when Moses was leading them from Egypt to Israel. The observance would remind them of God's great care for the people and the observance would also remind them of God's great power and how he demonstrated it on their behalf in bringing them from Egypt to Canaan in spite of very difficult circumstances.

[27:40] It was an observance that would cause the people to give much praise to God for his past work for Israel. It would cause the people to give God much thanks for their own blessings.

After all they didn't have to live in such flimsy and uncomfortable dwellings anymore. They got to live in them to celebrate not as full-time residences. Symbolically for us the feast of tabernacles reminds us of our pilgrim status in this world.

We know this world is only our temporary dwelling place and compared to the dwelling place that Christ is building for us in glory the best of dwelling places in this life are nothing but flimsy

temporary booths.

This section should also be a good reminder for us about the providence of scriptures. Those who are faithful in their reading of the word of God will often testify that just when they needed that promise or precept their reading for that day uncovered just what they needed and we talked about how the Israelites happened to be reading this section of the law just before they were supposed to observe this feast.

That's because they were diligently pursuing the word and by doing that they discovered a duty that was to be performed right at that time. That providence is a great blessing but it will only come to those who are faithful in earnestly pursuing the scriptures.

[29:03] The festival of booths documented here was a widespread celebration and that led to even more benefits. Look at verse 17. It begins with the phrase so the whole assembly of those who had returned from captivity made booths and sat under the booths.

Notice that the text says the whole assembly obeyed the order about making booths and dwelling in them. Such a widespread accommodating response to the word of God is unusual but earlier we noted that the desire for the word was also just as widespread because in verse 1 it said all the people requested Ezra to read the word to them.

When we have such a universal response and obedience to the word of God we can only see the church blessed and maybe even the nation blessed as well. Our text said that the Jews made booths and that they also sat under the booths.

We shouldn't let such a small comment go unnoticed because it really is a big comment on the completeness of their obedience. They did their whole duty. It wasn't just partial obedience. Some people like to make the booths but sitting in them is too inconvenient or uncomfortable or time consuming or maybe even too humbling. Our obedience is incomplete unless we sit in the booths after we have made them.

[30:26] So consider some of the modern day equivalents to booths. We make church buildings but some people rarely show up to sit in them when the services are going on. Some people buy nice new Bibles but they don't really read them.

They only carry them on special occasions. Some people volunteer for service but they never fulfill their pledge to show up and serve. So in other words they make booths of different types but neglect to sit under those booths.

We can learn from the Israelites that we need to sit in the booths that we make. As we start a new chapter for the church with our next pastor let's be sure to sit under the booths that we built.

The most encouraging thing that we can do for our next pastor is to show up and participate and that quote actually comes directly from him. It was one of the sermons that we listened to from Pastor Appreciation Month in October.

He was thanking his church for everything that they had done for him but he said the most you can do for him to make him feel appreciated is to actually come and show up that that really lifts everybody's spirits.

[31:32] And we need to keep that in mind as we go along. The same thing can be said for Dan and everybody else who gets involved in putting the services together. So we've talked about what this section of scripture includes.

You may have noticed something important is never mentioned in it. The narrative jumped from the second day of the seventh month to the celebration of the Feast of Booths on the 15th day.

According to what we studied last week and then reviewed earlier tonight the day of atonement would have happened on the tenth day. Because the people had been living out of renewed commitment to God's word we can be confident that the day of atonement really did occur for some reason it's just not documented here in the chapter.

Let's remind ourselves what happened on the day of atonement. The activities on that day were symbolic of something much more important that would happen in the future.

On the day of atonement a declaration would be made following the ritual of blood sacrifice that all the sins of God's people were fully and irrevocably forgiven.

[32:40] On that day two goats were chosen one was sacrificed and the other the scapegoat on whose head the sins of the people were symbolically laid was driven into the wilderness and that goat was then left behind and this ritual pointed forward to Christ who died for our sins and set us free.

With this in mind it's understandable why the leaders encouraged worshippers to be joyful. We considered these next statements earlier in the lesson but they're worth repeating again. Knowing that we are loved and cherished brings joy. God has loved his people from before the foundation of the world. He loved us more than we can ever express. His love's measure is Calvary and no greater love is imaginable.

It's hard not to be joyful when you think about that isn't it? And that's the real point of studying this scripture and knowing this scripture. Earlier in tonight's verses we saw the spiritual leaders bring the people to sorrow over their sins.

Bringing people to sorrow over their sins is essential because genuine sorrow leads to repentance. Tonight's verses also show though that we have another important concept in scripture and that is that spiritual leaders should never leave people in genuine sorrow.

[34 : 04] Jerusalem's leaders also pointed out God's mercy to the people. So leaders and teachers must also show God's justice and need for repentance but they also have to emphasize God's love and mercy.

When we understand God's love and mercy that's what brings us the joy. This chapter about revival had a profound impact on the people of Israel.

Let's take a minute to summarize what that was. The impact of the word upon the people of Israel is not hard to trace. From this chapter we see that the word provides a basis for true unity.

The people are united in their desire to learn more of the word of the Lord. All classes are included here. Their unity of purpose not only brings them together it places them in a position where God can bless them.

They join together in showing their respect for their law and their obedience brings with it a sense of community. Is that any different for us? When we get together to study the word it brings together all classes and all different types of people and when we do that it brings together a sense of community.

[35 : 16] So we're really not different than the people of Israel at this time. Think about the people of Israel too in this regard. Previously they had not been prepared for self-government because they were so disunited.

The spirit of renewal begins to heal these divisions and as the people learn more of God's law their national identity is strengthened and they became joyful. We know of course that they did sin again we're going to see as we get further into Nehemiah that 12 years later Nehemiah returned to find many sins and a need for renewal.

That's true today too the people of God always need renewal but still it was different for the people of Israel in that day because after the revival here in Nehemiah chapter 8 these days left a mark on Israel that lasted beyond even the time of Jesus.

The word should have a similar effect on us today. We should be a joyful people too. Indeed we're frequently told to rejoice and if we don't rejoice it's because we do not love the word of God as these people did or because we do not obey it.

Peace, joy, and strength are the basis for a fruitful Christian life and what constitutes a successful life for the Christian. It's not the acquisition of things or the accumulation of a certain economic net worth.

[36 : 41] Christians may have none of these and still know a profound sense of happiness and well-being. That's because we know the forgiveness of the Lord the certainty of his promises and the sustaining presence of the Holy Spirit.

When we know those things we find that outward things have no real significance. What matters is peace of conscience and fellowship with Jesus Christ who calls us his friends.

The relentless pursuit of pleasure apart from the gospel is a dead-end cul-de-sac of despair. Have you ever thought about it phrased that way? That if you pursue the gospel or if you pursue the accumulation of treasure apart from the gospel I mean you're actually going down a cul-de-sac of despair.

So living for the things of this world stuff that all will decay is ultimately senseless and short-sighted. Several people have found the soul-satisfying life of communion that Jesus Christ can only bring. Joy from fellowship with God was God's plan from the very beginning. Nowhere is this spelled out more clearly than in the account of the creation of Adam and Eve.

[37 : 49] They enjoyed face-to-face fellowship with God and the delights of a pleasure garden as he walked with them in the cool of the day. The psalmist evidently thought the same thing as he

talked about God as his exceeding joy in Psalm 43.4.

This joy of fellowship with God and contentment with our circumstances has been destroyed by the entrance of sin into the world. Joy, however, is what redemption ultimately restores, although the experience here and now of that joy is often intermittent.

One of the most thrilling and unexpected actions of our Lord is that on the verge of his betrayal and crucifixion, his concern was for our joy. Yes, our joy is seen as the goal of his redemptive work on our behalf.

In Jesus' high priestly prayer to the Father, he said this, and this is from John 17.13, he said, but now I am coming to you and these things I speak in the world that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

There you get a sense of the love of God for us that even as he was about to go to his crucifixion, he was still concerned about our joy. So we experience true joy when we hear the word, understand the word, and obey the word.

[39:09] Then, like Jerusalem's leaders whom we saw tonight, we'll be able to say, do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.