

Psalm 126

A song of ascents

1. When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed.
- 2 Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."
- 3 The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.
- 4 Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negev.
- 5 Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.
- 6 He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

Psalm 126

- 1 When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, We were like those who dream.**
- 2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."**
- 3 The LORD has done great things for us, And we are glad.**
- 4 Bring back our captivity, O LORD, As the streams in the South.**
- 5 Those who sow in tears Shall reap in joy.**
- 6 He who continually goes forth weeping, Bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, Bringing his sheaves with him.**

The Blessing of the Harvest

I want you to look at Psalm 126. I call this message "The Blessing of the Harvest." At the end of this message I will invite you to make a commitment to the Lord of the Harvest.

This Psalm probably dates from the time of Ezra and the return of God's people to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity. God had acted according to his promises and had set the people free from their captivity. This is the song of those who have been saved from bondage. Redemption is when God sets us free. God is in the business of setting His people free. In this song we see what God does in and through a person that has been saved.

1. They **Testify** of their **Experience** with God.

- A. It is a **real** salvation.

"When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion," Notice that it is the Lord that has done this. There was a divine timing in this turn around. When the Lord gets involved He turns around human predicaments. Until God stepped in, the nation of Judah was still in captivity. Until God stepped in, Hannah was still barren. Until God stepped in, Lazarus was still locked up in the tomb. Until God stepped in you were still dead in your trespasses and sins.

But God does step into our misery and into our lost and rebellious lives. And when God steps in, He makes a change. The words **"brought back"** in this verse are used again in verse 4. That Hebrew word (shuwb) can mean to "bring back," to "turn again," to "turn around," to "restore" or "refresh." When the Lord steps into our lives He

overturns things; He reserves our direction; He restores our relationship; He brings us from death to life.

Even though it may seem so good to be a dream, it is real. For the returning captives the reality was so good that it was unbelievable. It almost seemed like a dream. **"We were like those who dream."** When God gave a turn around it was more than they imagined.

Acts 12:9 – When God set the apostle Peter free from Herod's prison, he thought he saw a vision—he thought he was dreaming! In verse 11, after Peter was out in the street, he said *"Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting."*

Have you ever had a dream and you woke up and wished it were real? This one is for real.

B. It was a **recognizable** Salvation.

"Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing." They were glad and rejoiced and laughed and sang. You cannot separate gratitude from gladness. When God steps in and changes you, you cannot hide your joy. When the Lord saves us He places His Holy Spirit in us who then begins to bear fruit in our lives. And a fruit of the Spirit is JOY!

Even the people of other nations recognized that the Israelites' gladness was because God had done great things for them.

As Christians we ought to be characterized by joy. Joy should so overflow through our lives that others will notice. It is a depressing thing to see a sad, glum Christian. Think about what God has done for us. Verse 3 says, **"The LORD has done great things for us, And we are glad."** They recognized that God had done great things for them and they were filled with joy.

What has God done for you? He has loved you. He has rescued you from sin, death and hell. He has forgiven all your sins. He has given you eternal life. He has given you the promise of heaven. He has given you his Holy Spirit to comfort you, teach you and empower you. He has given you the privilege of prayer. He has placed you in the family of God. He has gifted you for ministry. Listen, God gave up His very own Son unto death in order to give you life. **"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"** (Romans 8:32).

If God has done all those great things for us and more—rejoice!

When we rejoice, the lost people around us will notice. Maybe one of the reasons we are not seeing a greater harvest is that we have forgotten to rejoice. When is the last time an unbeliever noticed your joy? Has anyone asked you lately why you have such joy in your life? We must rejoice, publicly declaring what God has done and give God the glory for it all.

Those who have been saved **Testify** of their **Experience** with God.

2. They **Pray** for a Complete **Restoration** (Pray for the Lost).

In verse 4 the prayer is “**turn again the captivity**,” “**bring back our captivity**,” “**restore our fortunes**,” or “**release again the prisoners**.”

They were praying God to restore, or bring back what had been taken captive. Now you might think, “wait a minute, I thought God had already returned the captives. That’s what all the rejoicing was about, right?”

Their rejoicing led to their concern for others. They were praying for God to return what they had lost. What had they lost? Not only their homes and fortunes but especially their families and fellow countrymen.

Only a small remnant of the Israelite people had returned to the promised land. Many were still living in exile. I believe they are really praying for God to return those who were still in Babylon, in Persia, and other far away places. They would not be satisfied until all were released from bondage.

This is an intense prayer. They were praying for streams in the south, the Negev. Isaiah prophesied about the return from exile and said, (Isa. 43:19 -- **Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness And rivers in the desert.**) The area South of Beersheba is called the Negev. In the summer it is normally arid and utterly dry. But when the spring rains come the dry streams quickly fill and flood. The change comes with an intense power. With that same intensity they are praying that God would rapidly restore their captivity. They pray for God to fulfill quickly His promises of complete restoration. They are praying that God’s blessings would overflow like a flash flood.

Have you prayed like that?

3. They **Follow** God’s **Program** for the Harvest.

In verses 5 and 6 there are four action words that tell God’s program for the Harvest.

1. **Going** – In verse 6 it starts with “**he who goes out**” the NJKV reads, “**He who continually goes forth . . .**” The idea is that the harvest comes to the one who persistently, continually keeps on going. Jesus said “**Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations . . .**” Literally it reads “**As you are Going**” make disciples. It suggests that we are making disciples as we go through this world, as we go through life.

Preacher John Wesley once said, “The church must go to the lost or go to oblivion.”

Billy Graham once said, “Christians must never forget the little word, go. It is two-thirds of the word God, one third of the word Gospel, and half the word good. It is a little word, with a big meaning.”

No farmer can expect to harvest a crop if he sits in his house and never goes out into the field. Jesus told His disciples, “**Behold, I say**

to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" Are we going? Or are we expecting to get a harvest simply sitting on our church pews? Are we going or are we just hoping they'll come? God's program for the harvest always starts with going.

2. **Weeping** – Verse 6 continues, "He **who goes out weeping.**" By sowing tears of repentance over sin, the nation reaped the harvest of a joyful return to the land of Israel. Psalm 137 shows the attitude of sorrow and repentance that the people had in exile, "**By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept When we remembered Zion.**" In exile Daniel prayed a prayer of repentance, Ezekiel prayed in repentance, Nehemiah prayed in repentance. They sowed in tears. Verse 5 says, "**Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.**"

The late Dr. B.R. Lakin once said, "One of the major problems with the modern church is that it is filled with technology, but empty of tears!!"

The winners of souls must first be the weepers for souls. Tears of earnestness produce tears of repentance. In the New Testament gospels we see that Jesus wept three times.

1. Over a friend - Lazarus (John 11:35) To be resurrected
2. Over a nation- that rejected him (Matthew 23:27)
3. Over a world headed for ruin (Luke 22:39-46)

When is the last time you prayed with tears over those who are lost? God promises joy to those who sow in tears. Start with tears over your own sin and the sin of God's people, tears of repentance will lead to a concern for the lost. And as we pray intensely for them, we will find reason to rejoice when God saves them.

3. **Sowing** – "**Carrying seed to sow**" or "**Bearing precious seed.**" Our seed that we sow is the Word of God (Luke 8:11). When is the last time you carried the Word of God to someone? Do you go forth carrying your seed with you?

Richard Weaver earned his living in the mines. But being a Christian, he had the higher priority, however, of trying to bring his associates in contact with the Savior and His soul-restoring Word. While most of the men were indifferent, one became offended by his witness, and finally exclaimed, "I'm sick of your constant preaching. I've a good mind to smack you in the face!" "Go ahead if it will make you feel better," replied Weaver. The man immediately struck him a stinging blow. The Christian did not retaliate but turned the other cheek. Again the unbeliever struck him and then walked away, cursing under his breath. Weaver called after him, "I forgive you, and still pray that the Lord will save you!" The next morning his assailant was waiting for him when he came to work "Oh, Dick," he said, his voice filled with emotion, "do you really forgive me for what I did yesterday?" "Certainly," said Weaver extending his hand. As he told him again the message of salvation, God opened the man's heart, and he received Christ.

We must go with God's message.

We must go with God's ministry.

We must go with God's Word.

4. **Reaping** – **"Bringing his sheaves with him."** God provides the Harvest. Sorrow in sowing produces rejoicing in reaping.

What a blessing it is to be saved and to be a part of God's program for the harvest. We who know Jesus Christ have received too much to keep it to ourselves. We must intentionally sow the seed with tears that we might reap with rejoicing.

I read an article is based on a sermon by Del Tarr who served as a missionary for fourteen years in West Africa. His story points out the price some people pay to sow the seed of the gospel in hard soil.

Missionary Del Tarr wrote,

I was always perplexed by Psalm 126 until I went to the Sahel, that vast stretch of savanna more than four thousand miles wide just under the Sahara Desert. In the Sahel, all the moisture comes in a four month period: May, June, July, and August. After that, not a drop of rain falls for eight months. The ground cracks from dryness, and so do your hands and feet. The winds of the Sahara pick up the dust and throw it thousands of feet into the air. It then comes slowly drifting across West Africa as a fine grit. It gets inside your mouth. It gets inside your watch and stops it. The year's food, of course, must all be grown in those four months. People grow sorghum or milo in small fields.

October and November...these are beautiful months. The granaries are full -- the harvest has come. People sing and dance. They eat two meals a day. The sorghum is ground between two stones to make flour and then a mush with the consistency of yesterday's Cream of Wheat. The sticky mush is eaten hot; they roll it into little balls between their fingers, drop it into a bit of sauce and then pop it into their mouths. The meal lies heavy on their stomachs so they can sleep.

December comes, and the granaries start to recede. Many families omit the morning meal. Certainly by January not one family in fifty is still eating two meals a day.

By February, the evening meal diminishes. The meal shrinks even more during March and many children succumb to sickness. You don't stay well on half a meal a day.

April is the month that haunts my memory. In it you hear the babies crying in the twilight. Most of the days are passed with only an evening cup of gruel.

Then, inevitably, it happens. A six- or seven-year-old boy comes running to his father one day with sudden excitement. "Daddy! Daddy! We've got grain!" he shouts.

"Son, you know we haven't had grain for weeks."

"Yes, we have!" the boy insists. "Out in the hut where we keep the goats -- there's a leather sack hanging up on the wall -- I reached up and put my hand down in there -- Daddy, there's grain in there! Give it to Mommy so she can make flour, and tonight our tummies will be full and we can sleep!"

The father stands motionless. "Son, we can't do that," he softly explains. "That's next year's seed grain. It's the only thing between us and starvation. We're waiting for the rains, and then we must use it."

The rains finally arrive in May, and when they do the young boy watches as his father takes the sack from the wall and does the most unreasonable thing imaginable. Instead of feeding his desperately weakened family, he goes to the field and with tears streaming down his face, he takes the precious seed and throws it away. He scatters it in the dirt! Why? Because he believes in the harvest.

The seed is his; he owns it. He can do anything with it he wants. The act of sowing it hurts so much that he cries. But as the African pastors say when they preach on Psalm 126, "Brother and sisters, this is God's law of the harvest. Don't expect to rejoice later on unless you have been willing to sow in tears."

And I want to ask you: How much would it cost you to sow in tears? I don't mean just giving God something from your abundance, but finding a way to say, "I believe in the harvest, and therefore I will give what makes no sense. The world would call me unreasonable to do this -- but I must sow regardless, in order that I may someday celebrate with songs of joy." -- Copyright Leadership, 1983

Are you ready to make that kind of commitment? Over the next four weeks we will be looking more intensely at four areas. And I want you to pray about each one:

1. **Going** – Where will you go? Will you claim a group of people or an area of homes for Jesus Christ? Make a commitment to GO.
2. **Weeping** – Will you ask God to help you to pray with brokenness for the unreached families and individuals in the area you have claimed? Will you make a prayer list? Will you conduct a prayer walk? Will you designate your home as a neighborhood house of prayer?
3. **Sowing** – Will you attempt to place the seed of the Word of God in every unreached home in the area you have claimed? Will you give Bibles, tracts, New Testaments, Jesus videos? Will you sow your area with seeds of kindness?
4. **Reaping** – Will you receive Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior? Will you attempt to share the gospel with at least one person before Christmas? Will you invite at least one person to the Harvest Day in Sunday School and worship?

With God's help you can make a difference. You can touch someone for Christ this week.