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Thanksgiving And Tears

Rev. Samuel McP. Glasgow, D.D.*

"The joy of the Lord is your strength."
Neh. 8:10.

At the strangest times God's commandments come. A call to thanksgiving is sounded by God amid hearts that are vastly heavy and sorely hurt. When Israel was broken and their faces bathed in tears, God's commandment was, "joy." "Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet . . . this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the Lord is your strength."

Life, untaught by God's Word, can never rise to its highest level. God has many surprises for His children. We are glad that He says, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways."

God's people often need a new outlook. The bitter cup of exile, loneliness, persecution, broken homes and hearts fronted and troubled Israel. This must be overcome and God's people must rest their minds, relax and rejoice. God makes provisions for our relaxations. We need to unbend that the bow of life may keep its resiliency. "Drink the sweet, eat the fat, send portions, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

The feast here re-established by Nehemiah is most significant. It is the feast of the tabernacles which Israel had not celebrated since the days of Joshua. Simple and, yet, exceedingly significant, the people were sent to the woods and the hills for boughs and branches. They built arbors and booths on their house-tops, in the yards, and the streets, in the "church yards," they left their homes and all the comfort and security thereof and for a full week dwelt under the arbors and booths out of doors. Why? What does this feast of tabernacles signify? There is a deep-flowing current of comfort and challenge here.

Just like this fragile shelter, so this feast signifies that our life is temporary, transient. We have no permanent, solid abiding place. This life is fleeting. Just as its joys and delights seem to swiftly go through our fingers: so also its sorrows and heartaches can not long abide. They are transient and brief.

This feast further says we are really dependent upon God. Our strong, well appointed homes, our towering concrete skyscrapers, our enormous factories, and mammoth ships, all tend to deceive. So God brings His people out and lets them sit under the booths. Thus they find that in reality they know that man must live a day at a time. It is only as God wills that we shall live and do this or that. Our life is so frail—as the mist of the morning—our day is so short as a hand's breadth!

As we sit under this booth, the sun streaming through the boughs at noonday and the pitiless winds chilling us in the night watches; we learn another, a great positive lesson—God is quite sufficient. God alone is enough. In the wilderness our fathers had no homes, no wells, no farms, no factories, no organized business, but they did have enemies and hunger and thirst. Yes, and always remember, they had God. And He was sufficient for all who trusted and obeyed Him.

Therefore, we can rejoice. Under all circumstances, in sunshine or shadow, we rejoice in God. "Eat the fat," says Nehemiah, "drink the sweet." The joy that comes from God is the source of your sufficient strength. Sit under your booth. Think. God can care for His people. God did care for His people. God will care for His people. We,

by faith in Christ, are His people. "Lift up your heads, oh ye gates, even lift them up ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in." The joy of the Lord is yours, it is your strength. Gladness in God is your "stronghold," your refuge. Are our hearts burdened and hurt? Is there anxiety, loneliness? Are we separated far from many who are dear to us? Are they in danger? Just trust and be glad in God. All life has a blessed meaning. Rest, wait, trust. Your protection is not in stone walls. It is not in brick or mortar. It is not in fire and sword. It is not in our homes and our accustomed places. Look at the boughs above you. Look at this booth. It is a fit picture of all human effort to protect our interest and to satisfy our souls. Our best is insufficient. If we are protected and kept, provided for and given peace, God must do it. God can do it apart from our accustomed comforts. Yes, mark you, God will do it. Brave heart, come another step with me. God is doing it. With God, it is always "through the water," "through the rivers," "through the fire," "through the valley of the shadow of death." Israel, remember: how did your fathers ever get to this land of promise and hope? How did they ever come through the wilderness? Was it by their might, their splendid organization, their invincible army, their own wisdom and military power? Did they? They did not! What did they have? Nothing but God, and He was sufficient. Though our earthly preparations and plans, protections and provisions are well symbolized by the booth and the boughs covering us in the open, yet we have as all our fathers had, the Presence and the Power and the Peace of God.

You have the same God Who led and protected and kept Israel. He is sufficient, yes, and this is His call: "Eat the fat, drink the sweet, neither be ye sorry, for the joy of the Lord is your strength."

*Pastor of the Independent Presbyterian Church, Savannah, Ga.

That We May Advance To Christ!

By Rev. W. Hoyt Wakefield*

The Dillingham church is strictly rural, located 25 miles north of Asheville, N. C., at the foot of Craggy Gardens, via Barnardsville. The church is centrally located in a community of 96 homes. Only one other church, a Baptist, ministers to the spiritual development of the community. Their membership is very small and their pastoral care is limited to two brief periods each month. A Christian cooperative fellowship between the two congregations is definitely so. Realizing that the community needs a Christian program to direct an advance to Christ and to stimulate a Presbyterian consciousness the following program was submitted to the members of our church as objectives in our four year Advance to Christ. For seven weeks it has been executed and most pleasing results accompany it.

First, a diagram was prepared showing the location and name of each home. This showed 96 homes, some of which contained two or more families. The next step was to divide these homes into groups of 8 forming twelve groups. The reason for assigning 8 homes to each group was a period of prayer was to begin and continue for a period of 8 weeks, meeting on Wednesday nights, meeting in some home of each of the 12 groups upon invitation. We have not forced these prayer meetings