

Psalm 126

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[0 : 00] Again, that is Psalm 126. I ask that you please stand for the reading of God's word. Psalm 126.

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy.

Then they said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us. We are glad. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, my extremes in the Negev.

Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy. He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You're seated. Well, good morning.

[1 : 12] It is a joy to be with you today. This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. Amen. Say it with me. This is the day that the Lord has made.

We will rejoice and be glad in it. I can't hear you. This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. I was glad when they said to me, let us go to the house of the Lord.

These are the days that both convey what a church is like and yet creates the constitutional makeup of a church ready to accomplish great things for the Lord.

I'm so glad that you're here with us. This morning, I want to take a few minutes to encourage you with this truth.

We have come. We have come. We have come. To worship a God. Who has done and will do great things for us.

[2 : 16] To put it differently, the future of the church is bright. I want to encourage you with the conviction that the future of the church is bright.

It's bright. Now, I'm aware that that conviction will need to be proven. Recent studies would indicate otherwise. They would.

And you are reading of them weekly. Speaking of flagging membership in church. A failure of the church to be able to capture the collegiate mind or the youth beneath.

Of the fractures in the church, which are so prevalent as to make church a failed experiment. As if all we know of the Christian church is that is in a moment of decline.

And so it may be a surprise even to some of you experientially to think that the future of the church is bright. We have labored long under the last few years of language about its divisive nature.

[3 : 42] Of its diseased state. Of its individuals who are in disarray. And it has stripped the morale and belief even of the most hopeful advocate.

And yet, we gather in the rain to confirm this truth. That the future of the church is bright.

The two stanza song that was read for you today intimates an author of considerable age. You are reading the lyrics in Psalm 126 of a person who's been around the block once or twice.

Who's seen a thing or two. Of an individual who possesses the kind of wisdom that only years can breathe. They have the ethos.

The indispensable characteristic of credibility that comes with decades of understanding.

[4 : 52] And in that very first stanza, the writer seems to be out to capture our imaginations. The imagination that might make you dare to believe again.

Let me read the opening stanza again. When the Lord restored the fortune of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy.

Then they said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us. We are glad. He recounts a time in Israel's history where the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion.

He doesn't indicate the particular time. We don't know whether this is under the ministry of Hezekiah, where the nations again saw the greatness of Israel.

We don't know if it refers to the return from the Babylonian captivity, where God's people were suddenly moved to return and to rebuild the wall.

[6 : 00] We don't know if it's in the season of Josiah, where great reforms came on a dilapidated and dying church. But what we do know is that the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion.

Zion, of course, originally was a mountain upon which was a fortress in which the Jebusites lived. It was a city then on a hill that David took and called his own, and Jerusalem was its name, and it became the place in which God's people went to meet with their God.

Put it simply, it was the church of the living God that the Lord had restored the church's fortunes. I'm kind of glad that it doesn't give us the particular historical circumstances, for it would be far too limiting in range.

In fact, the author is not so intent on letting us know what took place as to how it felt to be there. Notice the way the stanza goes.

[7 : 11] We were like those who dream. And all the indications of the opening stanzas and the lyric are intent to let the reader know, I was there.

And I want you to know what it was like. It was like being in a dream. It was like having to pinch yourself and ask, is this really true?

Is this really happening? Is this actually occurring? And notice the language of verse 2, which indicates again what came over him in that wonderful season of restoration.

Our mouth was suddenly filled with laughter. Our tongues with shouts of joy. In fact, not only were our mouths giving praise to the Lord, but those who were around us so knew our own condition and our inability to accomplish anything for God, that indeed it must be God who would accomplish something for them.

Verse 3, the Lord then, they say, has done great things for us. We are glad. I hope that captures your imagination.

[8 : 29] To have a seasoned songwriter stand before us today in this psalm, indicating that whether you know it or not, he was present when great things had been done.

Just a couple of years ago, I visited a dear friend in England to celebrate his 94th birthday. I know you're getting old when you've got good friends that are 94, but so it is with me.

He had wanted to see the place where he was going to be buried. He wanted to see where his ministry had begun. He had wanted to look at the home in which he grew up in as a boy.

And so he left London proper and drove south toward the Downs and on the way pulled over at Seven Oaks and walked into an Anglican church.

It was the church where his ministry had begun nearly 50 years before. Now, this was a man who had seen God do great things.

[9 : 40] Thousands attending his annual conferences, bringing the gospel around the world. Hundreds and hundreds sitting under his ministry in City Center of London for the better part of 25 years as he expounded to them the scriptures over a Tuesday lunchtime service.

And I said to him in the building, do you recall your very first sermon, if this was the church that you were a curate in, your first assistantship back in the 1950s before anybody knew your name?

He said, oh, yes. I recall my very first sermon. And he began to quote, with eyes of fire, when the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongue with shouts of joy. He, in his aged state, singing this song with the experience of God who had grown things beautifully out of dry ground.

I remember an experience on my own. Mid to late 1960s, as a young boy, being in California, the Costa Mesa region, it had been a time of incredible social tumult.

[11 : 18] People wondered whether the country was coming apart. They thought we had bent everything to the point of no return.

And yet there, suddenly, out of nowhere, comes a movement led by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Let me see if I can capture your imagination. Envision me at about age eight or nine or tens, the age of some of you right now, going to meet in a church that didn't have a physical structure.

They had a large tent that seated about a thousand. But you had to arrive an hour, an hour and a half early to get under the tent. Men and women, young people and old arriving.

We wore bell-bottom jeans back then. The wider, the better. Bibles in rabbit skin like covers. covers and everywhere people listening to the attentive word of God as Chuck Smith preached to flowing crowds long before their building was even completed.

[12 : 43] I remember going to the white trailers that were set up in a parking lot to buy the Maranatha music cassette tapes. Yes, there were such a thing.

and listening to songs like Little Country Church on the Edge of Town. Do-do-do-do-do-do-do. I remember Maranatha music and Larry Norman and the advent of what would become contemporary Christian music.

I remember in a season of tumult thousands arriving early in expectation of loud praises to God through music and the quiet attentive hearing of his word.

Well, the psalmist remembered those things too. And after recounting his own personal experience of it in the opening stanza, he moves in the second stanza to relay to us his own theological convictions.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy. He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

[14 : 14] This stanza moves from the capturing of our imagination that God has done great things to a theological conviction that he will do great things yet again.

Notice it opens with a prayer. And it's a prayer that came in a particular season. Verse four, restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev.

All you need to know about the streams in the Negev is that they were subject to seasonal waterings where they actually would overflow.

And yet the overflowing seasonal rivers of the Negev would recede at different seasons until it was nothing more than a dry riverbed.

No rain, no wetness, no water for growth. And it seems now that the one who is writing is saying that his present situation is in a season of dryness where nothing seems to be growing, where the riverbed is not yielding life for any who are around.

[15 : 41] It's a prayer for the season. We need to know that this is the natural order of things in the world in which we live, and it is certainly ordinary for the spiritual seasons of one's life.

Doesn't the book of Ecclesiastes actually indicate that there is a season for weeping and a season for laughter? That there is a season for mourning and a season for dancing?

The scriptures themselves indicate that one like Elijah, who stopped the heavens from raining, then one day, according to God's promise, began to pray that rain would come.

And he looked out on the horizon and he saw no clouds at all. And yet he prayed and sent his servant, go look again and see if there's any rain on the way. And the servant went and said, there's no rain yet today.

And he prayed. And he said, well, go again. And he came back seven times until finally the servant said to him, there's the tiniest of clouds on the most distant of horizons.

[16 : 55] And Elijah is now on his feet, for he knows that the rains are on the way. The rains have come, dear friend.

The waters are flowing. The season of ecclesial disruption and social change is going to give way to planting and growth and harvest and spiritual strength.

And we know that because that is the way God works. He's not praying in verse 4 for something that he hopes might happen. He's praying in the confidence of what he knows will happen, for he knows his God.

Restore our fortune, O Lord, like streams in the Negev. Bring to us the seasonal waterings that bring life. In fact, so confident is his prayer rooted in the conviction on God's promise that he actually begins to push forward into the future.

Do you see it? Verse 5, they shall reap with shouts of joy. Verse 6, they shall come home with shouts of joy.

[18 : 14] And so the future, which he is confident in, informs the productive work of the present long before anything could be seen to come.

Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy. He who goes out weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy.

I suppose then that the psalmist has looked back to capture your imagination that you might actually be confronted with this truth. God has done great things. He looks forward to indicate to you on the promises of God that he will do great things and that past and that future inform your present.

What do you do this morning if your soul feels dry, lifeless, no fruit, wondering whether anything you're doing in life is going to matter?

[19 : 21] Well, then be like Elijah and pray and pray some more and pray until the clouds and productive life-giving rain comes.

Those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing seed for sowing will come home with shouts of joy.

And so you and I live on the cusp of overflowing harvest, but in the season meant for sowing. Hardship embraced embraced before harvest is taken in. Work to be done before reward is ever seen.

The hard-working farmer continue to do the things that God promises to bless. continue to give people this word for some of it will return a hundred fold.

[20 : 37] If you're a mother, father, continue to raise your children no matter their age, asking for God to bring spiritual refreshment.

These are the wonderful comforting truths of Psalm 126. my mother's grandma, and I'm closing with this.

My mother's grandma, Sadie, shortly before her death, circled up those that are nearest to her and said, I'll greet you in the morning as you're bringing in your sheaves.

When my own grandmother died, we all carried our single stalk of grain and followed her casket to its resting place and laid our single on a coffin of a woman who had lived well, indicating in some sense that all the sowing, all the weeping, all the laboring would indeed follow her in life.

I hope you can see it. I hope you can understand that you will one day, through faith in Christ, walk into his presence with sheaves of wheat that testify to his greatness.

[22 : 36] Let me close just by reading to you from the book of James. Be patient, therefore, brothers and sisters, until the coming of the Lord.

See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth. Be patient about it until it receives the early and the late rains.

You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. And I say unto you, the showers of his blessings are already here.

Our Heavenly Father, your church has languished long under sorrow and tears.

And we are comforted to know that those like the psalmist who are older would testify to all that you have done and all that you will do.

[23 : 50] So keep us in the field plowing from edge to edge until we shall see you face to face.

In Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.