

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 out 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. God said that seed time and harvest, summer and winter, cold and heat, would never cease, as long as the earth remains.

[4 : 3 7] 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.

God is faithful to His promise. 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.

[6 : 01] 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 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.

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.

[7 : 21] The first, we're perhaps more familiar with under 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.

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.

[8 : 32] 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.

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 excels. 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.

[9 : 38] 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.

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.

[10 : 42] Preparation of the soil. That's a great word in everything we tackle isn't it? Preparation. 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.

And that was more hard work. I remember when I was up in Boner Bridge and we were out in Migdale up in the crafting area you'd see the men with the hose going out to do the sweds.

[11 : 47] And miserable work, hard work keeping the sweds clear of weeds so that they could grow on. And then the next stage came and there had been 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 land holder 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 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.

[13 : 06] 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.

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 it was it was something that came round with regularity and 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 centre 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

[16 : 11] Acts 14 where Paul was at Lystra and he was speaking to the people 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 and he says he 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 god did not leave himself without a witness in that he did good giving rain from heaven and fruitful seasons 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 harvest coming round he did people good sending rain from heaven and fruitful seasons filling people's hearts with food and gladness 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 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 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 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 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 boulders 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 they were going back to the land of promise they were going back with a spiritual appetite for resettling and reorganizing the worship of God there return was primarily to be about spiritual business and you see that if you look in Ezra but if you look in

Haggai as well the business was to build the temple 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 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 preeminence in their thinking they were taking the place of preeminence and we're told by Jesus Mary chose the good part

[23 : 32] 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 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 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 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 is it that the church of Ephesus had this against it the Lord said but I have this against you you have left your first love 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 more 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 the things of Jesus

Christ 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 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 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 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

[31 : 04] God assures us here shall doubtless come again 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 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 wriggling 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 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 doubtless is pretty close to the original the Hebrew it is certainly the two words 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 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 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 has become a member and that one has 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 someone has become a member now at the harvest in 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 unpromising 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

[37 : 09] Lord would have us lay hold of he makes things grow amen