

Title: **THE JOY OF GOD’S SALVATION**

Text: Zechariah 8:19

Subject: *The Joy of Faith*

Date: Sunday Morning — November 12, 2006

Reading: *Zechariah 8:1-23*

Tape # Zechariah #43

Introduction:

Have you seen reports about that silly, “laughing church” down in Florida? Most people, with half good sense, look at such a display of ignorance and hedonism and think, “Those poor fools.” But, in reality, the “laughing church” is simply practicing what the whole world (secular and religious) promotes — self-indulgence. Everyone in this day seems to think that the only reason the world exists (and God too) is to make them happy. People go to church to feel good, to be happy, as my grandmother used to say, to “get happy.” At church they get high on Jesus and get happy.

There are multitudes in this day of charismatic nonsense who content themselves with ever fizzling religious euphoria. They go to church week after week, get whipped up into an emotional frenzy, and get high on Jesus, get happy. But their plastic joy quickly fizzles; and they soon need another religious fix.

Does that describe you, or do you have what the Holy Spirit describes as the abiding “*joy of faith*” (Phil. 1:25)? Has the grace of God wrought joy in your soul? Do you possess a deep, abiding, glorious joy in your heart, a peace passing understanding? Do you have true, abiding joy, a rejoicing in Christ, a joy that gives light to your darkness and lightens your load, the joy of God’s salvation, “*the joy of the Holy Ghost*” (1 Thess. 1:6)? I want to you about **THE JOY OF GOD’S SALVATION**. You will find my text in Zechariah 8:19.

(Zechariah 8:19) “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth *month*, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.”

Proposition: The Lord God here promises to turn the sad fasts of his people into perpetual gladness and feasting.

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One characteristic of Christ's reign of grace, of him establishing his kingdom in the hearts of men, is this: — **Wherever Christ rules in the hearts of men there is a perpetual feast of gladness** (Isa. 25:6-9).

(Isaiah 25:6-9) “And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. (7) And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. (8) He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken *it*. (9) And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this *is* our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this *is* the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

Grace brings us a perpetual feast of gladness, “*a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.*” When we are most heavy laden with difficulties, the consolations of Christ most abound. Indeed, as Robert Hawker said, “The very tear of grace is a tear of holy joy.” — “*The hope of the righteous shall be gladness*” (Pro. 10:28; Ps. 4:7; 30:11; 45:15; 105:43; Isa. 35:10; 51:11; 61:3; Jer. 33:11).

(Psalms 4:7) “Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time *that* their corn and their wine increased.”

(Psalms 30:11) “Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness;”

(Psalms 45:15) “With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace.”

(Psalms 105:43) “And he brought forth his people with joy, *and* his chosen with gladness:”

(Isaiah 35:10) “And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they

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shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”

(Isaiah 51:11) “Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy *shall be* upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; *and* sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”

(Isaiah 61:1-3) “The spirit of the Lord GOD *is* upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to *them that are* bound; (2) To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; (3) To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.”

(Jeremiah 33:10-11) “Thus saith the LORD; Again there shall be heard in this place, which ye say *shall be* desolate without man and without beast, *even* in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man, and without inhabitant, and without beast, (11) The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD *is* good; for his mercy *endureth* for ever: *and* of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the LORD.”

God promises gladness to his people, but this feast of fat things is always preceded by sorrowful fasts. The gladness of faith is always preceded by the mourning of guilt. — It is only from fasting that we come to feasting. — It is only from the sorrow of guilt before God that we are come to experience the joy of God's salvation, the blessed joy of faith in Christ.

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SHAMEFUL FASTS

This Word of God was spoken by Zechariah, who was sent to the Jews who had returned from Babylon to Jerusalem after 70 years of captivity in that strange land. Psalm 137 speaks of that 70 years as a time of great sorrow.

(Psalms 137:1-6) “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. (2) We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. (3) For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us *required of us* mirth, *saying*, Sing us *one* of the songs of Zion. (4) How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land? (5) If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget *her cunning*. (6) If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.”

Judah had been destroyed by Babylon and carried captive, **because of their obstinate disobedience and sin**, because “*they made their hearts as an adamant stone*” (7:12), despising and rejecting the Word of God. The city of Jerusalem had been sacked, the temple had been destroyed, and all the glory of Judah was gone. But **now, just as he had promised, after seventy years of captivity, God has brought back a remnant** to rebuild the holy city, to rebuild his house, and to re-establish the nation.

During their captivity in Babylon, the Jews had set up four annual days of fasting, by which they claimed to worship Jehovah; but **they were shameful, sad fasts**, fasts by which they remembered their most shameful experiences as a nation. These self-imposed fasts, of course, were not ordained by God. They were nothing but the inventions of men in captivity. You can read about them in 2nd Kings 25

- On the 17th day of the 5th month they kept a day of fasting and humiliation **in remembrance of the day the Chaldeans had destroyed the temple**.
- On the 9th day of the 4th month they kept another annual fast, weeping and mourning, separating themselves from food and drink, **in remembrance of the destruction of Jerusalem**.
- Every 7th month they held another fast **in remembrance of the murder of Gedaliah** and the captivity of the Jewish remnant in more remote parts of Israel.

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- And on the 10th day of the 10th month they kept a fast **commemorating Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem.**

The Jews instituted these four annual fast days, appointed days of sorrow and mourning, while they were captives in Babylon. And they continued to observe their sorrowful fast days after **they returned from Babylon to the land of promise.** There, standing in the land of promise, they were surrounded by ruins, they were confronted with difficulties, and they were harassed by their foes. Everything they saw was as an arrow to pierce their hearts, reminding them of their sin and folly. **Finally, they came to the house of God and asked,** “Should we continue to keep these fast, should we go on weeping, separating ourselves, as we have done for so many years?” (7:1-3).

Our text is God's answer. — *“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.”* **In chapter 7** God's prophet reproved Israel and Judah, plainly declaring that they had been carried away into Babylon because of their own sin. He had scattered them in his wrath *“with a whirlwind,”* and made both the land and their souls desolate.

It is ever the work and business of God's servants to expose man's sin. Guilt must be exposed before grace can be known. Until we are wounded, we will not be healed. Justice must slay before mercy gives life. **No man will ever seek pardon for sin, until he is made to know something about his sin.** You will never seek Christ as your Savior, until you are made to know you are a sinner in need of a Savior. **That is exactly what Paul tells us happened to him** (Rom. 7:9).

(Romans 7:9) “For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.”

“What comfort can a Savior bring
To those who never felt their woe?
A sinner is a sacred thing;
The Holy Ghost hath made him so.
New life from Him we must receive,

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Before for sin we rightly grieve.”

Joseph Hart

In this eighth chapter, having exposed Israel's guilt and sin, God's prophet proclaims the sure and certain salvation of his chosen nation.

He scattered them in great wrath among the heathen, that he might gather them in great mercy to himself (vv. 3, 7, 8).

(Zechariah 8:3) “Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain.”

(Zechariah 8:7-8) “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; (8) And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.”

The Lord God promised to make those who had been desolate prosperous, and those who had been a curse among the heathen a blessing. Then, in verse 19, the Lord promises to turn their fasting into feasting. He does not promise to reduce their fasts, but to remove them altogether and turn them into feasts, feasts of joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts of boundless grace and rejoicing. Where sin abounded, he promised that grace would much more abound.

ALL THINGS NEW

What a dramatic change! What a complete reversal! But this was not written, and I have not been sent here merely to remind you of a piece of Jewish history. **These things are written in the Book of God to teach us better things, things concerning our great Savior and his great salvation.** 2nd Corinthians 5:17-21 gives us an excellent commentary on Zechariah 8:19.

(2 Corinthians 5:17-21) “Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (18) And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of

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reconciliation; (19) To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (20) Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. (21) For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

FASTS AND FEASTS

In Christ our God makes all things new! **In Scripture, fasts are always associated with great heaviness and sorrow.** They were periods of time when men and women refused to eat and drink because of heaviness.

- When his son was dying, **David** fasted (2 Sam. 12:16). — He said, in Psalm 35:13, "*My clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting.*"
- The inhabitants of **Nineveh** put on sackcloth and fasted when they were warned of God's judgment (Jonah 3).
- **Our Savior** fasted for forty days when he was led of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil (Matt. 4).

In the Old Testament the fast was always associated with the knowledge and confession of guilt and sin deserving wrath and judgment (Joel 2:12-13).

(Joel 2:12-13) "Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye *even* to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: (13) And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he *is* gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."

The Jews observed many fasts; but God only required one. The one fast God required was for the affliction of the soul in connection with the day of atonement (Lev. 23:27-29). It was a symbolic confession of sin, sin that demanded atonement and satisfaction. All other religious fasts were but the inventions of men.

But feasts, as we have already seen, are always associated with joy and gladness. And the Lord God here promises that he will turn fasting into feasting for his people. All the feasts of the Old Testament were associated with God's great works of redemption, grace and salvation by Christ. They

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were times of wonderful exhilaration, joy and anticipation. There were seven of these feasts established in the typical age.

- The Old Testament **Feast of Passover** (Lev. 23:5) was a feast celebrating redemption in anticipation of Christ our Passover being sacrificed for us.
- The **Feast of Unleavened Bread** (Lev. 23:6-8) began the next day, after the Feast of Passover. It was a picture of faith in Christ, of our continual feeding upon Christ the Bread of Life.
- The **Feast of Firstfruits** (Lev. 23:9-14) portrayed our Lord's resurrection and our resurrection with him.
- The **Feast of Weeks** (Pentecost) (Lev. 23:15-22) was a harvest feast, a feast of ingathering, speaking of the ingathering of God's elect by his Spirit's omnipotent grace.
- The **Feast of Trumpets** (Lev. 23:23-25) was observed in anticipation of the glorious triumph of Christ which is proclaimed by the gospel. — "*It is finished!*" — Satan is vanquished! — Justice is satisfied. — Sin is out away. — Redemption is done!
- The **Feast of Atonement** (Expiation) (Lev. 23:26-32) was a proclamation of reconciliation and restitution to God that would be made by Christ, who restored that which he took not away.
- The **Feast of Tabernacles** (Lev. 23:33-43) proclaimed the incarnation of our blessed Savior, the Word who would be made flesh and dwell among us.

These feasts were divinely appointed times of great joy and gladness, among believing Israelites, spiritual exhilaration and happiness of heart, as they saw the wonders of God's redeeming, saving grace in Christ set before them in the ceremonies of the law. — In exactly the same way, the Lord's Supper is called a "*feast*" in 1st Corinthians 5:8.

(1 Corinthians 5:8) "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth."

So, when the Lord God promised to give his elect "*joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts,*" he was saying, "When I save my people I will cause them to rejoice in my salvation. The grace that I give you will make you joyful and glad. In that place where there was only shame and sorrow, there shall be the joy of faith." — "*And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I*

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make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful” (Rev. 21:5).

That does not mean that we no longer experience sorrow, even sorrow for sin. But God gives his mourning, sorrowful, penitent child of God joy, — joy mingled with tears, but joy. Your sad fasts shall be cheerful feasts. **Grace does not lessen our griefs; but gives us joy in the midst of grief.** Our Lord Jesus does not merely give us fortitude to face the weary business of living, but joy in living. The grace of God does not make us insensitive stoics, but joyful even in the midst of great pain. **The joy of faith is joy in Christ, joy that gives peace, peace that passes understanding** (Phil. 4:4-7).

(Philippians 4:4-7) “Rejoice in the Lord always: *and* again I say, Rejoice. (5) Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord *is* at hand. (6) Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. (7) And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

The joy Christ gives is joy that flows from God's grace experienced within. Saving grace turns mourning into gladness and sorrow into joy (Ps. 107:30).

(Psalms 107:30) “Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.”

- Nothing is more bitter than sin; but nothing is sweeter sin forgiven.
- Nothing is more galling than guilt; but nothing is more glorious than guilt removed.
- Nothing is more painful than condemnation; but nothing is more pleasant than “*no condemnation.*”
- Nothing is more fearful than judgment; but nothing is more delightful than judgment finished.
- Nothing is more demanding than righteousness; but nothing is more pleasing than righteousness bestowed.
- Nothing is more horrible than ruin; but nothing is more happy than redemption!

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- Where once there was only the sorrow of wrath felt deep in my soul, there is now nothing but the joy of grace.
- Once I was convinced that all things were against me. What grief and sorrow! — Now I know that nothing can be against me, for God is for me (vv. 14-15). What gladness! — Now I can smile at Satan's rage and face a frowning world!
- Once I was sure I was a reprobate soul, for ever damned. — Now I dance in my heart before the Lord because he has chosen me!

(Psalms 30:11) “Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness.”

Has the Lord God caused you to mourn for your sin, to mourn for his Son? Do you afflict your soul in bitterness, in fasting, fasting that causes you to think you must forever do without Christ, the Bread and Water of Life? **Hear me, poor, guilty sinner.** — Cast your soul upon Christ, and your fasting shall be turned into feasting. — “*Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.*” **When God causes you to rest from your enemies, he will turn you** “*from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day,*” and make you “*days of feasting and joy*” (Esther 9:22). **His promise is,** “*I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow*” (Jer. 31:13).

Has God the Holy Spirit convinced you of your sin? Do you know that you are nothing but a doomed, damned, helpless, lost sinner, without God, without Christ, and without hope? Do you see your alarming lost condition before the holy Lord God? Do you know that you are hopeless and helpless before him? **If so, God has sent me here to proclaim to you the joy of forgiveness through the precious blood of Christ, the joy of pardon by grace alone** (Isa. 40:1-2).

(Isaiah 40:1-2) “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.
(2) Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.”

He promises, “*I will dwell in the midst of them forever*” (Ezek. 43:9). — “*Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD*” (Zech. 2:10), — “*I will dwell in the*

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midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee" (Zech. 2:11). — *"Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain...And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness"* (Zech. 8:3, 8). — *"I will turn your fast into joy and gladness and cheerful feasts"* (Zech. 8:19).

(2 Corinthians 5:17) "Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

(Psalms 30:11-12) "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; (12) To the end that *my* glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever."

- **He who scattered has gathered** (Isa. 54:7-8).

(Isaiah 54:7-8) "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. (8) In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer."

- Where **once there was nothing but depravation and desolation**, now there is fruitfulness and prosperity of soul (v. 12).
- He has turned **poverty into plenty and emptiness into fulness**. — *"I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things"* (v. 12).
- **Though I was a curse** among the heathen, he has made me blessed and a blessing (v. 13).
- **Though I was a reproach**, he has turned my reproach into honor, and declares that I am honorable in his sight (Isa. 43:4).

"It is finished;" shall we raise
Songs of sorrow, or of praise?
Mourn to see the Saviour die,
Or proclaim His victory?"

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Lamb of God! Thy death hath given
Pardon peace, and hope of heaven:
'It is finish'd;' let us raise
Songs of thankfulness and praise!"

Has God turned your fasting into feasting? Has he turned your mourning into gladness? If he has, let us — *“Therefore love the truth and peace.”* Love Christ who is the Truth and who is Peace.

(Colossians 3:1-4) “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. (2) Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. (3) For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. (4) When Christ, *who is* our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”

Then, when Christ comes to gather us home to glory, he will turn our sad fasts into feasts of gladness!

(Revelation 7:16-17) “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. (17) For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

(Revelation 21:4-7) “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (5) And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. (6) And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. (7) He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.”

(Revelation 22:3-4) “And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: (4) And they shall see his face; and his name *shall be* in their foreheads.”

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(Revelation 22:20) “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

Amen.