

Psalm Ch126v1-6

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 August 2024

Preacher: Peter Kenny

[0 : 00] Good morning again, and I'd love you to turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 126.

Psalm 126, if you're using one of the Red Church Bibles, it's on 623. So Psalm 126 on page 623.

So Psalm 126, page 623 of the Red Church Bible. It reads,

I've been reading a book recently. The main character in the book is a man by the name of John. John is in his 70s and is reflecting on his life and much of what has happened during the course of his life.

Now, John in his life has had more than his fair share of grief. He had lost a wife and a child at a relatively young age.

[2 : 26] And on one occasion, as he's looking back on his life, he remembers an occasion when his friend who loved John had a newborn baby son.

And so the friend thought, wouldn't it be a lovely way to honor John and even to console John a little bit, to name the son after him? Now, the friend doesn't tell John in advance that this is what he's going to do.

And so on the first occasion, when John meets this new little baby and is holding him in his arms, the friend tells him, I'm going to name him John after you.

Now, it's church on a Sunday morning that he does this. And so it's a very public occasion. And John is pretty taken aback by the friend doing this.

And he doesn't really know how to react or respond. He doesn't have a chance to gather himself at this news. And so what should have been a wonderful moment where he feels honored and happy and joyful becomes a moment of real regret.

[3 : 37] Because he's like, how do I respond to this? How do I react with all these people looking at me? And he wonders in years after that how his response shaped the relationship with the son who came to be known as Jack.

What should have been a moment of joy and happiness becomes one of sadness and regret. And as he reflects on it, he thinks to himself, this wasn't the way it should have been.

This wasn't the way it should have been. And if you are like me living in this world where we can hardly get through a week where we think sooner or later, this isn't the way it was meant to be, then we can resonate with what the author of this psalm writes in verse 4 where he says, restore our fortunes, Lord.

And essentially what the psalmist is asking God to do is to make things right. Make life the way it was supposed to be. When we feel that in our health, in our work, in our friendships, in our relationships, when we think this isn't the way it was meant to be, what we long for is that it would be the way it was meant to be, that it would be the way God has made it to be or intended it to be. And so as we reflect on this psalm, there are two thoughts that move the author to pray this prayer, to pray, restore our fortunes, Lord.

[5 : 13] And the first thought that the psalmist has that moves him to pray this is this. The Lord has done great things for you.

The Lord has done great things for you. You see, verse 4, restore our fortunes, Lord, is based on the knowledge of verse 1, when the Lord restored the fortunes, thinking back to the past, when God had restored their fortunes before.

And when the author is asking for the psalmist to restore their fortunes, he's not asking God to make them financially wealthy. It's not financial fortunes he wants.

What he wants is that, in verse 2, that the Lord would do great things. We see that phrase at the end of verse 2, the Lord has done great things for them. Verse 3, the Lord has done great things for us.

That is God restoring our fortunes when God does great things for us. And the psalmist recognizes that God has done great things for them in the past.

[6 : 20] That in a very substantial way that God has brought about healing or restoration. That life, to a large degree, for a time, has been the way it was meant to be, living for him in his world, flourishing under his kind rule and reign.

And when God does great things in our lives, sometimes they are in very normal ways. So you see that in verse 5 and 6, this idea of sowing and reaping or planting and harvesting, this normal rhythm that we're so accustomed to.

But you realize that these normal things are actually great things when you lack them. And so the farmer who has been through a time of famine will recognize how great it is when the crops grow again, when the rains come again, when he enjoys these rhythms that sustain life.

There's lots of secondary reasons why a harvest happens, but the author of this psalm recognizes that the primary reason that the harvest happens is because God has done something great.

That's the primary reason that God has restored our fortunes. And so sometimes these great things that God does happen in normal ways.

[7 : 43] Sometimes they happen in more unusual ways. So some people would see that in this psalm, that the people have been brought back from exile into the land of Israel, into their spiritual homeland, back from captivity, which is reflected in this word Zion in verse 1.

They've been brought back to Zion, back to Jerusalem, back to Israel. And this is a remarkable great thing that God has done in their life, that he has restored their fortunes in a remarkable way. And so the psalmist recognizes that God in the past has done great things. These great things bring great joy.

In verse 1, we were like those who dreamed. This is too good to be true. You have to pinch yourself because it feels like a dream.

What you'd love to happen has happened. What you never thought possible in this life has come to pass. It is a joy that is too great for words. In verse 2, our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.

[8 : 57] We laugh at jokes, but it's more rare that we laugh with joy, where something has happened in our life that is so great, that God has done something so wonderful, that all we can do is laugh and shout with joy.

You've seen it in the Olympics over the last little while. Mondo Duplantis, if you saw Mondo Duplantis breaking the world record for the pole vault, and the commentator is talking, talking, talking, filling the airtime about how wonderful it is and how great it is, what's Mondo Duplantis doing?

He's just laughing, and his friends and his family are just shouting with joy at what has happened. And of course, as God's people, we recognize that God has done great things that bring great joy in our lives.

There's a story in the Bible of a husband and wife. The man is called Abraham, and the wife is called Sarah. They're both well into their 90s, and God promises them that they will have a son. And Sarah's response to that is to laugh. And the reason she laughs is because she thinks it's a joke. Are you joking me, God?

[10 : 23] Don't you realize our age, God? Well, God goes ahead and keeps his promise to them and does this great thing in their lives.

Sarah has a baby, and after she has the baby, she laughs again, but this time it's not because it's a joke. This time it's with joy.

Listen to what she says in chapter 21 of Genesis. God has made laughter for me. Everyone who hears will laugh over me.

And she said, Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have born him a son in his old age. And so she laughed with joy because God had done great things.

Because God has done great things that gives this joy that is too great for words. And it is a joy that is undeniable. In verse 2, in the second half of the verse, then it was said among the nations, The Lord has done great things for them.

[11 : 31] The nations around Israel would have had their own so-called gods, and they would have at least have acknowledged that Israel had their own God as they sought, Yahweh.

They would have said something like, well, you have your God, and we have our God, and that's fine, and we'll respect each other, but they're separate, and so that's the way it is meant to be. And yet even in that confused worldview, they cannot help but recognize the joy that God's people have at the great things that he has done.

The nations say of them, God has done great things because they see the joy that they have. And you know, on more than one occasion, when somebody has come along to a church gathering, and I've chatted to them afterwards, and they will say to me, well, I don't have the same faith as you, I don't have the same belief as you, they're essentially saying, I don't have the same God as you, they will often say, that singing was amazing.

There was such joy there because they recognize, even though they disagree, that God has done great things, that there's such joy among these people.

[12:50] One commentator writes about this psalm, this is John Calvin, he says, the writer's intention was to encourage extravagant rejoicing, lest forgetfulness should bury the remembrance of God's grace.

Indulgence in such celebration was entirely appropriate. Today, similar joy should characterize the assembly of the Lord's people whom he has gathered.

God has done great things for us. For you. And that is what moves us to ask him to do it again. Restore our fortunes, Lord.

Well, I mentioned that we had baptized a couple of people in the River Lee in July. Yatzec and Christian, both guys, I think in their 40s or 50s, who had come to faith in recent times.

Yatzec shared with me his story beforehand, and I asked him, was it okay for me to share this? And he says it was. Yatzec lost his father and his mother at a young age.

[14:03] And this, as you can imagine, had a profound impact on his life. Yatzec said this, I felt completely abandoned by everyone, including God.

I felt useless and unwanted. No one cared about me or what I did. In my heart, there was only emptiness, as if I had died while still alive.

There wasn't a week that went by without me drinking to the point of unconsciousness. I was 16 or 17 years old then. I never sought a return to God.

About two years ago, and now we're talking about 2022, after another downfall, I lost the will to live.

I had a plan to swim far out to sea, to go under, and never to return.

I don't remember if it was exactly the next day or shortly after I had planned everything. I met a man whom I'd known for a few months. He had never mentioned God or anything about such topics, and suddenly he handed me a card advertising a course in Cork Baptist Church.

[15:18] I looked at it and thought, is this a joke? Are you kidding me? God, why are you doing this? Why now? Where were you all my life? I didn't want to read it.

I didn't want to acknowledge that card's existence. When I started reading it, what I remember is not the exact words, but to me, it sounded like God saying, I know you, and I know what you're planning.

I have something different for you. Just come back to me. Since then, almost a year and a half have passed. In the church, I met many wonderful people, my new family.

For the first time, I read the Bible and realized how little I knew about Jesus. The problem is, we can't control life. It will always be difficult on earth. I never was and never will be perfect.

Through this journey, I understood that even when I want to escape from life's challenges, God is reliable and gives me hope to endure until I am with him in heaven in perfect peace and security.

[16:24] There's less and less pessimism in me and more and more hope and only Jesus Christ can give freedom. The same yesterday, today, and forever.

And as we baptized Jacek, I couldn't help but thinking he had planned to swim out to sea, to go under the waters and never to come up.

We brought him under the waters, symbolizing his death with Jesus, but we brought him back out of the water, symbolizing his resurrection life with Jesus.

I couldn't help but thinking God has done great things for Jacek and he has done great things for you. And as you reflect on the last week, it is worth thinking what are some of the great things that God has done?

And they may be just normal things that we take for granted the day-in, day-out rhythms of life where he sustains us, sowing and reaping, planting and harvesting, sleep and rest, work, family,

friendships, relationships, creativity.

[17 : 41] And you recognize that there are many secondary reasons for us enjoying these things, but the primary reason is that God has given us these things.

He has done great things. And sometimes we will have more unusual moments where God has done great things that are truly remarkable. Maybe not delivery from captivity in Babylon, but something like for Jacek that is truly remarkable.

And we need to hear this, don't we, this morning, that God has done great things for us. Because sometimes we forget. sometimes in life it just gets busy.

But it is good to remember that God has done great things and it moves us to plead with him to restore our fortunes again. That's the first thought. God has done great things and here's the second one.

God will do great things for you. He's done it before. he will do it again. Verse 4, restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev.

[18 : 56] Now the Negev is a barren, dry, desert, arid, parched land where nothing seems to be happening and there seems to be no life.

But then the rains come and the river beds are suddenly filled with torrents of water and the flowers flourish as if from nowhere and the plants grow and the animals return and suddenly what was barren and lifeless and seemingly dead is again thriving and it is virtually overnight that God has done this and the author of the psalm wants God to restore their fortunes in this way quickly.

Do something quickly, Lord. And that is what we long for. If we are in a time where it just feels like our relationships or our work or our family life is just tough going like the Negev, we want him to do something quickly.

And sometimes he does do this quickly. Sometimes he will restore our fortunes quickly. I was chatting with another man in our congregation. David is his name.

He was happy as well for me to share this. David told me that he had been living in Dublin for a time. He was in a new city, new job, and on one particular occasion there was just stress on every area of his life.

[20 : 33] so he hadn't yet connected with people, so very little friendship. I hadn't yet connected with the church. He was in this new city. He was two days from being homeless because of his landlord wanting him out of the house.

His team at work was in open rebellion against his boss, and so in every area of life he was just under this stress, so stressed that he got physically ill on the way to work one morning.

And David said to me that he loves sharing this story because by one o'clock that day everything had been changed by God.

Work, relationships, accommodation, everything had been changed. It was like streams in the Negev, and he acknowledges that that was God.

There was lots of secondary reasons, but the primary reason was that God did great things. And you know, sometimes God will do great things in our lives very quickly, but sometimes it's a longer process.

[21 : 46] In verse 5, those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. The image here is of sowing and reaping, planting and harvesting.

this isn't a flash flood that brings restored life. Planting and harvesting takes time and effort and patience, and it is hard work, it is intense, and it can be sad at times.

Particularly so if you are a farmer who has been through a year or two or more of famine, seed, and you are going to plant, and you are literally throwing it away, and you are thinking to yourself, this is all or nothing, I have nothing left.

If the rains don't come, if the harvest doesn't come, this is it. And so you can understand in verse 5 why some will sow with tears, and then you have to wait, and wait, and wait, not just days or weeks, but months.

And eventually, something starts to happen. Eventually, there are little green shoots, breaking up through the soil, leaves, crop, harvest, and it has felt like an eternity, but the remarkable thing is that if you've taken a snapshot of the field before and after, the transformation is just as dramatic as streams in the Negev.

[23 : 41] Now, it has taken time, but it is just as dramatic to see this field now flourishing. It has taken time and tears, and it has been tough, but the promise is that God will do great things, even

when it is slower than we would want, slower than we would like, and when we're waiting, it can feel like an eternity as we cry out to him.

what's striking though is that God does great things, not just in our circumstances, but he does great things in us.

It's interesting that verse 6 seems to repeat verse 5. So verse 6, those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.

Now, at first glance, that just seems to be a repetition of verse 5, maybe to underline it, maybe to amplify it, but you notice that the focus has shifted in verse 6.

So in verse 5, the focus is on the sowing and the reaping, and it's kind of a secondary thought, the way in which the sowing and the reaping is happening.

[25 : 11] But in verse 6, the focus is on those who go out weeping, returning with songs of joy, and the sowing and the reaping are kind of the secondary thought.

And so what you realize is that there has been more than one transformation here, that God has been doing something great, not just in the land, bringing a harvest, but in the one going out, sowing with tears.

And what you realize is that yes, God cares about crops and about land and about his creation, but actually he cares even more about the one weeping.

And so he promises us that he will do great things in you, in his people, where those tears being sown now will be transformed into joy.

many. And sometimes it'll be quickly, and sometimes it'll feel like an eternity, but we can be sure that he will do great things again.

[26 : 32] And that moves us to plead with him to do this. In that story that I mentioned back at the start of the man whose friend named the boy after him, and he had this moment of regret and sadness that he hadn't responded better.

Forty years pass and the boy grows up. He goes by the name of Jack, and the relationship between the friend John and the son Jack are not easy.

So it's difficult at times, it's awkward at times, there's misunderstanding at times, there's conflict at times. And John regrets his own words and thoughts and actions.

But at the end of the book, John and Jack are sitting at a bus stop, and John asks Jack, the friend's son, if he can pray a blessing for him.

And this is what he says. Jack took his hat off and set it on his knee and closed his eyes and lowered his head, almost rested it against my hand.

[27 : 42] And I did bless him to the limit of my powers, whatever they are, repeating the benediction from numbers, of course. The Lord make his face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace. Nothing could be more beautiful than that or more expressive of my feelings, certainly, or more sufficient for that matter.

Then when he didn't open his eyes or lift up his head, I said, Lord, bless John Ames Boughton, that's Jack, this beloved son and brother and husband and father.

Then he sat back and looked at me as if he were waking out of a dream. Thank you, he said. And what's remarkable about that moment is not just that it has been 40 years to get to this point, and you can see how God had been at work in the relationship, but it's also remarkable that John was able to pray like this for Jack, who had brought such heartache and such turmoil, not only into his life, but into the lives of his own dad and many others as well.

And you realize that God had done great things in his own heart. And you know, it's a good question for us to ponder as we wait for God to do great things in our lives and in those around us.

[29 : 19] What's he doing in my heart as I wait on that? What's he doing in me? And remarkably, what this psalm promises us, that slowly but surely God is bringing about transformation, moving us from tears to joy.

God will do great things for you. And that moves us to plead with him to do it. How can we be sure of this?

How can we be sure that God will do great things for us? Here's the reason we can be sure of it. The Apostle Paul writing to the church in Rome says this, he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things?

There's the anchor for the promise that God will do great things for us. Paul says that if God has given his son over to death for his people, he is not going to spare anything necessary, anything good for us.

He will do great things for you. I was at a funeral on Friday up in Dublin, a man who had been part of the church up there, baptized when he was 14 in the church, started playing music when he was 16, he'd been playing piano and organ up until last month, he was 80 when he passed away.

[31 : 07] And this man is with the Lord now, Derek is his name, and Derek would tell us if he was here this morning, you know, one day God will do something great.

Derek is with the Lord in glory now, the tears have been wiped away, the pain and the suffering is gone, and it's hard for us to fathom what that will be like, but we're assured, we're assured that God will do great things, and so we plead with him that he would.

Let's take a moment to ask God to do just that. Heavenly Father, we know that life in this world, we will never have it the way we would want it to be in a perfect sense.

Lord, we recognize that you have done great things in the past in our lives where you have brought substantial restoration of our fortunes, where you have worked in ways that are sometimes quite normal, it seems, and sometimes quite remarkable.

Lord, many of us here recognize that and can testify to that. Lord, help us to remember that so that it would move us, Lord, to call on you to do great things again, things that are far bigger and greater than we could ever ask or imagine.

[32 : 38] Father, we want to praise you that we have this promise that you will do great things, and we know that, not because we deserve it, but because this is what Jesus has assured us of, that in him being given over to death, how will you not freely give us all things?

God, we long for you to do great things again, and Lord, we draw to mind areas of our life where we feel that need deeply, and we commit these relationships and friendships and other areas to you, and we ask that you would do great things.

And Father, we praise you that there is coming a day when you will make all things new, and Lord, that we believe it, we can hardly get our heads around it.

But Father, we look forward to that day, in Jesus' name, amen. We're going to sing to respond to something of what we've been thinking about, just reflecting on God's goodness, his faithfulness, and so on, and so let's stand and sing praise to God now.

Thank you. Thank you.

[34 : 19] Thank you. It's been■■■act 2