

CITY OF JOY

NEHEMIAH 12:43 | And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.

PSALM 126:1 | When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

The mission of Nehemiah was to remove the reproach that lay upon the house Israel because of disobedience. The tide turned when the Remnant returned to the Word, confessed and repented of their sins, and renewed their covenant relationship with God. And now the story that began in a minor key crescendos on a note of joy. *And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away.*

Joy is not a feeling but a fruit. We associate joy with feelings of happiness, cheerfulness, gladness, and delight. Joy includes all that. But true spiritual joy is an effect of something much deeper: obedience. *Go and do God's will and you will know...the remedy to the gloomy doubts and the terrible depression of this age* (GREVILLE MACDONALD).

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. *God made them rejoice with great joy.* Heavenly joy is given to all who walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh. *The disciples in Antioch were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit* (ACTS 13:52 NASB). Nothing in this world can match or mimic this divine joy. It comes straight from the heart of Jesus (JOHN 17:13). No amount of human charm or charisma can whip it up. *You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore* (PS 16:11). Do you know this joy?

Joy is a sacred duty. We are commanded to *rejoice in the Lord* in spite of and even in defiance of the worst circumstances. *Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the*

flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation (HAB 3:17-18). Remember your Christian duty of joy. *You say: 'It is not in my power to rejoice now.' Well, I deny it. You have the power, if only you will exert the will* (GREVILLE MACDONALD).

Joy follows sacrifice. *They offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy.* Jesus endured the Cross *for the joy that was set before him* (HEB 12:1). As your sacrifice, so is your joy. Great sacrifice? Great joy.

WALL OF DUTY

■ Make God your source of joy. *The joy of the LORD is your strength* (8:10). The Hebrew word for *strength* here is literally *protection, refuge, stronghold*. A Christian without joy, therefore, is like a city without walls. Ring-fence your heart with the true joy that follows obedience and sacrifice. Make this your personal manifesto:

I will love God by keeping his commandments (JOHN 14:15). I will love God by loving my neighbour (MATT 22:37-39). I will deny self, take up my cross, and follow Jesus (MATT 16:24). I will place my life before God as a daily offering (ROM 12:1). I will seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (MATT 6:33). I will live by every word that comes from the mouth of God (MATT 4:4). I will hear his Word and put it into practice like a wise man who builds his house on the rock (MATT 7:24). I will set my mind on things above, not on earthly things (COL 3:2). I will walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh (ROM 8:4). I reject the fake joy that abounds on the easy road to hell. I will stay on the narrow way that leads to life (MATT 7:14). I will find true joy in the heat of battle, in the arena with the lions, in the ruckus of cancel culture (MATT 5:11-12). I declare: The joy of the Lord is my shield, my strength, my song!

■ Make Singapore a city of joy. When troubles come our way, consider it pure joy (JAMES 1:2). When safety measures switch back and forth, count it all joy! *We should remember that despite the present setbacks, Singapore remains one of the safer places in our Covid-19*

world. There is much that is right and, therefore, room for cheer as we navigate out of the present storm... any interplanetary observer visiting earth would be puzzled that among the unhappiest people on our planet are Singaporeans. By any objective measure, we should be among the happiest (KISHORE MAHBUBANI). Search your soul. A thankful person is a happy person. A grateful Christian is a fountain of joy. Today and every day, may we, the people of God, make up for the deficit of joy in our city. Joy is a value of the kingdom. A sacred duty. Will you fulfil it? When *predictable Singapore* becomes unpredictable, count it all joy. In defiance of the worst, take joy in the God of your salvation (HAB 3:17-18). *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you* (1 THESS 5:16-18).

■ Make Singapore a city of *surplus* joy. A star city of exceeding great joy (MATT 2:10). When the Gospel reached Samaria, *there was much joy in that city* (ACTS 8:7-8). The disciples in Antioch were *continually filled with joy* (ACTS 13:52). Ask God to visit Singapore as he did Samaria and Antioch.

- Pray for a revival of personal evangelism, off the cuff and relational. Ordinary believers giving up frivolous pursuits and non-essentials in order to prioritise reaching the lost and proclaiming Good News, online and offline. Pray for a revival of power evangelism, down to earth but anointed. Ordinary believers moving in the gifts of the Spirit, reaching out to sociological groups the Church typically neglects or avoids.

- Declare: No person is outside God's radar. No group is beyond God's reach. God loves every person and knows each one by name. Every soul is precious and winnable. Each has the potential to rock our city with heavenly joy. *There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents* (LK 15:10). And the joy of Asia's Antioch will be heard far away!