

Psalm Ch126v1-6 - Joyful Harvest

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: 07 January 2024

Preacher: Jonny Grant

- [0 : 00] Well, let's turn in our Bibles to Psalm 126. Psalm 126.
- So I wish you a joy-filled coming year. A joy-filled coming year.
- Is it possible that we could be joy-filled? Well, yes, we can. We're going to find out how as we read Psalm 126.
- Let's read together. When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed.
- Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them.
- [1 : 12] The Lord has done great things for us. And we are filled with joy. Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev.
- Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.
- Short psalm, but a great psalm. Let's pray and ask for God's help as we look at this together. Let's pray. Father, thank you that you are present with us.
- We cannot see you physically, but you are here by your Holy Spirit. And you are here through your word as we look at it together.
- Father, and we pray that by your Spirit you would take your word and speak into our lives today.
- [2 : 30] Restore our fortunes so that we are filled with joy. That's our prayer. And we ask that you will do it.
- Amen. Amen. Well, have any of you ever seen The Repair Shop? Any of you seen that?
- It's a program on TV where people bring in their broken items to get repaired. It could be a chair, it could be a record player, a toy or a game.
- Something that has great emotional value to the person. And at the beginning of the program, we see the guests bring their broken item, a watch or whatever it is that belonged to their great, great, great, great grandmother.
- And by the end of the program, they receive the fully repaired and restored item. And the response of the guest is always one of wonder and delight.
- [3 : 35] As their repaired item is revealed to them, as the cover is pulled away, they are stunned and amazed that something broken could be restored.
- There are tears of joy. Well, wonderfully, God is in the business of restoration. And it always leads to songs of joy.
- Look at verse 1 with me. When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion. Verse 2. We were filled with songs of joy.
- Verse 4. Restore our fortunes. Verse 5. And there will be songs of joy.

You see, this is what God is doing for us. He restores broken lives and fills us with songs of joy. And this ultimately happens through the gospel, the good news about the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 48] So as we venture into Psalm 126, we do so at the end of one year and facing into another year. So what we're going to do is we're going to look back with joy at God's restoration.

And we're going to look forward in joy with God's restoration. A looking back and a looking forward. So first of all, let's look back with joy.

Verse 2. Our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongues with songs of joy. Imagine a room full of laughter and joy.

Why? What's the cause here of such delight? Well, we know, don't we? Look at verse 1. When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion.

This is taking us back. God's people are looking back to the salvation that God did in their lives. It could be when God rescued his people from Egypt.

[6 : 03] Or it could be when God returned his people from exile. The slavery in Egypt, the separation in exile, were both desperate situations.

It seemed utterly hopeless and dark. But yet God intervened and restored them. End of verse 1. We were like those who dreamed. The restoration that God brought about was only a distant thought.

But amazingly, it became a reality. You see, this is the kind of God we have. He's a restoring God.

Have a look back with me to Psalm 107. It's where we started this morning. Psalm 107. This psalm is a collection of stories of how God restores.

How God intervenes and saves. So look at verse 2. Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story.

[7 : 10] Well, what is their story? Well, let's have a look. Verse 4. Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle.

Verse 6. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. Or look at verse 10.

Some sat in darkness, in utter darkness, prisoners suffering in iron chains. Verse 13. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.

Or verse 17. Some became fools through their rebellious ways, and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. Verse 19.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and yes, he saved them from their distress. You see, God is a restoring God.

[8 : 18] He saves, he rescues his people. Well, let's go back to Psalm 126. Now, the point of all these restoration stories is, this is God's work.

God has intervened. His acts of salvation have been clearly seen, and it's evident by the nations. Look at the end of verse 2. It was said among the nations, as they looked on at what God has done.

The Lord has done great things for them, for his people. And the people themselves, well, they could say in verse 3, the Lord has done great things for us.

You see, salvation is always a work of God. It's not 50-50, you do your bit, and God will make up the rest.

No, it's always 100% God. It is salvation is an intervention by God when we're no longer longing or desiring.

- [9 : 22] It's a God initiative when we have no means or no ability within ourselves. God restores and God acts.
- Now, God's acts of salvation, as we've seen, have been many and varied. But the point of all of these stories throughout the Old Testament is to point us to Christ, who ultimately saves.
- One writer put it like this. The Bible is not a series of disconnected stories. It is a single narrative in which every story, every character, and every act points beyond itself to one who is greater.
- That is, Jesus Christ. So the story of God rescuing his people from slavery in Egypt points us to Jesus, who has come to rescue us from a greater slavery, or slavery to sin.
- The account of God returning his people who are in exile back to their own land points us to Jesus, who brings us back into relationship with him, and into a kingdom that will last forever and ever.
- [10 : 43] The restoration that God's people who are in exile back to their own land points us to Jesus.
- I want us to encourage us to look back with joy. Here's two ways we can do this. Here's the first one.
- Remembering our big salvation story. So retell the story to yourself. If you are a Christian here this morning, look back to that time in life when God intervened into the mess and brokenness of your life and restored you.
- Do you remember it? How he forgave you of all your sin, past, present, and future, never to hold it against you? Do you remember how he loved you?
- Do you remember how he loved you and embraced you and welcomed you as a son and daughter into his family? Look back and remember the moment you realized Jesus is my saviour.
- [12 : 13] Be filled with joy at the big salvation story. But also remember and look back to the smaller stories of salvation.
- You see, while we may have a big story of being saved by Jesus, there are many mini stories too, aren't there? Like the stories we read in Psalm 107.
- Maybe you were wandering in that desert-like wasteland, empty, unfulfilled. Or perhaps you were like that person who was in deep darkness.
- No hope, no light. Or maybe it was just through our plain old foolish sinful self and we found ourselves lost and broken.
- But whatever experience we have been through, God remained faithful to you. He heard your cry of trouble and in your distress, he saved you.
- [13 : 18] He restored your life. You see, when God saves you, he will keep you. He is the faithful, loyal, and steadfast God.
- So look back with joy in what God has done for you. Now maybe you're here this morning, but you're thinking, well, I don't have a salvation story.
- I haven't experienced that. Well, you know what? You can, right here, right now, by simply trusting Jesus with your life, you can be restored to God.
- He will give you a new beginning and a fresh start. He will walk with you in your times of trials. He will be with you in your seasons of struggle.
- Those that God saves, he will keep. He will never, ever let you go. No matter your sin, your suffering, or Satan, he will hold you.
- [14 : 28] And so you too can say these words in verse 3. The Lord has done great things for me.

And I am filled with joy. So can we look back together? Look back in the past, at the big salvation story, and all the many little ways God has been keeping you in your life.

Second, looking down without joy. You see, we may be and have experienced joy in the past, but that's not how I would describe my life today.

Perhaps you're thinking, when I look at my life at this very moment, it's joyless. Because that seems to be the experience of the writer.

Something is happening between verses 3 and 4. We're not told, but it's clear, isn't it? Because verse 3 ends with joy, doesn't it?

[15 : 44] We're filled with joy. But then verse 4, there's an absence of joy. All is not right. He's having to cry out again, verse 4, Restore our fortunes, Lord.

It's like the joy is gone. In fact, as we read on in the remaining verses, there's tears and weeping. Their life is like a farmer who's longing and waiting for a turn of fortunes.

He's sowing in tears, going out weeping. They're doing the right things, but nothing seems to be changing. Isn't that how life can feel?

Maybe that's where you are right now, today. You've trusted God in the past. You've been serving God.

You've been faithful. But the past was great. But today, this week, this year, it's been hard.

[16 : 52] It's tough. And there are no songs of joy. You see, we live in a broken world, don't we?

And some days, that brokenness is all too real. A loved one dies. A relationship breaks. A friend lets you down.

You receive that unwanted diagnosis from the doctor. Your plans for the future are all shattered. You fail and you fall again.

Today, there are no songs of joy. Today, it's tears and weeping. Is that it?

Is that the life that I am to expect? The past was great. But today, what's going to happen?

[17 : 55] Is this it? Well, the answer is both a yes and a no. There will be tears and there will be joy.

Third, looking forward with joy. You see, amidst the suffering and the pain, there is a promise, isn't there? Look at verses 5 and 6.

The people will reap with songs of joy. They will, verse 6, return with songs of joy. How?

Where, where does all this joy come from? Well, verse 4 gives us the answer. It's a prayer.

Unless, sorry, verse 4, restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev. They're praying to God.

[18 : 55] Having looked back at how God had restored in the past, the people are now crying out to God to intervene again and bring his salvation. Just as you restored us in the past, restore us again today like streams in the Negev.

Well, what's the Negev? I've never been there. Well, the Negev was a dry wilderness, barren and desert-like. No life, no growth.

However, heavy rains in the distant mountains would cause flash flooding on the barren plains below. Dry riverbeds would suddenly become full and an overflowing river.

Overnight, dormant seeds are nourished and within 24 hours, lush green plants and flowers sprout up all along the river course.

And you can watch this on YouTube, by the way. Go and look it up. Not now, later. What was barren has now automatically, instantly been filled with life as the river comes cascading through.

- [20 : 10] It's restored. It's like a new creation. Well, just as the rivers flow and bring life, so the cry goes up to God once again to bring restoration, to bring his salvation.
- Ultimately, it's a prayer for God's people as we live in a broken world. We long for God to come again and to restore our fortunes.
- We long for the day when God will burst forth like a mighty river, bringing life in all its glorious abundance. We long for the tears to be replaced with laughter, the sound of weeping with songs of joy.
- Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev. Well, there is a promised joy, isn't there?
- Through the blur of our tears and through the pain of our weeping, let's not lose sight of God's promise. Look at verse 5.
- [21 : 31] Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.
- Here is the promise of God's full and complete salvation, the ultimate restoration we long for. It will be like harvest time, where everything is ripe and full and there's fruitfulness.
- It's then that all sorrow will cease and there will be songs of joy forevermore. How can we be so sure of this?
- Well, come with me please to John's Gospel. You can keep your finger in one, two, six, and we'll go to John's Gospel in the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.
- John chapter 16. Here Jesus is speaking with his disciples about his soon death to come and his resurrection that will take place after.
- [23 : 10] And with his disciples he speaks these words starting in verse 20. Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices.
- You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come.
- but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you, now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy.
- Jesus' promise here is not just for the disciples but for all his people who trust him. You see, through the death of Jesus, our rebellion was dealt with and there was the joy of the forgiveness of all of our sin.
- But more than that, through the resurrection of Jesus, death is defeated once and for all and there is the joy of eternal life. But above all of these things, one day the risen Jesus will return and he will end all grief and he will wipe away your every tear and fill your hearts with joy.
- [24 : 56] Look at verse 22 again. So with you, now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy.
- Let's go back to Psalm 126. So there is the promised joy.
- And in the meantime, there's patient waiting, isn't there? Jesus is coming, hallelujah. But what about now?
- What do we do today as we wait? well, we have the joy of forgiveness, the joy of a relationship with God, the joy of an eternal future to come, the joy of one another here today.
- And together we get on with the task of sharing this gospel hope with a broken world. Look at verse 5. the picture is agricultural.

[26 : 17] The farmer goes out to sow his seed, carrying his seed, and is patiently waiting. Sometimes, well, sometimes the crop can fail.

Maybe it gets diseased, perhaps there's no rain. The work is repeated, and so the farmer must go again, more sowing, more carrying, longing, waiting.

Through the tears, and through the weeping, he goes again, and again. It's a picture of the church, isn't it? As we get on with the task of sharing the gospel hope, we faithfully sow the seed.

We share the gospel story of God's restoration, and we pray for God to act, that he would come like a mighty river, longing, and waiting, tears, and weeping.

You pray for a friend, months and years pass by. You serve in the ministry of a church every week, every term, but for all the hard work, there comes at times disappointment, rejection, loneliness.

[27 : 50] We sow with tears, we go out weeping, we long for the barren wastelands to be filled with life. Well, one day, the longing and the waiting will be over.

Look at verse 5. Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.

one day the Lord will return and as he gathers all God's people, on that great day we will see the harvest in all its fullness, more than we could ever expect or imagine.

And we will celebrate God's restoration. Tears and weeping will become songs of joy. And so as we sit between the end of one year and the start of a new year, as we face today with all its struggles and all its pressures, I invite us all to look back on 2023 and rejoice in God's salvation in your life and how he has saved you and how he has kept you.

He has been faithful and I want us to look forward to 2024 and rejoice in what God is doing.

[29 : 41] The numbers may be small in those who respond, but God is doing his work and we look forward to the ultimate day when we will carry in sheaves many people.

Together, today we pray, we sow and we wait. Joy is coming. Let's pray.

Father, thank you.

Thank you for intervening into our life. Thank you for rescuing us, restoring us and saving us, for the joy of salvation today.

Thank you for the many, many times you have intervened in our life, how you keep us, how you are faithful, and help us now together as your people, as your church, as we go forward to a new year, to trust your great promises, that you will do your work as we sow.

[31 : 16] Help us never to tire from doing the gospel work that you have called us to, in the glorious hope and knowledge, that we will reap with songs of joy, we will see a harvest to come.

So bless us, Father, do your work amongst us, and we ask this for your glory, and the fame of your name.

Amen. Well, we're going to sing, sing a song of joy.

What is our hope in life and death? Yes, it's true, we do have an eternal hope.