

Hearing the sound of hope and joy?

(With God's help). Have we secured a culture or an environment which is characterised by abundant hope and prevailing joy?

What and where is the evidence? What does it look like and can you see (or hear!) it?

Hope and Joy are always contended and usually involve choices. We get confused because we think they are feelings that are completely linked to and generated by good experiences.

"Our hope and joy are not dependant on circumstance" BLT Declaration

Ezra 3:10-13 (Ezra means 'God helps')

10 When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David king of Israel. 11 With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord:

'He is good; his love towards Israel endures for ever.'

And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. 12 But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. 13 No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away.

The result of the temple foundations being laid was a lot of noise - which could be heard a long way away!

For many 'joy' took the form of the sound of weeping. These were people who had seen the first temple and so a range of things were happening for them. Restoration can be very emotional and there can be a noisy release of pain and hurt. For others, there is the inexplicable joy of tangible progress. Whatever was happening, there was lots of noise and it disturbed their adversaries.

Ezra 4:1-7

When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a temple for the Lord, the God of Israel, 2 they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, 'Let us help you build because, like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.'

3 But Zerubbabel, Joshua and the rest of the heads of the families of Israel answered, 'You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, commanded us.'

4 Then the peoples around them set out to discourage the people of Judah and make them afraid to go on building. 5 They bribed officials to work against them and frustrate their plans during the entire reign of Cyrus king of Persia and down to the reign of Darius king of Persia.

6 At the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, they lodged an accusation against the people of Judah and Jerusalem. 7 And in the days of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his associates wrote a letter to Artaxerxes. The letter was written in Aramaic script and in the Aramaic language.

How did their adversaries react;

- They tried the subtle approach of getting alongside them. Be careful who you partner with in life as it can all end in tears! A major approach of the enemy is to be in among us and to destroy relationships, often starting with minor irritations that grow into major attitudes and eventually unforgiveness and outright division. *The only thing worse than not having joy is stealing someone else's - we should let others have their joy and not bring them down when they are excited about good things.* **John Piper**
- They tried to discourage the people. If encouragement builds us up and helps inspire and motivate us to keep going and to persevere, what does discouragement do? Which voice is louder, the voice of encouragement or discouragement?
- They tried to use fear as a tactic. It's often fear the enemy will use to challenge our inspiration and motivation, especially when it comes to doing new things. Who gives us a spirit of fear?
- They tried to trouble them. How often can a series of minor incidents and issues grind us down and cause us to lose joy and hope we have previously known? As Nicky Gumbel tweeted recently; *"Sometimes you may face difficulties in life, not because you are doing something wrong but because you are doing something right."* These troubles can often be series of life frustrations. They tried to frustrate the people and they didn't give up in using frustration against them
- They wrote a 'letter of accusation' to the king. How often does the enemy accuse us and remind us of our 'failings and weaknesses?' This actually stalled progress in re-building the temple for a long time.

Why do our adversaries play so dirty? They are hugely fearful of the people of God establishing an environment where the presence of God is evident and they become more effect in serving Him and outworking His purposes with power and great effectiveness. They are not just concerned with stopping things happening but with stealing and destroying our hope and joy - our strength and inspiration. Stop the joy and you generally kill inspiration, motivation and passion, thereby an effect means of halting partnership, activity and even thanksgiving and worship. We must have an awareness of the enemy's devices and strategies, they are strangely recurring!

2 Corinthians 2:10-11

10 Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven – if there was anything to forgive – I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, 11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

John 10:10

10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

What can we expect the sound of joy and hope to be like?

- Consistency in our worship, no backing off because of our circumstance, in fact
- A choice to find joy and be joyful in our trials and circumstances
- A growing inner maturity in joy and hope, marked by perseverance and resilience. This does not diminish the need for relationships where we can be honest and real but where we also need to be encouraged in our faith and hope
- An infectiousness impacting our neighbours, rivers of joy flowing at every opportunity
- A growing strength to overcome and defeat all enemies, with an awareness that he tries a range of approaches to try and cause disillusionment and despair
- Occasions with Holy Spirit filled laughter and joy. A third of the kingdom is made up of joy!