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### **Overwhelmed or Overjoyed?**

Our neighbors in Dallas had a dog named Buster. His pedigree rivaled Heinz 57, but he was a very friendly dog. He would happily greet us at the fence as we would pull into our garage racing up and down the full length of the property. Petting him one day I noticed several little black hard specks had begun to attach to his neck and head. Initially, they seem to really bother him, every now and then he would violently shake his head trying to get rid of the little black bugs. But he was still full of energy and life and seemed to continue enjoying the finer pursuits of dogdom. After a few days, Buster stopped fighting it, the hundreds of little ticks clinging to him became little more than a bothersome nuisance to old Buster. Our neighbor's tried special treatments and baths but the ticks just kept on clinging on. Nothing seemed to work so they just stopped trying. They figured "what's the use...it seems everything we try can't get rid of those little ticks." We noticed a few weeks later that the dog jumped a lot less. He walked slowly out to greet us at the garage...his yips were less yippee. Probably a month later he began to look gaunt and his bones began to stick out. I noticed on one of his good days, when he actually made it to the fence before we drove off, that his entire body was ravaged by thousands of ticks, slowly sucking the life away, bit by bit by bit.

Do you ever reflect on life and sometimes feel like that dog. Those little things keep clinging on, and bit by bit by bit they have drained your strength. It's those little pin head sized ticks that will get us. Those continual, seemingly small sins, frustrations, and nagging conflicts that wear us down. It's those imperfections we see in our own life. We continually struggle, it's seems like it's been for years. It's much easier for me to deal with the bigger battles. The fight is well defined. When I blatantly sin against God others, I may wrestle with the Lord a while, but He eventually wins, I ask forgiveness and then go ask forgiveness of the person I've wronged. Then it's been dealt with it's painful but it's over. But it's those constant little skirmishes, the ones that happen every day that get to me. When we look at our own imperfections it's easy to get

overwhelmed. When I think of the blackness of the thoughts that I allow to enter my mind, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by imperfection. Maybe it's feelings of jealousy or anger that keeps sucking away at you. We can get to the point where we no longer see any victory over sin in our life. You know exactly the sin I'm talking about. It's the one you can never seem to tame. Just when you think you've become it's master, it has broken it's chain and run wild once again. Isn't it easy to become overwhelmed by our own imperfection? To begin feeling it's no use to continue working at the Christian life? Maybe some of you are feeling today...what's the use...I just can't do it anymore. I'm overwhelmed by guilt, depressed and worn down. The ticks have sucked my Christian life dry. I'm overwhelmed by my own imperfection. If you feel guilt ridden, worn down and sucked dry. There's hope...there is a renewing life, a vibrant joy filled life, not problem free, but guilt free and exciting. This is all about living the abundant life, experiencing the joy of the Lord. How can we be joyful amidst life experience that says Joy should not be an emotion your experiencing right now. Where does joy spring from? How does this joy fit into my life this week? My purpose this morning is to help the people of God begin to experience the Joy of the Lord practically in our lives. We are not to be overwhelmed by imperfection.. but overjoyed by God's strength.

Turn with me to Nehemiah chapter 8. It is helpful to remember that the first eight verses talked of revival, a returning to the foundation all of our lives are based on...what's that? The Bible. A thirst for the Word of God. The people of Jerusalem have gathered in the plaza in front of the Water Gate to drink deeply of the Word's of God. Now in chapter 8 verses 9-12 we see the response of the people to the truth. (READ) What is the response of the people? Weeping, grief, mourning. People wept because they recognized that the pious robes they thought they were wearing were nothing more than greasy cutoffs and a threadbare t-shirt. They wept. Is this an appropriate response to the truth of God's Word? Sure is... especially when one realizes that they and their father's before them have failed so long in living up to God's truth. Here are possibly thousands of people under conviction of the truths read to them. They were weeping because the way they had been living did not measure up to the way that God wanted them to live. They

realized that they were grieving God's heart. The Word of God was boldly proclaimed and clearly explained and the people responded by weeping grief.

Weeping over sin and imperfection is a right and healthy response, but we cannot wallow in our own deficiency. We cannot become overwhelmed by imperfection. Notice in verse 9 it took all the leaders, priests and scribes to implore the people "Do not weep, stop the grief and mourning." Why? Why did the leaders want to stop this heart felt response to God? I don't think they wanted to stop it, I believe they wanted to redirect the focus of the people away from dwelling on their own imperfections. The leaders wanted to direct their focus toward God. These people were under conviction of God but I think many were feeling the weight of guilt. Guilt is feeling the weight of a justifiable penalty. You are standing alone, knowing that a penalty would be just. Guilt feels like a cold steel bar smacked across your chin. You are caught flat footed and knocked back on your heels.

But the leaders didn't want the people knocked out, they wanted them enlivened to live for God. Conviction can have an equally powerful effect as guilt, yet the motivation is by different means. Conviction is like a huge electromagnet. You've possibly seen them at wrecking yards attracting huge hunks of metal and moving them to different piles. Conviction is a strong persuading draw to do right in the future. It strongly persuades, encourages you to change your course of action and begin doing right. I believe the leaders did not want the people to be overwhelmed by their own imperfection, but be strongly compelled to live for God. They did not want them crippled by guilt but compelled by conviction. True conviction doesn't knock us out, but brings us to the end of our own strength and the beginning of God's. Isn't it interesting that it was the Bible that brought conviction to the people? The ability to convict is a stamp of authenticity to the power of God's Word. We are not called to be overwhelmed by imperfection, but overjoyed by God's strength and the truth of His Word. How much would you pay for a secret that would ensure you strength for whatever lies ahead in your future?

Look at verse 10. The joy of the Lord is your strength. We read yes the joy of the Lord is our strength. How can we move from being

overwhelmed to overjoyed. How can we integrate the Joy of the Lord practically into our life? Let me offer four helps in bringing the joy of the Lord into our lives.

First, the joy of the Lord is based not on the depth of our personal remorse toward sin, but based on God's ability to forgive. We are not forgiven because we say we're sorry, we are forgiven based on God's choice to forgive us. For us it is because of the death Christ died. With that forgiveness we can claim total acceptance by God...no matter what. Asking forgiveness wipes us clean. The sin is covered. When God forgives, He forgets...why do we still hang on? This concept was blowing the Jerusalem folks away. Here was a God they had forgotten about. For years they had failed to follow His way but now they know, are convicted of sin and are called to rejoice in God's forgiveness. They can come to God guilt free and filled with joy, they no longer have to wallow in guilt.

James Garfield was a lay preacher and principal of denominational college. They say he was ambidextrous and could simultaneously write Greek with one hand and Latin with the other. In 1880, he was elected president of the United States, but after only six months in office, he was shot in the back with a revolver. He never lost consciousness. At the hospital the doctor probed the wound with his little finger to seek the bullet. He couldn't find it, so he tried a silver-tipped probe. Still he couldn't locate the bullet. They took Garfield back to Washington, DC. Despite the summer heat, they tried to keep him comfortable. He was growing very weak. Teams of doctors tried to locate the bullet, probing the wound over and over. They even asked Alexander Graham Bell, who was working on a little device called the telephone to see if he could locate the metal inside the president's body. He came but also failed. The president hung on till September but finally died not from the wound but from infection. The repeated probing, which the physicians thought would help the man, eventually killed him.

So it is with those who probe too long in the sins. We cannot dwell on our sin too long. There is a point where we must release it to God, and there comes the joy. Is there not a great joy in going to God and saying here is this sin. I no longer desire to massage guilt and pain out

of it for myself. Please forgive me God, and delight in the truth that you will wipe it clean from my record. Is there not joy in God's forgiveness?

Experiencing the joy of the Lord comes not only from His forgiveness, the Joy of the Lord is also based on His strength...not our own. This principle seems almost cyclical. We are strengthened when we experience the joy of the Lord. We experience the joy of the Lord by rejoicing in Him and His strength. Joy comes from a focus not on our own imperfections, but on his perfection's. Not on our own weaknesses but on his strength. We are to rejoice in the Lord for He is the source of our strength. Delighting or joying in the Lord brings strength and the strength of the Lord bring joy. Joy is that pleasurable, deep seated feeling caused by well being, good fortune, excited by expectation of the future. Joy comes when we delight in his strength and not our own. What are you thinking of when you delight in your wife or your husband. When I delight in Erin I am overwhelmed by what great fortune I have to be married to such a wonderful person. I feel like the luckiest guy in the world. I dwell on her attributes, her beauty, the things she has done to show how much she loves me this week. I wonder how often do we ever stop and become overwhelmed by pleasure and good fortune that we have a relationship with God. How often do we become amazed at the things that God has done for us to show how much He loves us. The things He has created for us, the things He's saved us from the many things He has given us. It there not much that we could delight in Him. The joy of the Lord is based on His forgiveness and dependent on His strength

Joy also comes independent of circumstances. It's easy to say, come on, Joy could not possibly visit my life right now. I can't possibly experience joy in the midst of this pure hell. One who has the joy of the Lord is not necessarily filled with a lot of noise and laughter sometimes this joy is seen is a calm and quiet spirit amidst chaos. Sometimes joy is nourished in affliction. James 1:2 "Consider it all my brethren when you encounter various trials" I have seen quite recently real joy coming from folks in the midst of crisis. I remember thinking that's what it's all about. Sometimes the quiet calm of joy is best recognized during chaos. Remember Paul and Silas up all night in the prison singing songs? Now I can imagine how the town drunks and thieves liked listening to songs

extolling the praises of God. They probably thought these two should be placed in the loony bin. Here they were delighting, joying in the Lord when all the circumstances around them told them they should be doing the opposite. Joy is independent of circumstances and based on His strength, not our own. If the people of Jerusalem were to look around at their city still in rubble, and inside their hearts at the many things that needed changing, marriages that needed healing and habits that needed breaking, it could have been real easy to get overwhelmed. But, joy is independent of circumstance, based not on wallowing in imperfection but basking in God's perfect perfection. Not on our own strength, but His. It seems that joy comes to those who are able to redirect their focus off themselves and onto God. When we feel powerless we must delight in the one who is all powerful. When we are depressed we must joy in the God of encouragement. When we blow it and sin again we must run to the God of the second chance. Not only the second but the third and fourth as well. He is the one who forgives. Is that not something to rejoice about? The joy of the Lord is based on God's forgiveness, dependent on His strength and independent of circumstance.

Finally, joy is dependent on obedience not successful Christian service. It's not doing the Christian activities, Christian type things, the preaching the coming to Church helping out in the community, with the youth or even building on the building. No, Joy is dependent on obedience to God. The truth of God's Word called the people of Jerusalem to action. The Word had called and now they were to respond in obedience. He wants us to be obedient. It makes sense that the One who created us would know the things that would make our life work the best. He has given us that blueprint for life in the Bible. Do you want the secret to living a joy filled life? Accept His forgiveness. Delight in His strength. Be obedient to His Word. Our responsibility - is our response to His ability. Don't be overwhelmed by imperfection, be overjoyed with His strength.