

From the Altar to the Potluck

Description

[RG AUDIO 102814](#)

Nehemiah 8:1-12

Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand (Neh. 8:2 b).

Ezra stands on a wooden platform, reading the newly rediscovered Book of the Law. He reads a bit, then pauses for the Levites to make the meaning clear. The people react with uncontrollable grief, shedding tears as they compare their behavior to the standards outlined in the book. Finally, Ezra calls for an intermission and sends them home with instructions to not mourn or weep on this holy day. Rather, he tells them to find strength in the joy of the Lord.

The episode shows the welcome, if uncharacteristic, contrition of the people. Their understanding of the Word of God produced grief that later was resolved by joy. However, Ezra didn't let them wallow in their disgrace. Instead he pointed them to joy, saying, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (v. 10). Their joy overflowed in celebration and sharing of food.

We've all been there. This story reminds us that our strength doesn't come from our competence, our success, or even our moral uprightness. Our strength comes from the joy of the Lord.

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