

Understanding the Joy of the Lord (Video)

by Carter Conlon

This sermon focuses on the incredible understanding of the joy of the Lord, emphasizing God's joy in restoring, empowering, and celebrating His children. Using the parable of the prodigal son, it illustrates how God's joy becomes our strength, covering our failures, empowering us to represent Him, and bringing us into a place of celebration and restoration.

Scripture: Luke 15:11, Hebrews 12:2, Nehemiah 8:10, Zephaniah 3:17, Psalm 30:11

Topics: "Joy of the Lord", "Restoration and Empowerment"

Description

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Transcript

I can almost promise you before this night is out, you're gonna get up and dance in your living room or your kitchen or if you're sitting in your car, you'll have to get outside of your car if you're gonna dance or whatever it is you're gonna do. I think God's gonna bring you into an incredible understanding tonight of what the joy of the Lord is, what the joy of the Lord is. A lot of people don't understand the joy of the Lord, but I hope tonight I can make it very, very clear to you from the word of God.

Now remember, we're going to have communion at the end of this service, so if you have a chance at home to get some bread and some juice and to prepare to celebrate the victory of Christ that we've been singing about all night with us at the end of the service. Pastor Tim Delina, the senior pastor of Times Square Church preached a message on Sunday morning that you really need to hear. Everybody needs to hear it.

It's called Land Lessons, and if you haven't heard it yet, I really, I've heard it twice and I'm gonna listen to it again in the morning because it just stirs my heart to the core. Wonderful, wonderful message from the presence of God and from the word of God. I was speaking in Virginia a couple of weeks ago for the Family Research Council for their Pray, Vote, Stand conference, and I had the privilege of meeting a young lady called Monica who was online.

She might be online with us tonight. She works for the Family Research Council and she's been in a wheelchair for, had been in a wheelchair for two years because of Lyme's disease. She was paralyzed.

She heard Sarah Kibudo's testimony from this meeting and she said, well, God, if you can do that for Sarah, you can do that for me, and she got up out of the wheelchair. She's walking, she's healthy. God touched her.

Hallelujah. We serve a God of miracles, and so I gave Monica's cell number to Sarah. They're roughly the same age, same personality type even, both bubbly and alive, and they're gonna get in touch with each other, and I'm sure that this is the beginning of a longstanding friendship, and I hope maybe one day I can get Monica here to testify that she just was on this prayer meeting and she said, God, you can do that for me too, and by faith got out of a wheelchair and she's been completely healed, so we just thank God, just thank God for that with all of our heart.

I'm gonna be sharing from the book of Nehemiah, chapter eight tonight, then I'm gonna go into the New Testament after that to Luke chapter 15. If anybody out there wants to follow along in your Bible or related device, you're more than welcome to do so. So Father tonight, God, in Jesus' name, I thank you, Lord.

God, I thank you that you still choose the foolish to confound the wise. You said in the New Testament it's through the foolishness of preaching the gospel that people are saved. So Father, thank you, God, for using this foolish vessel one more time, anointing me with your Holy Spirit, taking my thought process far beyond what I naturally have and speaking through me, God, to the hearts of the people that are gathered in this auditorium and those that are with us online and those who will be watching in the future in their own time zones.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you, God. Lord, as the world is on a downward spiral, your church is rising.

God, thank you for what you're doing, Lord. My heart is glad. I don't understand it all, but God, I feel it in my spirit.

Your church is rising. Just as Sarah rose from a wheelchair and Monica rose out of a wheelchair, your church is getting up. Your church is going to have a testimony of the miraculous, and God, we're going to understand some basic truths that maybe we just lost along the way.

In our desire to please you, we forgot that this whole kingdom is about grace and mercy. So, Father, help me to convey this truth tonight and help us all, anew and afresh, to understand what the joy of the Lord really is. In Jesus' name, amen.

So, Nehemiah chapter eight. Now, the background, the children of Israel have been taken into captivity because they dealt carelessly, really, with the presence of God. They dealt carelessly with their purpose on the earth, and they started to take a lot of things for granted, and maybe in great measure, as we're all prone to do, they got bored with the things of God.

They drifted away from God, and the end result was a foreign nation came in, took all of the people captive for 70 years into a nation at that time initially called Babylon and eventually belonged to the Medo-Persians. Then, in three separate stages, the miraculous opened and the people were given a way to go back home and to begin to rebuild their testimony. And one of these, the last, actually, group of people was under the leadership of a man called Nehemiah.

And Nehemiah was really just a butler in the Medo-Persian king's court. And from his own brothers, he heard a report of what was going on in Jerusalem, how that the people had gone back, they were trying to rebuild, but they were discouraged, and there was a bit of reproach concerning them. In other words, there was a lot of mockery about the people of God.

And when he heard the report, it broke his heart. And he began to pray. He was a man given to prayer, and he began to pray, and God began to lead him, gave him incredible favor to go back to Jerusalem and to rebuild the wall around the perimeters, as it was, around the city of God that had been broken down because of the previous neglect.

And then the wall, in 52 days, was accomplished. It was really a miracle. He just encouraged everybody to start building in the vicinity of your own house.

Men and their wives, men and their sons, men and women and their daughters, they all began to build together. And everybody in the vicinity of their home began to build, and in just 52 days, which even the enemies of the people of God had to acknowledge this was a miracle, that God was with these people. You see, when we start to obey God, things begin to be done that we normally couldn't do in times that we couldn't do the man and with skills that none of us naturally have.

And so when it was all done, under Ezra the priest and Nehemiah and others, they gathered all the people together to, again, open the words of God's book and to read them to the people. They hadn't really been serious about the word of God. It was because of their lack of seriousness of God's word that they got into captivity and trouble in the first place.

They didn't really take God at his word. There were warnings. You go to the book of Deuteronomy, for example, chapter 28, the warnings are very, very clearly there of what would happen to them if they neglected this great relationship that God was bringing them into.

Of course, they neglected it, and everything that was warned happened to them. So now they're coming back and they're trying to rebuild. Now, you have to picture the scene now.

They're rebuilding a testimony out of the rubble. And when the priests opened the word of God, the scripture says in Nehemiah chapter eight, let's start at verse six. Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God.

All the people answered amen and amen while lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. And then it lists a whole bunch of people who were helping the people to understand the law and the people stood in their place.

In verse eight says, so they read distinctly from the book in the law of God, and they gave the sense and helped them to understand the reading. So now they're opening the words of God. Remember, I talked to you about Deuteronomy.

Who knows what it was that they began to read. And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and 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 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. Now obviously everything that was declared is not written down here. But when the words of God were opened, all they could see was failure.

Have you ever been that way? Have you ever been in a season in your life where you open the Bible and the Bible talks about issues of the heart and character and you look and it's almost like this, meh, meh, this red light keeps going off every verse that you read. You know, fail, fail, fail, fail, fail, fail. And that's the way these people would have felt.

The word of God that they had at that time is being read and all they see is failure. Oh God, you warned us, we didn't listen. You told us we didn't take it seriously.

You told us what would happen to our children. We didn't listen and we ended up in captivity and we brought your name into reproach. That would be another thing that would grieve their hearts.

Oh Lord, we were, as they would be reading the words of God, they would recognize again the calling on their lives. Abraham was their father and through them, there was supposed to be a blessing that would come and touch the whole known world. And they felt like such abject failures.

I don't know if you've ever felt like that. I've been there once or twice in my lifetime where you just feel like God, I just, every, I'm reading it and it's not producing any joy. I'm reading your word and it's just simply producing a sorrow because all I see is failure upon failure upon failure upon failure.

Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church. I remember when I was a young Christian, I remember blurting out loud, oh, that's easy for you to say. Paul, you weren't even married and you're writing all these words and telling us how to live.

God told me, he says, I'll show you how to do this. You don't have to worry about that. You let me do in your life what only I can do for you.

And I'm talking about the early, early years when you're reading the word and you're just, God, I'm such a failure. I see what I should be, but I see also what I'm not. Remember, Paul says it in the book of Romans, the things I know in my heart, what's right to do, and I delight in my mind.

But God, I don't know how to perform this. I don't know how to do what I'm supposed to do. For the things I know I should do, I'm not doing.

And the things I don't want to do, I find myself doing. And he says, who will deliver me from the body of this death? But now, the people wept when they heard the words. There's just ruin everywhere.

I don't know if you've ever felt like that. I'm speaking to people online tonight. Your whole life is a mess and you know it.

I mean, I don't even have to prove it to you, and you know that. You feel like you've blown your life. And you were, maybe some of you actually were raised in the church, or you had some exposure to the things of God, and some even thought you had a great relationship, a saving relationship with God, but something happened along the way.

You lost it. Maybe you didn't deal carefully with your relationship, or maybe you never fully understood some things about the kingdom of God. And it caused you to drift away, and now your life is a mess, and

you look around like these people, and there's just ruin everywhere.

And every time you open the Bible, it's just like it reminds you of what you didn't do. Maybe you lost your family. Maybe your marriage broke apart.

Maybe you're sick in your body because of addictions that got ahold of you, or you're troubled in your mind, and you don't know how you're ever gonna go forward. You feel like such a total failure. But then something strange is said in the midst of it all.

He said, don't be sorrowful. The joy of the Lord is your strength. You know, and the people would have thought initially, as many do, am I supposed to just walk around pretending I'm happy when I'm not? Do I put a plastic smile on my face and walk around just saying the joy of the Lord is my strength, but I don't feel any of it inside? Some people feel that way, I'm sure.

But the people understood, not only did they say the joy of the Lord is your strength, they said go and eat the fat, drink the sweet, and you're gonna have so much that you can give portions to those that don't have anything, for this day is holy. And so the Levites quieted the people, say, do not be grieved, and everyone went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to rejoice greatly. So the point is, what did they hear? The scripture says they understood the words that were declared to them, so what were those words that were declared to them, and what is this joy of the Lord that is supposed to be my strength? It's gotta be more than just me being happy looking at the mess that's all around me, and it had to be more than just saying go home and be happy, because that certainly wouldn't do it in those circumstances.

Now, in order to understand this principle of the joy of the Lord being our strength, we go to Luke chapter 15, and it's the story, in chapter 15 and verse 11, Jesus talked about a certain man that had two sons, and his younger son said to his father, give me the portion of goods that falls unto me, and so he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered everything together and journeyed to a far country, and wasted his possessions with prodigal living. Really, it means self-consumption, just he wasted it on himself, so he's given, he has this relationship with his father, as the children of Israel did with God in the Old Testament, but he doesn't appreciate it.

For whatever reason, maybe it's just never sunk down deep. He just doesn't get who his father is yet, maybe. He doesn't fully understand what it means to be related to his father, I don't know why, but something got into his heart, and he said, I'm done with this place, it's too narrow for me, I just don't like all the rules that are in this place, and for whatever reason, he just said, there's gotta be more to life than this.

It's the kind of a person that says, I find the church too narrow, I find the call of God too small, there's gotta be something other than this out there, and so he just says, give me what is mine. You know, it's interesting, the father doesn't even resist, he doesn't even seemingly try to talk him out of it. Give me, in a sense, it's a kind of a person that says, God, give me the salvation you gave me, give me the life you gave me, give me the promise and provision you gave me, give me the future, maybe, that you promised was gonna be mine, but I'm gonna go and find it myself.

I find this place too narrow. So he went out from his father's house, took what his father had given him, he actually got his inheritance, but he took it, and he went far, far away from the heart of his father, and kind of wasted it all on himself. It's the type of a Christian person who never finds their purpose in life.

They fail to understand that we are called to be ambassadors of an incredible kingdom, but rather than, in a sense, live for the benefit of others, he chooses to live for himself. He says, I wanna find joy more than I've known in the relationship I've had with my father. Now, he went and he spent everything on himself, but when he had spent everything, there arose a severe famine in the land, and he began to be in want.

And I'm telling you, there's a famine in America today, there's a famine in Canada, there's a famine all over the world. God is producing the famine. I'm telling you straight out right now.

God is setting the condition to bring his people home. The father was not willing to have his son captivated in this place forever, and so you have to believe that the father's got some influence and ability, in a sense, to at least be a voice at that time. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country and he sent him in his fields to feed swine.

There would be nothing worse for a Jewish boy than feeding pigs, it's as low as you can go. Pigs are the most unclean thing, it's a pig that, in a sense, the day that Antiochus went in and offered a pig upon the altar, that's the absolute abomination, in a sense, in the presence of God. And it's the type of a Christian person who ends up doing things he never believed they were ever capable of doing.

Walking away, in a sense, from the call of God, walking away from the house of the father and ending up in the place, I never thought I would go here. I never thought I would ever do something like this. I thought I was beyond this.

I had enough culture, I had enough training, I knew enough about my father's house. How in the world did I ever end up in a field feeding that which is as unclean, according to my religion and according to my culture? It's like a Christian person ends up hooked on pornography, feeding the unclean thing. If nobody watched pornography, by the way, there would be no pornography, because you have to have an audience, or there would be no point in producing this stuff.

And so here's a Christian boy, he's out in a place he shouldn't be, and he was so hungry, and he couldn't find anything that would satisfy, but the society around him was so selfish, nobody would give him anything to eat. And I thank God when the world rejects you as a Christian. I thank God.

There's no worse place to be than know whose son you are, whose daughter you are, and you're in the world, and the world starts to reject you, and you don't know if you can even go back home to your father, but the world is rejecting you. And this is what happened to this boy. Nobody would give him anything.

The scripture said he came to himself, and he said, how many of my father's hired servants have bread enough to spare, and I'm perishing with hunger? I'm gonna rise and go to my father, and he would be thinking now, what's the formula now? How do I come back to my father? Like, what is it that I was told? What was I taught? Oh yeah, I remember now. I gotta go and say to him, Father, I've sinned against heaven and before you, and I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.

This was the prayer, and I could just see him as he's going down the road, he's just repeating this prayer, I'm no longer worthy. It's plan B now for my life, or plan Z, actually, for my life. Plan A is forfeited.

I one time was in your house, and I one time walked with you, and I one time understood you, but I blew it all, and I went out and I made a mess, and I dishonored your name, and my life will never be the same again, so I'm on to plan B or plan C for my life. I'm not worthy now to be called your son. Make me like one

of your hired servants.

In other words, I'll come back to your house, and I'll just, I'll grab a broom. There's nothing wrong with grabbing a broom, by the way. I'll grab a broom, and I'll just go out, and I'll clean corridors, and I'll grab a rake, and I'll rake gardens, and I'll paint posts, and all those things are good, but you see, the boy had a much higher calling on his life, but he thought for sure I have forfeited.

I'm on to plan B if my father will even accept me, and he rose and came to his father, and you can just see him. He's so far down the road, and he's trying to remember what I'm supposed to say, and he feels so unworthy, and he smells like a pigsty because he's been with pigs in the field. Do you understand? He smells unclean, and he's coming down the road, and he's repeating his mantra, Father, I'm not worthy.

How many people come to church like that trying to get right with God? They sit there, Father, I'm not worthy. Oh, God, make me like one of your hired servants, and I'll never be worthy again, and I'm so sorry for what I've done, and I'll just snivel and snot the rest of my Christian life, and I'll come to the altar, and I'll cry, and I'll repent, and that'll be my whole testimony of what great a mess I made in my life, and you allowed me to come home. The Scripture says, but when he was still a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

I can just imagine this boy's coming down the road, and he stinks, and he's made a mess, and he's broke, and he's done things that have brought his own father's name into disgrace, like he's not lived right, and he's coming down the road, and he's reciting his mantra, and suddenly he looks, and there's this old man come running down the road. His robes are flowing, his white hair is blowing in the wind, and he's running down the road to his son. Praise be to God.

I can imagine the servants in the house, they said, where's he going, where's he going? He saw the son far, you see, because he'd been waiting for him to come home. That's who God is. That's what God thinks like.

That's what the purpose and mission of God has been in this world all along. He didn't come to save the righteous, he came to save sinners. He didn't come because we had it all together.

He didn't come because we were righteous, or noble, or wise, or strong. He came to us because we're weak, and we're foolish, and we make mistakes, every last one of us. He came to us because only he could bridge the great divide that was between us and the kingdom of God.

And I don't know what was in the heart of the son, but have you ever been in a church service, and you feel like God's calling you, but you're not quite sure what his response to you is going to be? And how surprised he must have been when his father ran, was his father gonna slap his face? Was he gonna stop 14 feet short and say, don't you dare think about coming home after the mess you made in the family name. He wasn't sure what the father was going to do. And how surprised he must have been when the father embraced him, and kissed him.

You know, under the religious rules of that time, when you embrace somebody, you took their smell upon yourself. When the father embraced his son, he took the smell of the pigs upon himself. When Jesus Christ went to the cross, and spread his arms open wide, and those nails were driven through, he took your smell, he took my smell, he took our stain, he took our shame.

He took all the foolish, stupid things that you and I have done, even as believers in Jesus Christ. He took it all upon himself, all upon himself. How strange that must have seemed to that son when his father embraced him.

His father puts his arm around his son, and starts walking back home with his son in his arm. And the boy starts repeating his mantra, father, I've sinned, I'm not worthy any longer. Make me as one of your hard servants.

The father's not even talking to him. The father doesn't even acknowledge him. The first thing out of the father's mouth, he says to his servants, bring the best robe in the house, and put it on my son.

The robe that is reserved for royalty, the robe that is reserved for, it's as if the president came to your house. The robe that is reserved for the finest of the finest of the finest of guests come to your house, put that robe on my son. And that robe, when it was put on his son, it covered the smell of his shame.

It covered the places he had been. He was now being received as royalty, not as a slave, not as plan B, but as royalty coming into his father's house. How stunned the servants must have been.

I can admit, this is what the Bible says in the book of Hebrews, that this salvation of God is something the angels desire to look into. That his heart is so towards us. He so loves us.

He is so taken with us. The angels don't understand it, that God, almighty God, God who lives in perfection has set his heart and desire on you and me. Praise be to God.

We are his trophies forever. And the best robe, the best robe in the house of God is the blood of Jesus Christ. The covering of Christ takes away the smell of where we've been and the stain and the reproach of what we've done.

Even those who may have known him in some degree but walked away from him. The next thing he says is if that's not good enough, he says bring the ring and put it on his finger. The ring is the signet of the father's authority.

In other words, you're not coming in as plan B and you're not coming in my house as a gardener. You're coming in as a son. You're coming in with the full authority of my house.

The signet ring on the son's finger meant when he sealed a document with that ring, he carried the authority of his father. Behold, I give you power to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall by any means hurt you. The ring of authority, not a slave, not second class, not plan B, not plan C, not plan D, plan A for his son.

You are my son, hallelujah. Hallelujah. And then, and then he says bring shoes and put them on my son's feet.

In other words, son, you're gonna take a journey. See, you're gonna represent me now. I'm gonna send you places, son, and you're gonna talk about me, hallelujah.

I get shivers when I preach this message because my son, you're gonna tell, what do you think the boy's message was from that point onward? The seven steps to this, the 14 steps to that, obey this, do that, listen to the rules. No, he says, you gotta meet my dad. You've got to know my father.

My life was a mess. I was living in a pigsty and I came down the road and he embraced me and covered me and empowered me and invited me to represent his house and go on a journey and tell others about him. Now, he brings him in the house.

This is where it gets really interesting. The scripture says, he brought him in, killed the fatted calf, arranged a celebration, called for the musicians because in verse 25, it said, when the older son came, he drew near to the house and there was music and dancing. So he brings his son, and I've been at a Jewish wedding in Jerusalem and I've seen this kind of a celebration.

He brings his son into the house, strikes up the band, now the son, you can just picture the son, his life has been a mess. He's standing in the corner of the room and he's got the robe, he's got the ring, he's got the shoes, he's now the center of attention of this entire gathering. The feast is in his honor.

The musicians are gathered and they begin to play and the Bible does say there's dancing. And so suddenly, he looks and his father, I've been at a Jewish wedding and I've watched the older Jewish men dance. It's amazing how they dance in a circle and they raise their hands and he looks at his father dancing and suddenly it hits him.

It is my father's joy to bring me home. It is my father's joy to cover my failure. It is my father's joy to empower me over my enemies.

It is my father's joy to call me to represent him in his kingdom. And he looks and it's not his joy, it's his father's joy that becomes his strength. The joy of the Lord is your strength.

That's what Nehemiah and Ezra and the others were telling the people of God. It is God's joy to bring you home. It is God's joy to restore you.

It is God's joy to give you the power to rebuild what was lost. It is the joy of the Lord to do this for you. That is the source of your strength.

Hallelujah, it becomes my joy, yes, but it's his joy first, not mine. It's his joy to restore me, hallelujah. Glory to God.

That's why Nehemiah and the others in Ezra, they said to the people, they said go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared. In other words, feast on this incredible joy of the Lord and let it spill over through your life to people that don't have any of it or they don't know the reason why they should have the strength that God's joy brings. Have you ever seen, doesn't he say in the Bible, I will rejoice over you with singing? Doesn't he say the angels in heaven rejoice over even one sinner that gets saved? You see, this party that we're reading about in Luke 15 goes on all the time in heaven because the created beings there know the heart of God.

Praise be to God. And send some to people for whom nothing is prepared and do not sorrow for the joy of the Lord, the joy of the Lord is your strength. Hallelujah.

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