Luke 24

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Preacher: Arthur Jackson

[0:00] When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. 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, like the 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.
This is the word of the Lord. Speak to God. You may be seated. These are great days for the gospel.
In Chicagoland and in the world. It's our privilege to share with you this sacred labor that God has given us.
[1:07] And we are glad for that. Pray with me. Father, thank you for this day and your presence and guidance and direction in it.

I pray, Lord, that as we come before you and this people, that you would increase, that I would decrease, that your word would be clear, that it would minister and go forth in ways that you have ordained.
And praise you for Isaiah 55 that reminds us that when you send out your word, it comes back with a mission accomplished kind of word to you.
So let that be here today is our prayer in Christ's name. Amen. Shirley and I had the privilege of being at Judson Baptist this morning with the Judson Baptist family and preached there.
And it was really just good being back in that environment. And but I'm glad to be here with the Holy Trinity family, our family.
[2:19] This past week included my attendance at two different funerals. On Tuesday morning, Dave Helm and I went to the funeral of Raymond and Corey Creed, the guys who take care of the facility.

Their father was buried on last Tuesday. And we want to remember those young men in prayer. They are a good tribute to their dad in that they are very hardworking, diligent young men.
You see them around. As a matter of fact, I saw Raymond as I was coming in. So let's pray for that family as they continue to mourn the loss of their father. On Thursday, I attended the homegoing service of one Maria Petty, affectionately known as Brown Sugar.
Another one at a funeral at a funeral home chapel.
Another one at the other one at the other one at a church. But there was a common feature to both of those services. And that was singing.
[3:48] That expressed faith. And encourage faith. Singing that expressed faith. But also encourage faith.

Through these songs of ascents that we have been covering this summer, you and I have been able to hear the voices of the singing saints of yesteryear.
Guess what, folks? They sang in and through the varied circumstances of life. Because of that, we've been able to hear and we've been encouraged in that.
We turn our attention this afternoon to Psalm 126. And I love this psalm. I love it more having spent time with it. But, you know, oftentimes we come.
There are chords that we remember from psalms. We may not know the whole psalm. But this is the, you know, the sowing and the reaper. He that goes out with seed, bearing precious seed.
[4:56] So doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his seed. This is it. Not only do we see that verse, but we see the full context in which it was spoken.

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The historical setting seems to have been the 70-year Babylonian exile and that it was over. Some, not all of the exiles, returned home.
But those who did, they returned to a scene. It was like a land that had been ravished. There, the walls of Jerusalem were down.
The temple had been destroyed. One writer notes regarding this psalm that it may have been written in the midst of the troubles which hinder the rebuilding of the temple in the first 20 years after the return.
The Cyrus gave them freedom to go. It was 538 B.C. But more probably belongs to the early part of the Ezra-Nehemiah period, which was roughly 80 years following the actual freedom given by Cyrus, when the sense of failure and disappointment had sunk more deeply into the heart of the people.
[6:08] And the contrast between, listen to this, the glowing promises of the prophets and the actual condition of the weak community in Palestine had become a permanent trial of faith.

In other words, Lord, where is all these glowing prophecies that were spoken of? I mean, the toil of our hands, our labor, we're not quite seeing it, Lord.
This is a six-verse psalm. This is what I want you to consider with me this afternoon. Let me give you a sentence.
But I think this particular sentence captures the sense of what's here. When sobered by the realities of the present, anybody have any sobering realities in the present?
They come in different sizes and shapes, don't they? When sobered by the realities of the present, it serves us well to reflect upon the Lord's great works of the past and then to allow such to prompt our prayers and to fuel our faith for the future.
[7:27] Let me say that again because I believe this really captures what the psalm is saying to you and me today. When sobered by the realities of the present, it serves us well to reflect upon the Lord's great works of the past and to allow such to both prompt our prayers and fuel our faith for the future.

And you and I certainly are faced with sobering realities. We could go through a bunch list of things, some of which may pertain to you now.
Your skies may be blue, but just wait a while. Sobering realities that cause us to think, perhaps, Lord, where are you?
When are you going to show up for me? When is my time going to come? First of all, notice with me in verses 1 through 3, the reflections of the past.
You see, that's what's happening there. Notice the language is speaking in the past tense. It's like the writer is looking into the historical rearview mirror.
[8:53] Note the words. Look at verse 1. When? Twice in verse 2 speaks about then, referring to what was in the past.

Then was our mouth filled with laughter. Then they said among the heathen, among the nations. He was looking back at a time in their historical past.
Notice also the tenses of the verbs in verses 1 through 3 that indicate past action. The Lord had restored in verse 1.
The fortunes are the captivity of the people. Notice the next one. We were like the world, like those who dream. And our mouth was filled.
They said among the heathen. Then it speaks in verses 2b and 3. The Lord has done great things.
[9:52] Again, looking at something that had gone on in the past. They were like people who were looking through all of those wonderful pictures in the photo album.

You had them at home, don't you? You remember when you were 15 pounds thinner, huh? And I remember when I had more hair and all of those things.
I mean, it's a sobering... Did you know aging is a sobering reality? Some of you may not know anything about that yet. I mean, just today, folks, I was tying my tie and I took it loose.
And then I was like, how in the world do I tie this tie? I mean, it just sort of eluded me momentarily. Of course, none of you all have that problem yet. But it was like they were looking into this historical photo album.
They had put in the DVD. And they saw what was past. Their recent history had included great things from the very hand of God.

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[11:00] Their 70-year exile had been reversed. They had been liberated from captivity. Just as the Lord had promised, they were back in the land. Their chastisement was over.

The discipline was finished. But now they were back home, huh? Just as the Lord had promised, they were back there. Listen to this. You needn't turn to it, but might want to reference it.
Isaiah 48, verses 20 and 21. Go out from Babylon. Flee from Chaldea. Declare this with a shout of joy. Proclaim it. Send it out to the end of the earth.
Isaiah. The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob. They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts. He made water flow for them from the rock. He split the rock and the water gushed out.
There was great joy. In view of what the Lord had done. The Lord had responded to the people of God. He responded to the great work of the Almighty.
[11:56] With great, great rejoicing. It was like they were giving the Lord a standing ovation. What did he have done? They were stunned by the goodness and the kindness of God.

Just as we have sung this afternoon, their mourning had turned into dancing. Their dancing shoes were on. They were rejoicing before the Lord.
We see that in the language. There was great joy. There were shouts of joy. Verse 2. And they were looking forward to further shouts of joy.
In verses 5 and 6. Three times we see that particular phrase here. It was one of those two good to be true moments. They were like those who dream.
Have you ever had moments in your life that you wish were a dream? Huh? We've had some. You would wake up from the experience and it would all be over.
[13:00] But oftentimes that's not the case. We are in the midst. Our feet are firmly planted in the now. And sometimes it's a very hard and difficult place. And you wish that it were a dream.

Huh? But their experience was the opposite. They had to be dreaming, they would say, because it was so great. But they weren't. The Lord had showed up for his people and they were free.
Liberation had come. Far from being a subjective dream, it was an objective reality. Personally experienced, but not only personally experienced.
Validated by the onlooking nations. You see that? Huh? Huh? They saw too. And they said that the Lord has done great things for them. Huh?
They had seen the hand of God in their life of the nation. Huh? Great joy. The Lord had done great things for them.
[14:04] They recognized it in the surrounding nations. Acknowledged. That the work of liberation was the work of the almighty. Have you recognized that the Lord has a reputation for doing great things?

That's the kind of God we serve. Your righteousness, O God, reaches the heavens. You have done great things, O God. Who is like you? Declared the psalmist.
In Psalm 71 and 19. For he who is mighty has done great things for me. And holy is his name was the exclamation of Mary in the Magnificat.
In Luke chapter 1 and verse 49. Great things was the operative term. We see that in verses 2 and 3.
And gladness was the fitting response. Their joy and laughter, it was like, it was party-like. So great a deed had been done that it would have been hard not to dance.
[15:07] And rejoice. Huh? You know, hard not to shuffle a little bit. There was a comparable day in several regards.

That was the case in West Germany, in Germany, in the autumn of 1989. Some of you may remember that particular era.
The brick and mortar of communism had begun to crumble. Great liberation came on November the 9th, 1989. When that happened, joy overflowed in the streets of Germany, particularly that once divided city, Berlin.
One person's version of this account includes the following things. He talks about how he and his wife and others got in their vehicle, an old Volkswagen in Denmark.
And they drove down to Germany. They left on the 11th of November. They traveled. And once they arrived there, it said over 20,000 East and West Germans were gathered there in a huge party.
[16:23] Under one light, a group of musicians were playing violins and accordions. And men and women were dancing in circles because of what had visited that land.

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Despite the brilliantly cold night, car windows were open and everyone talked to each other. Liberation. Joy.
Had come. And he goes on to give several other accounts. Just let me give you a couple other snippets of that day. With Berlin's population of 3 million, there were over 5 million people milling around in delirious joy, celebrating the reunion of the city after 21 years.
A newspaper banner headlines read, Germany is reunited in the streets. Looking around, I saw indescribable joy in people's faces.
It was the end of the government telling people what not to do. It was the end of the wall, the war, the East, the West. If East Germans were going West, then we should go East.
[17:28] We poured into East Berlin. And around me, people spoke German, French, Polish, Russian, every language. But then he talks about their American reporters who couldn't speak but one language and asking them, do you speak English?

The soldiers themselves were overwhelmed by the event. They were part of the crowd. The uniforms meant nothing. The wall was down.
There was joy that spilled over from the hearts of people into the streets of Germany. Psalmist in verses 1 through 3, he reflects on the great things of the past, even as in verse 4, he looked at the realities of the present.
Great things from God in the past, the realities of the present. Great challenge. That was the deal. Dancing to drought.
Notice with me in verse 4. You see it there? Restore our fortunes. He said, well, didn't he bring them back? And wasn't that enough?
[18:35] It was one thing to be liberated. It's another thing to get back and to face the hard work that was waiting for them. It's not difficult to detect a change in the mood and the emotion of 1 through 3 and then going through 4 through 6.

The tone changes because the scene changes. The joys of rescue and restoration had given way to the sighs and the longings and the prayers that we hear in verse 4.
The shift is from the laughter of then to the sobriety of the now. Have you ever noticed that scenes in life can shift and change?
The health of yesterday can be overshadowed by the disease of today. The then of prosperity gets overtaken by the now of poverty or adversity.
Marital fulfillment then can be trumped by marital frustration now. Oh, the realities of the present have a way of overshadowing even those glorious things of our past.
[19:56] Those things that we would like to rewind and go back to. But the sobering realities of the present have a way of gripping us and even capturing us.

We feel the ache, we feel the pain, the angst, and we're left to ponder the question, what does one do when one's dancing turns to drought?
What great things, when great things are in the rearview mirror and great challenges are before you and around you, what is it that you do? Oh, this verse instructs us, doesn't it?
Such conditions should prompt our prayers to the God of past restoration. That's what we have in verse 4. And so the psalmist leads the group of pilgrims in prayer.
Restore our fortunes, O Lord. Like streams in the Negev. The psalmist, did you notice that the psalmist is to Yahweh the Lord?
[21:11] Israel's God. The same one who had done the great things in verses 1 through 3 is the one that they make their appeal to. They do not abandon him and neither should you or I when rough times come, when we are sobered by the realities of the present.

The psalmist here is akin to what we have in Psalm 85 verses 4 through 7. And turn back there with me. You'll find it on page 493. Similar kind of appeal.
It's very likely that it was written in a similar kind of day. Perhaps even the same day. Because as you look at the first verses, it's looking back at what God had done.
But then he begins to make an appeal and notice what he says in verses 4 through 7. Listen to this. Restore us again, O God of our salvation.
And put away your indignation toward us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? Oh, and here, this is where this is found.
[22:20] Will you not revive us again? That your people may rejoice in you. Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.

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You who have granted us salvation. Pass. Grant us, Lord, salvation now. We need your deliverance. Pass. Even now. Prayer was to the same God who had marvelously demonstrated himself in their past.
Their captivity had been reversed. They were back at home. The foreign had been replaced with the familiar. But though they were back in the land, there was work that still needed to be done.
On the one hand, their fortunes had been restored. On the other hand, restoration was still needed.
And such was the case when the captives returned to the land of Israel, their homeland.
Pilgrims stunned by the grace of God in the past, but they were sobered by the struggles of the present. The joys of restoration had given way to the tears and toils of their everyday existence.
[23:24] And in the midst of such conditions, they found themselves calling unto God, reaching up to him. Lord, restore us.

Our faith is in you. Our trust is in you. Those who are married now know something about the challenges of their everyday living. Couples don't hit autopilot of marital bliss and you wake up 40 or 50 years later in marriage.
As you look at those great pictures of when you walk down the aisles. And I tell you, one of my favorite things in the pastorate is to marry people. I've seen grown men cry as the bride made her way down the aisle.
Huh? And you see that? I mean, they don't know what they're saying up there. That's why you need to tell them what they're saying before they say it. Because they're seizing the moment.
And oh, don't you wish you could bottle up maybe that first year or maybe the first month? Hey, that's not the deal. You can't put it on automatic pilot.
[24:39] Not so. The journey gets rough and the dream in marriage sometimes turns to a nightmare. And you find yourself in verse 4. Needing to utter the prayers for the restoration of your fortunes.

So, you look at your wedding picture album and you reflect on the extreme joy of the occasion. And you pray for comparable joy in the present. Incidentally, thanks for sharing our joy on last week.
Prayer of verse 4 is akin to a, Lord, show us your favor. Huh? Like you showed us your favor. Just like you reversed the fortunes of the past.
Returning from Babylon now. Reverse our fortunes now that we've returned. Huh? Show up for us just now. Now, Lord. Just like you did then. We need you now.
Huh? So, there was a prayer for restoration. But then there was a picture of restoration. See that? How? Like the streams in the Negev.
[25:48] Huh? Show up for us like the waters that flood the desert land of the south country. That's what the Negev was. It was the arid, waterless district south of Judea.

In the summer, the brooks dry up. But when the autumn rains fail, the waters would rush. And the waters would gush. Where dry gullies were. And the scenery would change.
There could be several things in view here. The prayer could be for the Lord to send streams of more exiles. Because not all people return. And it could be, Lord, let the people come through those desert ways and bring them back home.
Huh? Repopulate our native land. On the other hand, it could be a picture of restoration of vibrant, productive life within the land itself.
That's when waters flow and revive and refresh. Picture with me a hot Chicago day. In the city. Fans in places of blowing hot air.
[26:52] You see someone, they go out to the curb to that little red box there. And somebody, you don't know where in the world they get the key from to turn on those hydrants. But you find them turning on the hydrants and people are coming out of the houses.

And the water is gushing and flowing and refreshing. Lord, send the streams of your blessing. The prayer was for nothing less than what Isaiah had spoken of in Isaiah 49, verses 19 through 22.
Pray at 610. Let's get that. Get you engaged here. 610, Isaiah 49. Verses 19 through 22.
610 in the Bible that's been provided for you. 610 in the Bible that's been provided for you. Verse 19. Surely your waste and your desolate places and your devastated land.
Surely now you will be too narrow for your inhabitants and those who swallowed you up will be far away. The children of your bereavement will yet say in your ears, The place is too narrow for me.
[28:08] Make room for me to dwell in. Then you will say in your hearts, Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away.

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But who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone. For whence have these come? Thus says the Lord God. Behold, I will lift up my hand to the nations and raise my signal to the peoples. And they shall bring your sons in their bosom. And your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. Again, this picture. Floods of people coming in.
Just like the rains from heaven filled with stony stream beds. Their prayer was for the Lord to show up in their midst. In their less than the best situation.
Out of the sobering realities of the present, prayers had arisen. And did you know that's what sobering realities can do, at least should do for us?
[29:07] And maybe we just don't have enough sobering realities, huh? Keep living, keep walking on this journey. Because sooner or later, they come to us all.

Reflections of great things of the past. Realities that include great challenges. But notice verses 5 and 6. The reminders of what the future could be.
What could it be? It could be a time of great harvest. The picture of restoration actually continues in verses 5 and 6.
It's the picture of what they could expect. What they could look forward to. While they prayed to the Lord for only what he could do. There were things in their reach too.
They prayed for the Lord to work. But there was also work for them to do. Going out with seed would come before coming in with sheaves of grain.
[30:06] There needed to be seeds in their hand before there could be sheaves in their arms. They needed to work. These verses swell with hope and anticipation. And at the same time, they encourage perseverance on the part of the people of God.

God has his work. But also, as William Carriage said, we expect great things from God. But we are to do great things for God. And here's the deal.
Because if they looked at the pattern that was in their history, they wanted that same pattern to be in their present. Just as there had been weeping and going out and rejoicing and coming in, in their bigger captivity.
This great historical point of reference where God had worked, even so, were the same things to be in their present distress. There was to be a similar pattern.
Sowing and reaping and weeping and reaping. The Lord's promises and their perseverance were both needed for their future will-being. We see both the faithfulness of God, but also the faithfulness of his people.
[31:18] They're both in view. The promises of God certainly are the seeds for the future harvest. We must never forget that. We must embrace this. We must plant them and reap the fruits.

But we also must persevere. This is one of those keep on, keeping on kind of passages. Great harvests need both the promises of God, but also the great perseverance of his people.
Got to keep on keeping on. It's a trust God and work hard kind of song. We've got to do both.
When sobered by the realities of the present, serves us well. To reflect upon the Lord's great works of the past and allow such to prompt our prayers.
Verse 4. To fuel our faith for the future. Verses 5 and 6. I think it's very fitting on this afternoon that we're coming to the Lord's table.
[32:28] This passage fits so well. It encourages us to look back at the work of God in our past for nourishment and encouragement for the present and for the future.

Oh, and there is no greater work that you and I can look back to than the work of Christ. Because that is a historical and a redemptive benchmark.
God who spared not his son, but delivered him up for us all. How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?
Paul wrote to the Romans, If God, notice, is for us, who can be against us? And he gave his son up for us all.
Great things, huh? The Lord's table is a great reminder of God's great deliverance for his people. It is there that you and I get to look again at the picture album of redemptive history.
[33:39] And we can see this too good to be true kind of grace that continues on into the present. Oh, and as we come to this table this afternoon, I want you to be nourished and strengthened as you look back on the great things that God has done in and through his son.

And the fact that that grace continues, it is the source for our present and our continuing joy. The then of Christ's work must be allowed to inform both our present and future.

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What a critical, critical point of reference. Christ's saving work and our identity with it. It keeps us going on and reform and informs our future.
His life and death and reign give us hope in our times of drought and discouragement. The fact that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him encourages us.
The greatest of God's great things. Fanny Crosby has given us a song about the great things that he has done for us.
[35:00] To God be the glory. Great things he has done. So loved he the world that he gave us his son.

Who yielded his life and atonement for sin. And opened the life gate. That all may go in.
She captures the spirit of the psalm and placarding the great things of God. But then she goes on and helps us with the gladness portion, doesn't she?
Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Let the earth hear his voice. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Let the people rejoice.
Oh, come to the Father. That's what we have in verse 4. This coming to him, not another, but the same one who has indelibly marked us with his grace.
[36:00] That's the one that we come to in our times of stress and distress. In the midst of our sobering realities, we come to him. Oh, come to the Father.

And how do we come? We come to the Son. And give him the glory. Why? Great things. He has done. And so, this afternoon, you and I come to the table.
We come this afternoon. And you may be here in the midst of sobering realities and present distress. Come to the table this afternoon. Come, being reminded of the great things that God has done through his Son.
Come and eat. Come and drink. Come and be nourished. The Bible says this. 1 Corinthians chapter 11.
Even as we prepare our hearts for the Lord's table. Listen to these words. Paul writes, I receive from the Lord what I also delivered to you.
[37:09] That the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, he took bread.

That's what he did. This simple, everyday commodity that represented his body that was going to be broken.
Huh? Huh? He took bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body. This represents my body.
And he says, it's for, it's for you. Do this in remembrance of me. And in the same way, he took the cup. And we're coming this afternoon.
Take the bread. We're going to take the cup. And we're going to remember and we're going to, by faith, receive from the Lord.
[38:15] We look back. Great things. Grim realities. Great challenges. But a great harvest. So we look forward.

The future. To the Lord. Won't you pray with me even as we continue our preparation for the Lord's table. Well, we do love you. We do thank you.
God, our. Help in ages past. Hope in days to come. Absolutely all that we need.
And we come. Lord, as. Those who look back. Well, we can see the various kinds of things that you've done.
But none make a greater statement. Then you're saving. Work through your son. And we come. And may we.
[39:16] This afternoon. Be strengthened. As we look again at him. Our focus be clear. May our faith be strengthened.

We ask. To these ends. And we pray these things. All in Jesus name. Amen. We go now. Please. Thank you.

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