

## 272 To weep, to mourn, to laugh, to dance

In last week's Reflection we were cheered by the Lord being "the Lord of hosts", whose mighty spiritual army carries out the Lord's wishes and thwarts His enemies' efforts. Elisha understood these spiritual realities, and so too, in Christ, do we.

This spiritual understanding springs from the people of God knowing the Word of God, which brings to mind that great occasion in Nehemiah Chapter 8, after the walls of Jerusalem, in the face of much spiritual and physical opposition, had been rebuilt by those who had returned from exile (Nehemiah 6.15-16).

We read – "And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate, and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel" (Nehemiah 8.1, KJV). After all they had gone through, and now filled with gratitude to the Lord over the walls being rebuilt, the people were united in their desire to know more of the Lord and His Word. What a contrast here with the far more frequent behaviour of Israel and Judah in going their own lofty way and then suffering all the consequences of their folly!

"Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation", the date being carefully noted (8.2). Standing on "a pulpit of wood" and backed by leaders on either side of him (vv 3-4), Ezra "opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up" (v 5). He then "read therein .... from morning until midday (v 3), the people listening attentively. What a scene.

"And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground" (v 6). What a further scene! Priests and Levites then "caused the people to understand the law (v 7). "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading" (v 8).

The people wept in response to all that they heard (v 9b, and eg., Hebrews 4.12-13 / Isaiah 55.8-13 / Psalm 119.105), but their weeping was not to last, for Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites told them – "This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not nor weep .... Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength .... Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved" (vv 9-11). (We note the three-fold mention of the holiness of the day). So the people duly went their way as instructed, and soon they were indeed "making great mirth"! (v 12).

What are we to make today of this solemn occasion of long ago? During the rebuilding of the city walls, we see the people's awareness both of the Lord and of the opposition; their prayerfulness, planning and unity; and their practical sense, determination and courage. When the task was completed, they "perceived that this

work was wrought of our God" (6.16b), and so in response they wanted to grow in the knowledge of the Lord and to serve Him more truly and faithfully. First they wept, and then they rejoiced.

There is so much here for us in our own walk with the Lord. None of us has yet "come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4.13). So, with Paul and all other members of the communion of saints who have gone before us, we "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3.14).

As we do this, we will all find along the way there is "a time to weep ... a time to mourn" (Ecclesiastes 3.4), brought on at times by our growing awareness of what we are in our natural, sinful state before the Lord. But praise God, such times always give way to "a time to laugh .... and a time to dance", just as they found after that significant day in Jerusalem.

Now of course, Jesus has been crucified, Jesus is risen, Jesus is Lord. The weeping and mourning of Golgotha gave way to the laughing and dancing of the resurrection - and they still do.

**© 2018 Faithful Sheep Ministries - [www.fsmins.org](http://www.fsmins.org)**