

Harvest In Its Season

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[0 : 0 0] Well, now let's turn to the book of Psalms and to Psalm 126.

Psalm 126 at the beginning. We may just read that psalm. When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream.

Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue was singing. They said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us and we are glad.

Bring back our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south. Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

Our focus is really on the last section in Psalm 126 verses 5 and 6. And under the general theme harvest in its season.

[1 : 3 1] Harvest in its season both in the natural realm and in the spiritual realm too. But first of all, by way of introduction, I want us just to remind ourselves of the phenomenal growth of interest in horticulture, and how our channels on the TV are full of these programs on gardening.

And the experts are showing us tricks of the trade and how to do this and how to do that. But books abound. And if you're flying, I feel wait till you get them two for the price of one.

But they abound on the subject. People have an interest in growing things to see, to have the pleasure of seeing what they can achieve.

And we can understand that. And often, I think, people lose sight of the actual wonder of what's happening.

People tend to take a sense of personal achievement rather than notice the beauty and the genius of God in providing such beautiful things, such fruitful things.

[2 : 5 8] And inevitably, if we think far enough about it, fruitful seasons. I think, before we go much further, I just want to notice how that, no matter how good the plant or the tuber or the seed, no matter how much sunlight and water we have, things won't in and of themselves grow.

There's more to growing than meets the eye. Growth, life, development itself is a mystery. We can say, and scientists say, many things about it.

But the actual growing itself is locked up in the wisdom of God. We were singing in Psalm 104, that when the Spirit of God goes forth, he renews the face of the earth.

There is an energy, a life-giving energy put forth by him that causes things to grow. That points up God's faithful commitment to providing for the people of planet earth.

Reminding us of God's promise way back in the ancient times to Noah. You remember Genesis chapter 8, verse 22.

[4 : 2 5] God said that seed time and harvest, summer and winter, cold and heat would never cease as long as the earth remains.

And every year as harvest is concluded, we are to remind ourselves that God has kept his word.

He's kept his promise. And yes, I know, like you do, it's true that crops fail, harvests fail. Some parts of the world haven't had a harvest for years.

But the point here is that the general principle is fulfilled. God keeps his promise. And the truth is, as you and I know, that even where crops fail, and fail for year on year, people need not perish.

They need not die of hunger. You know and I know there is an abundance in the earth today. And if there's a will to move things around, to redistribute, then there is no real need for people to be perishing because of hunger.

[5 : 35] God is faithful to his promise. Seed time and harvest, summer and winter, cold and heat will never cease as long as the earth in its present form remains.

And what is true in the natural realm, and we'll look at that a bit more closely in a moment, is true in the spiritual realm as well.

Because the mouth of the Lord has spoken, there is a harvest, there is a time, a season for everything under the sun. And harvesting in the natural world is a season, and harvesting in the spiritual world has its season too.

God has said it, and we can encourage ourselves in the truth of it. And so for a wee while in thinking about harvest in its season, I want to think about these two points I've mentioned.

First of all, harvest in the natural realm. And to look at the context, to remind ourselves of the context that caused this psalm, as it were, to be penned.

[6 : 47] God's spirit working in the psalmist gives us imagery that deals with the farmer preparing the soil prior to planting and looking forward, despite the difficulties looking forward to a harvest.

And I remind you that the psalm has the context of the Israelites returning from the captivity. You may recall that there were two major movements, two major returns.

The first, we're perhaps more familiar with, and Zerubbabel and Joshua and the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah were involved with them.

But when the people went back to the land, the land was really spoiled. It had to be cleaned up. The ground had to be cleaned.

I'm not sure how much you know about it, but the tactic of people like the Assyrians and the Babylonians is that when they went into a country, they spoiled the agricultural land.

[7 : 57] They put great boulders in it. They made a mess of it. So that the people couldn't prosper. So that they were dependent upon those who had lordship over them.

And in time, of course, spoiled land then became overgrown with thorns and thistles. And so that's the context that these folks met when they returned to the land of their fathers.

And time didn't permit them to complete the cleanup. So they had to make the best of it. They hadn't a lot of time to clean the ground.

And they had to make the best of it. They did as much as they could. And then they banged down their seeds in hope. The situation wasn't promising.

I don't know if you, some of you may have actually been to Israel and seen a way up in the north towards the Golan. There are still places there where the land is like that.

[9 : 11] It's still in a mess. Still the boulders are there. They have the marks of time upon them. They haven't been moved for a long, long time. And the land is pretty poor.

It's just been left. And this is the sort of situation that faced these exiles. They had to make the best of it. Yes, they did some clearing.

But in their first year, they had to make the best of it. And they sowed seed in somewhat and promising soil. Hence, we read the words, Those who sow in tears.

They sowed in tears. Those who continually go forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing. That's the context of it. Things didn't look at all promising.

And the seed was sown with the tears of anxiety. I forget who said that. Some commentator said that the seed was sown with the tears of anxiety and uncertainty.

[10 : 16] Yet there was hope. There was hope of a harvest. If for no other reason than God had said, Seed time and harvest shall not cease.

And this emphasis comes through. And it tells us that even in the natural world, Before we get a harvest, work has to be done.

Preparation of the soil. Well, that's a great word in everything we tackle, isn't it? Preparation. Preparation, preparation, preparation.

And nowhere do we see that more than in preparing the soil for growing. It's hard work. And it can be discouraging work. Some of you, I suspect, remember when you were young, Having to clear some of the fields of boulders and stones In order to make it suitable for sowing the seed.

It's hard work. And yet, it was necessary work. And then you, of course, had the various stages of the growth.

[11 : 34] And that was more hard work. I remember when I was up in Boner Bridge And we were out in Migdale, up in the crofting area. You'd see the men with the hose going out to do the sweds.

And miserable work. Hard work. Keeping the sweds clear of weeds so that they could grow on. And then the next stage came, there'd be more ground to them.

And on the thing went, all the way through. It was a lot of work. And a long wait for the harvest.

Everything had to be done. And the crop needed to be tended. But, you see, as we were saying a moment or two ago, The fact of the matter is, when the crofter, the landholder, the farmer, Did all that was in his power to do, To make sure things would work, He couldn't make the stuff grow.

He couldn't make it grow. You can add this and that. And it stimulates.

[12 : 43] It feeds. It brings on. But it doesn't make the thing actually grow. The same is true in the 21st century.

No amount of technology. No amount of skill. But genetic manipulation and all that will actually make the thing grow.

It's like human life. You can do something to develop muscles. You can do something to develop bones and so on and so on.

But you're not making the growth. Growth is the progression of life in this or that.

And God alone gives that growth. The saying is true in nature and it is true in grace. God gives the increase, to use the AV, Or more precisely, God makes it grow.

[13 : 46] And all the farmer could do, When he had done all his effort, Is hope and pray. If he believed in God, He would pray to God that God would give him A good crop, a good harvest.

But the growth came from the hidden energy, The life-giving power of the Spirit of God.
And we were singing there, as I say in Psalm 104, Reminding ourselves of that very thing,
That when the Spirit of God moves in that way, Energizing, Then he gives the face of the
earth rebirth.

He makes things grow. And that is true wherever and whenever We can see the result of
it. And so we can thank God that this is true.

We can thank him in recognition, In acknowledging his great goodness to us. Oh, that
men would give praise to the Lord for his goodness, For his wonderful provision for the
sons of men.

I know, of course, Like most of you here today, That there was a day when we were in
school, That Harvest Thanksgiving was in place, In the school.

[15 : 15] It was something that came around with regularity. And it was something where God was
in the picture. Sadly, that's not at all as common nowadays.

God is not in the picture. Technology is glorified. The achievements of man are at the
center. Or in some places, Mother Earth gets the credit.

But we are to remind ourselves, And in our witness to other people, We are to remind
them, That God makes things grow.

We are to help them see what the Bible has to say, About God and harvesting. That God
causes things to grow, In the natural world.

And I hope that you now see, If you didn't see it before, Why we were reading there, In
Acts 14, Where Paul was at Lystra, And he was speaking to the people.

[16 : 16] He was telling them that, To worship human beings, To worship the creation, Is something
they had to ditch. They had to worship the living God, In heaven and earth, The sea and
all that's in them.

And he says, He overlooked, All that was going on. In former times. But now he is
commanding, All people to repent.

He left them to walk, In their own ignorance, But now he's saying to them, No. And yet
Paul says there, In Acts 14, Verse 17, For all that he left people, To their own desires, And
their own ways of worshipping, The creature, The creation.

He says this, Nevertheless, Nevertheless, God, God, Did not leave himself, Without a
witness, In that he did good, Giving rain, From heaven, And fruitful seasons, Fulfill, Filling
our hearts, With food, And gladness.

Interesting, You see that Paul introduces that there. You think superficially, Why did he do
that? He did it because it was, It was key to the point he was making, That although God
left them to their own devices, And their own ignorance, In worshipping the creation, God
was speaking to people, In providence, By the cycle of life, By the, The harvest coming
round, He did people good, Sending rain from heaven, And fruitful seasons, Fulfilling
people's hearts, With food and gladness.

[18 : 10] So it is important, For us to recognize that, To acknowledge it ourselves, And to help
others, To do the same. We are to incorporate, This kind of thing, Into our own witness,
For the Lord.

Paul did it. And I think further, That we have to, We have to testify, That even when
scarcity comes, That he calls us to praise him, To recognize that he gives, Or withholds,
According to his will.

We've been studying in Habakkuk, In the Thursday evening, Meetings, And at the end of
Habakkuk, Habakkuk was faced, With a famine situation, In the land, And that's what he
said, So this fail, For that fail, For there's, No, Stock, In the stalls, And so on, Yet I will
rejoice, In the Lord, I will glory in the God, Of my salvation.

We recognize, His faithfulness, In providing harvest, We recognize, His right, To withhold the blessing to. So that is harvest, Briefly considered, Harvest, In the natural world.

But then secondly, And finally, Harvest, In the spiritual realm. And the saying is true, As in nature, So in grace. As in nature, So in grace.

[19 : 43] This is the wonderful, And interesting thing, About this psalm. It catches together, Both sides. It talks to us, About a literal situation.

When the exiles returned, To a land that was, Bolder strewn, And full of thorns, And thistles. But it also talks to us, About harvest, In the spiritual realm.

The principles, Are the same, In the physical realm, As the spiritual realm. God, Gives, Growth.

And as, We look at this, Very briefly, I just want to remind you, That in the original setting, The returning captives, Came back, As it were, On the crest, Of a wave, Of a religious awakening, Among them.

God was at work, Among them. They wanted to go back, With a spiritual desire. It wasn't just, Going home.

[20 : 58] They were going back, To the land of promise. They were going back, With a spiritual appetite, For, For resettling, And reorganizing, The worship of God, There.

Their return, Was primarily, To be about, Spiritual business. And you see that, If you look in, In Ezra, But if you look in Haggai, As well.

The business was, To build, The temple. To, To, To get the altar, Up, And, Sacrifices reintroduced, To get the temple, Rebuilt.

And whenever, The work slackened, The prophets, Haggai, And Zechariah, Challenged, And rebuked them, And corrected. Reminding them, That God was among them.

But you see, Those folks found, When they got back there, There was much to do, And it couldn't be done, Without faith in the Lord. Spiritual work, Needs spiritual minds.

[22 : 12] The work of God, Cannot be accomplished, Without faith in him. The writer of the Hebrews, Doesn't say it in vain, Without faith, It is impossible, To please him.

That is saving faith, True faith in him. And the work of God, Won't go ahead otherwise. And you see, If you go back, To that original setting, There was much to do, In building, The people up, In their faith.

That's why the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, Encouraged, And yet they rebuked them too. There were so many distractions, In their lives.

And if you're thinking, About this, You'll see how this is, A relevance to ourselves. There are so many distractions, From the work of God, We're part of. So many things, We have to be busy about.

Aye, That was Martha's problem, Wasn't it? So many things, That had to be done. Yes, They were legitimate, But they were taking, Pre-eminence, In their thinking.

[23 : 24] They were taking, The place of pre-eminence. And we're told by Jesus, Mary chose the good part. Mary put the focus, Where it mattered.

Spiritual, Development, Spiritual growth, Requires us to be, Spiritually minded, And leaning on the Lord, By faith.

Spiritual cultivation, If you like, Is hard business. Developing in the faith, Is not automatic.

It is hard work. It is serious business. It demands of us often, Sacrifice. Putting aside, What we would find easier to do, And enjoyable.

For that which is difficult, Because we don't see, Much for it. You remember, How Jesus, When he told the parable, Of the sower, To the disciples, He talked about, Different ways, People are affected, By the sowing, Of the word.

[24 : 43] And he did that, With point. First, He showed that, There was much, Patience, Attaching to sowing, The seed. It doesn't happen.

It simply, Just doesn't happen. Work has to be done. Patient, Perseverance, In that work.

Which reminds me, That, I used to watch, One of the elders at home, Sowing, The seed, The old way, With the tray.

And he would be going, This way, And that way, And this way, And that way. It took a long time. It has to be done.

In the spiritual realm, Sowing the seed, Of the word, Of the kingdom, Is a slow process. It's true, Not only for preachers, It's true for the Lord's people, As they witness.

[25 : 48] And therefore, We have, We necessarily, To take a long term, View of the thing. We have to think, About much hope, Much tears, Much prayer, In the sowing, Of the word.

Because there are, Many obstacles, To people, Really, Benefiting, From the word. We have to, Where it is, Appropriate, We have to, Lovingly, Watch over those, In whom the seed, Is sown.

Jesus, Says in that parable, The enemy, Comes along, And he hinders, The work. As soon, As, The word, Is sown.

The enemy, Comes and he snatches it away. There are some people, Like that, As soon as they've heard it, It's back to business, As usual.

The enemy, Outsmarts him, He snatches it away, And we've therefore, Got to be watchful. Because he will work, Wherever, And whenever he can, To rob us, Of the blessing.

[27 : 01] Jesus, Talked in that, Same parable, Of the sower, About, The fear of persecution, And of hardship, And he said, That these things, Choke the word, In the human heart.

That can happen to us, The spiritual sowing, Doesn't benefit us. You remember how, And I think it's important, To notice this, Even the Lord's people, Can get into problems here, Those who profess his name, What does Jesus say, To the, To the seven churches, I'm only going to mention two, But, Remember, How was it that the church, Of Ephesus, Had this against it, The Lord said, But I have this against you, You have left, Your first, Left, Somewhere along the line, The love of, For Christ, That, That spurred them on, In his service, Had been departed from.

It doesn't mean, They didn't love him anymore, Oh, It's far more subtle than that. It meant that, They loved him less, And that means, They loved themselves more, And their own interests more, They were too occupied, Or preoccupied, With other things, And not things, Of Jesus Christ, Paul says, Paul says, In Philippians, Something that's, Quite staggering, That very thing, I've said, I've quoted, Even those around him, In his day, Too many loved, Their own interests, And not those, Of Jesus Christ, Spiritual development, Is something, That is hard, A hard business, Where there is growth, And there is a need,

For that growth, To be developed, To be brought on, It's a hard business, There are many things, To hinder, A fruitfulness, In the Lord's people, And the years, And the months, Go on, Without a sign, Of much, Fruitfulness, But that's true, As we spread the seed, As well, As we witness to people, The years, Roll on, And we, See very little, For the sowing, Of the seed, But that doesn't mean, We stop sowing the seed, It doesn't mean, That we give up on it, We are bound, By the very, By the very principles, We've been looking at, To sow in hope, To weep over what we do, To pray over what we do, He who continually, Notice the word, He who continually,

Goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again, With rejoicing, And whilst we are to take care, How we receive the seed ourselves, Which we've been looking at, And noticing the dangers, To that, Or whether it is, In sowing the seed, In terms of sharing the faith, Work must be done, Hard work, Agonizing work, Agonizing work, Weeping, And praying, And sowing, It won't do itself, It has to be done, And you see, Lest we lose heart, Lest we lose hope, In the whole business, God assures us here, Shall doubtless come again,

[31 : 12] With rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves with him, There will be a harvest, God makes things grow, And therefore I think you see, It's important for us, When we're under pressure, And we're not seeing very much happening, Not to become despairing, Not to give way, To hopelessness, My picture of this, And I have to confess, I need to use it, Quite often, My picture of this is, Is a little child, Throwing a tantrum, When they don't get what they want, And they can be quite a sight, Can't they?

Banging their fists, On whatever is near them, Wiggling and rolling on the ground, Yelping and screaming out, Because they're not getting, What they want, And I think you see, If we're honest in our hearts, We're a bit like that, With God, We don't get what we want from him, We want the increase, We want the harvest, And he delays giving it, And we're a bit brattish, Like that, We throw a tantrum or two, But you see, The way forward, Is not to grow weary, In sowing the seed, Not to grow weary, In doing good, It's the spiritual principle, Prepare the soil, Sow the seed, Water it with tears, Pray over it, And God himself, Will give the harvest, And the more I think we,

Take that to heart, The better it will be for us, Because we will be more firmly resolved, To wait upon him, To know that he is faithful to his word, To his promise, And that if we, Continue to do the business, He who continually goes forth, Weeping, Bearing seed for soil, Shall doubtless come again, With rejoicing, You remember on Monday evening, Duncan Macleod noted, That the, Sing psalms version of the psalm, Didn't have this doubtless, Of the metrical version, And I just made the remark, In the passing at the end, That, That doubtless, Is pretty close to the original, The Hebrew,

It is, Certainly, The two words, Bo yabo, Shall, Come, Shall come, And so the English translated, Shall doubtless, Or shall certainly, And that's the sense, That's meant in the original, There's certainty about it, Because God gives the increase, God gives the harvest, God makes things grow, And, And, We're not to take this, Just superficially, But get it into, The heart of our heart, And be convinced of it, And act upon it, If you think about it, There are some of us here today, I'm one of them certainly, There are some of us here today, Who were very in promising soil, For the seed, Yes, I say we, There are those of us here,

Like that, We were in promising soil, And perhaps the folk, Who prayed for us, And taught us, Thought, But some of them, Kept praying, And some of them, That taught us in Sunday school, And Bible class, And, And, And, And, Who tried to speak to us, In the way, Had the joy in the season, Of seeing, A change came, A harvest, In its season, I don't, Involve myself, Deliberately, Too much with, The church at home, I keep out of their business, So to speak, But I like to hear, This one's become a member, And that one's become a member, Because, The harvest, Has come in its season, I could write a good short story, About this one, And that one, Because I knew them so well, And it's great to hear,

[36 : 03] Soans has become a member now, The harvest, And its season, God, By his spirit, Vivified them, Quickened them, Give that power, To profess, And you see, We're to take this to heart, We're to recognize, That what may seem, On the face of it, Quite an promising soil, For the seed of the kingdom, The business is to sow it, To sow it in hope, To weep over it, To pray over it, To nurture it, When we see some signs, Of life, Knowing this, That, He shall doubtless, Come again, With rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves, With him, It is, The law, In the natural world,

And in the spiritual world, The law that the Lord, Would have us lay hold of, He makes things grow, Amen.