

Sowing in Tears

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Date: 12 September 2021

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[0 : 00] I believe most of us, if not all of us, have lived long enough to experience that some seasons of life can be defined more by sorrows than joys.

I think in these seasons, many questions can arise in our minds. I think some of the questions that are common to us in these seasons that are marked by sorrow are, how can I continue on? Or why should I continue on? Or even worse, is it worth continuing on? I believe those questions and similar ones are answered for us in Psalm 126.

Psalm 126 is the psalm that we have come to this morning in our sermon series in the Psalms of Ascent. So if you have not yet turned there, please do so and follow along as I read Psalm 126, beginning in verse 1.

I'm reading from the English Standard Version. When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

[1 : 37] 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 and we are glad. 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.

Would you pray with me this morning? Heavenly Father, we bow our hearts this morning and we do so with gratefulness as we look to you to feed us from your word.

Lord, more than anything else, we recognize that we live by every word that proceeds out of your mouth. And we know, Lord, that you are the one who providentially orders all things and you have ordered and orchestrated and ordained that we would hear this word this morning from your word.

[3 : 10] Whether we are gathered in this place or we are watching by live stream or even listening in the days ahead. Would you speak to our hearts, Lord?

Lord, and Father, I pray once again that you would grant me grace to be faithful to your word. I pray that you would make me a sufficient minister of your gospel this morning.

And we pray, O Lord, that in the end, the truth of Psalm 126, your desired intent for it, will grip all of our hearts and we would live in the light of it.

We ask that you do this. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and for your glory we pray. Amen. So when we find ourselves in seasons of life that are more defined by sorrow than joy, and we ask questions like, how can I continue or why should I continue?

What is the message of Psalm 126? I think the message is this. Encouraged by memories of past restoration, God's people are called to pray for future restoration, sowing in tears and expecting one day to reap in joy.

[4 : 47] I think that is the message that Psalm 126 holds out to us. It is the reason we can press on in the midst of life, sorrows and tears.

And we have examples both in Scripture and in life that remind us of past restoration and fill our hearts with faith to pray for future restoration and encourages us to sow in tears with the hope that one day we will reap in joy.

And so when we find ourselves in such a place, whatever the cause, I believe Psalm 126 calls us to respond in two specific ways.

First, we are called to remember God's past restoration. That's what the psalmist says beginning in verse 1, verses 1 through 3.

Look at them again. 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.

[6 : 07] Then 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. The psalmist is looking back to a time of misfortune.

When the people of God were in a state of misfortune. They were in difficulty. And God amazingly restored their fortunes.

Meaning he had turned the circumstances that were unfavorable to being favorable. The translators of the New International Version say that it was a time when the Lord brought back the captives to Zion.

Pointing to the Babylonian captivity. We can't be sure of the circumstances but what we are sure of is that God's people were in some kind of a collective misfortune that God turned into good fortune. That's what we can't be sure of. And the psalmist is remembering that time. He's calling the community of pilgrims as they would journey to Jerusalem to recall the time when God did that.

[7 : 25] He said it seemed so good it seemed so good to be true. He said it was almost like you thought you were dreaming. It's like when you have one of those dreams you ever had a dream that you woke up to and you saw you woke up because the dream was so wonderful and so filled with joy and sometimes when we get those experiences in life we're thinking I must be dreaming this can't be real.

The psalmist says it was like that. He said this was such an extraordinary turn of events. We were like we were dreaming. The Lord in great mercy visited his people and restored their fortunes. It was not a dream. And the people who languished under tears and sorrows and misfortune found themselves laughing and shouting for joy.

And the event that the psalmist has in view was such a big deal that the nations around them were aware of it. They observed it. They could not help but take note of it.

And it was no mistake what happened. They said the Lord has done great things for them. They recognized something supernatural has happened.

[8 : 48] Israel's God has acted on their behalf. The God who made heaven and earth he acted on their behalf. In the King James version it uses the word heathen referring to the Gentile nations.

And it's saying that our believers watched this marvelous thing that God did. this marvelous turn of circumstances for his people and they said the Lord has done great things for them.

and one of the hints that the event was the return of the Jews from Babylonian captivity is that that was a very dramatic event that the nations were aware of far and wide.

It was when Cyrus the king of Persia defeated Babylon and in a year's time he ordered that Jerusalem would be rebuilt and the temple would be restored and he issued this decree that all those who wanted to go back and rebuild the city and rebuild the temple they were free to go. We find this in 2nd Chronicles chapter 36 verses 22 to 23. He gives this decree which was dramatic and amazing that conquering kings just don't do that.

[10 : 09] But Isaiah had prophesied some 160 years before that Cyrus one named Cyrus would rise up and would do this very thing.

And Israel's sorrows were turned to laughter and shouts of joy shouts of uncontainable joy. Matthew Henry writes about these verses he's a deceased Puritan theologian and he writes those who were laughed at now laugh and a new song is put in their mouths it was a laughter of joy in God not scorn of their enemies.

And Israel was the blight of the nations it was they were the scorn of the nations but when God acted in this way for them their joy was in the Lord it was not mocking their enemies who laughed at them wasn't saying aha now you laugh at that it wasn't that they were filled with laughter of joy in God not scorn of their enemy they were too happy for what the Lord had done to be thinking about their enemies and then we see in verse 3 that the psalmist picks up the words of the nations and he says the very same thing he acknowledges that yes the Lord has done great things for us and we are glad I wonder if you've ever experienced some kind of restoration in your life some kind of restoration like what the psalmist is remembering here in Psalm 126 you were in difficulty you were in hardship it seems like there was no way out and God in his mercy delivered you and it seemed too good to be true and you almost thought you were dreaming but it was real and if you experienced that

I'm sure you remember the unbridled joy that filled your soul and the truth is the harder the circumstance we face the more difficult the dilemma that we're in the greater the joy of God's restoration the harder the sorrows of misfortune the greater the joys of restored fortunes when we

study Israel's history one of the clear patterns we see is that without exception except for when they were in Egypt it's the only exception except when they were in Egypt all of the other times of national decline and hardship were connected to their disobedience to God it's connected to their sin and each time the Lord showed mercy and restored their fortunes restored the nation and if indeed this event is referring to the

Babylonian captivity and when the captives were released it was an expression of God's mercy in spite of their sin that led them into Babylonian captivity although many of the misfortunes and hardships we face in this life are from are not from our sin I should say some of them are just a part of living and are broken in the fallen world but some of them are because of our sin because of our disobedience and maybe that's your situation this morning and if it is we can take great comfort from the Lord's dealing with the nation of Israel that despite their disobedience he was merciful to visit them and to restore them we should take comfort from Psalm 103 where we're told the

[14 : 33] Lord does not deal with us according to our sins nor does he deal with us or repay us according to our iniquities this should encourage all of us because the reality is that for some of us when we find ourselves often times in difficulty and we realize that it is our sin that has brought us there our typical response is we feel condemned we don't want to look to God we have no faith to look to God for mercy feeling we don't deserve it and the truth is we don't that's the only kind of mercy that's available that's the only mercy that is available and mercy by its very nature is it is undeserved and so when we find ourselves in these seasons of sorrow whatever the reason whatever the cause Psalm 126 calls us to remember God's past restoration of his people both in scripture and in our own lives but that's not all that Psalm 126 calls us to do not only are we called to remember

God's past restoration but Psalm 126 also calls us to pray for God's future restoration and this is my second and final point that's what the psalmist does in verse 4 notice how he does it he prays restore our fortunes oh Lord like the streams in the Negev if I was one who had better dramatic skills I would read this with the exclamation mark as I should and I wish I could this morning but as best I can say he's shouting out he's oh restore our fortunes oh Lord like the streams in the Negev he prays and he draws on experience that these people knew so well they knew the streams of the Negev they knew the whole area of Negev Negev was in the southern part of Israel it was a very dry land it was in a desert state for most of the year but there would be these occasional rainstorms that would come and immediately the river beds would just rush with water it was so hard that the water would just sit on top and it would just be rushing water all around and immediately this desert turns in to a gushing stream and they knew quite well this picture he says God do it like that God bring us from this parched arid land to this water drenched land he's saying oh God what you've done in the past Lord do it again restore us oh God but he adds how he wants that to be like the streams in the

Negev this is an unbridled cry for restoration brothers and sisters we must do likewise years ago I heard about a man who was drowning and he was they say he was an Englishman so he was very properly and he was going down and he said physical assistance and he went down again he said physical assistance and when he saw that he was drowning and drinking he said help help help help and people ran and rescued him out of the water but when he was saying physical assistance nobody knew what he was talking about and you know sometimes we can be like that with the Lord we're dire straits parched ground and we send physical assistance no the psalmist says oh God restore our fortunes again

God restore them as the streams in the negev you know one of the realities for us and I think you would agree with me is that rather than praying and crying out to God we are prone to complain we're prone to gripe we're prone to be angry at God even many times when it is our own disobedience that may have landed us in a place of difficulty or distress and rather than ask our merciful God to have mercy on us and to restore our fortunes we are bitter in heart and we complain and we walk around with a sense of entitlement instead of throwing ourselves on the mercy of God and say oh God restore my fortunes again restore it like the streams of

[20 : 01] Negev Lord do it suddenly rush it over me we must pray like the psalmist and we must cry out to God for restoration but notice that while the psalmist calls us to prayer and prayer is the most important thing that we can be doing in these seasons of sorrow and sadness and hardship that's not the only thing that we are called to do we are called to this important activity to pray but we are

also called to do something else look at verses five and six 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

I think what the psalmist is saying to us is even as we pray to God as we remember his past restoration as we pray for future restoration he says to us press on he says press on in your circumstances continue to sow even though you sow in tears continue to live continue to work continue to press on and the promise is if we do we will reap and the reaping will be joyful we are being called despite our tears to press on and to continue to sow now the psalmist was speaking to a group of people who they understood agriculture their whole economy was based on agriculture that's where they lived but

I don't think that the psalmist is exclusively talking about literally planting seed in the ground although that's certainly included I think instead the psalmist is calling us to press on in whatever painful endeavor or circumstance that we are in and to do what amounts to sowing in that circumstance to do what amounts to sowing to bring that desired outcome it's a call to do good despite the tears it's a call to do good and to press on remembering what God did in the past hoping for what we desire that he would do in the future and we press on in the moment and we continue to sow we continue to live life we continue to be faithful in those endeavors because I think we all know the truth is sometimes we don't want to sow we just want to take a break from it all and say you know what

I just need to this no he says you press on you continue to sow and for some of us this morning this hard circumstance maybe it's a parenting situation maybe you're a parent with a wayward child the child from whom you may even be estranged and there is grief and there is sorrow and there are tears and you've prayed and prayed and there's been no change well sowing for you is to press on in that situation continue to do good waiting and praying praying for the day of his or her salvation perhaps your husband or a wife and maybe the source of your tears is marriage sowing for you is to continue to pray to God for restoration to continue to do good as you patiently wait for the joyful day of reaping the harvest of a better marriage that glorifies

God maybe your source of tears is as an employee or maybe in your career whatever the circumstance whatever it means to press on in that employment situation press on and do it sow those seeds despite the tears hoping and looking for the day that God will bring a joyful harvest maybe you're in business and this is a very difficult time for a lot of businesses and maybe you're tempted to throw in the towel but for you continuing to sow is to continue to press on to continue to be faithful continue to pray continue to cry out to God that he would restore the fortunes of your business and day by day doing the things that you are called to do and waiting for the day of the Lord's restoration brothers and sisters as we journey in this life the message of Psalm 126 to the pilgrims in the psalmist's day is the same message for us today it's a message of hope reminding us that God has brought great restoration to his people in the past and we could and should likewise pray for his restoration to continue to faithfully sow even with tears because

[25 : 56] God has sufficiently shown us that he is merciful and that he visits his people at harvest time with a harvest that will fill their hearts with amazing joy now I would be less than faithful this morning if I don't remind us that it is the Lord who ultimately determines when and how we reap from faithful praying and sowing and waiting whether we reap in this life or we reap in the life to come it would be wonderful if I could stand here this morning and tell you that every single event of waiting and praying and sowing will end in the reaping of that for which we wait and hope and pray in this life but that's not the witness of scripture and it is not the witness of life scripture tells us that there are some we read about them in Hebrews chapter 11 who died in faith not having received the promise they died being faithful sowing many of them in tears but they did not reap in joy on this side of life some of

God's people do not reap the answers to their prayers the harvest of their sowing in this lifetime some do but some do not but we shouldn't despair if it will be our lot that the answers and the harvest comes in the life to come we shouldn't despair over that because the truth is anything that we get in this life is still not permanent there is no joy there is no restoration that we receive in this fallen and broken world that will last brothers and sisters and sometimes the great disappointment for us is that we forget that and we ought not to forget that because what that does is it tempers even the way we view these things in life because we realize that they are not permanent there is no permanent harvest of joy on this side of eternity

Psalm 126 helps us to see that because here we see the psalmist reminding the nation of Israel of a past time of devastation and difficulty when the Lord restored their fortunes and clearly they are in another time where the psalmist would cry out restore our fortunes again oh Lord and when we live long enough we begin to see the patterns and the cycles and the repetition in life life is filled with brokenness but we should entrust to the Lord the sovereign and wise and good God whether the reaping is in this life or whether the reaping is in the life to come in truth the life to come will bring us eternal joy that will never ever be broken

I want you to notice that verses five and six are saying the same thing they're not saying something different I think if you look at it you'll see that verse five is saying something generally those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy and then verse six is saying the same thing in a personal way in a specific way he who goes out weeping bearing the seed for sowing shall come home with shouts of joy bringing his sheaves with him you know this morning I believe that there are some of us who the Lord would have to hear what he's saying to us in verse six rather than verse five I think there's a personal sense that the Lord is speaking to some and he's saying to you he who goes out weeping bearing the seed for sowing shall come home with shouts of joy bringing his sheaves with him as if to say to you personally keep on sowing keep on pressing there is a harvest that will come to you continue to pray continue to wait continue to be faithful do those things that you know you need to do and you trust the Lord to give you that harvest of joy whether in this life or in the life to come but beyond our personal need for restoration and I need to pray and to press on sowing seeds there is a need for corporate restoration of God's people and the

Lord has given us the promise that he will one day restore his people we still are a fallen people he will fully redeem us from the fall and he will usher in a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells listen to the vision of John that he writes for us in Revelation 21 verses 1 through 4 he writes then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more and I saw the holy city new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying behold the dwelling place of God is with man and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people and God himself will be with them as their

[32 : 49] God he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away brothers and sisters this is the restoration that awaits the people of God God will bring us into the new Eden we have fallen from the first seed been cast out of it through our forefather Adam through the last Adam we will be restored again into the presence of God we will be restored into the new Eden that God even now is preparing for those who love him that brothers and sisters is the ultimate restoration and that is one that will not be such that we will find ourselves again crying for another that is it that is the ultimate it is the restoration of restorations and may we long for that day and may we faithfully live for that day even sowing seed in the midst of tears because that day the joy of the restoration of that day are beyond the joys of anything we've ever known because we will be with the

Lord forever delighting in him and in his presence for whom we're told there's the fullness of joy the fullest expression of joy that we can ever know and so as we journey together may this be our vision of home may this be our vision of the ultimate restoration that we both desire and need let's pray oh Lord I pray that you would speak to our hearts especially those of us who find ourselves in seasons of sorrow where we are in need of your restoration would you help us oh Lord to be reminded of your great mercy to your people in the past that you've restored fortune from misfortune

God would you give us a vision of the future that you would hope for future restoration and not just in this life but beyond this life the ultimate restoration of your people back into your presence Lord you know what each of us needs and you know where we are this morning and so I pray that you would speak to our hearts in your sufficiency and care for us as only you can as you leave today may the king of ages the one who is immortal invisible and the only God the one to whom belongs honor and glory enable you to press on in all of life circumstances even sowing in tears may he enable you to look for the ultimate day when we will reap the harvest of full and final redemption through Jesus

Christ our Lord Amen Amen