

Psalm 126 • Sowing in tears, reaping with joy

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Psalm 126 is a short Psalm. It is about the return of the Jewish exiles from wherever they've been captive. Over the course of the history of Israel, there were many times that the Jews were taken captive by a neighboring country.

Of course, the most popular captivity was what took place when the Babylonians conquered Judah and took the Israelites away for a period of 70 years. And in fact, some scholars believe that this psalm is actually speaking of the return of the exiles after the Babylonian captivity.

But frankly, it doesn't matter. Because all of the sentiments and the statements that this psalm conveys are applicable to any return of the people of Israel.

And it says in verse 1, if you look with me there,

*"When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream."
(ESV)*

And that's a poetic way of saying, "It was like we were dreaming." They had longed for such a time that they would be returned to their homeland. And he's saying here that it was just like a dream.

And then he says,

"² Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; (and) then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them.""

So he's saying that, even people among the other nations were talking about the Lord's goodness to the Israelites, to bring them back to their homeland.

He says,

"³ The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad."

We read about this initial jubilation that accompanied the release of the captives. The return to their own land. How delightful it was. And what a reason it gave for them to praise the Lord.

And then there's a prayer that is essentially bound up in verse 4, where the psalmist says,

"Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb!"

And this is a simple request that God would replenish their prosperity. Coming back now to the land, they had probably had very little. When nations would come and conquer Israel, they would often take the blessings. They would strip the fields. They would take all of the things that they had worked so long to build up and establish in their homeland.

And there's a prayer now that is given for the Lord's blessing and prosperity upon all who have come to resettle back in their homes and restart their businesses. And of course, they also would need protection from any nearby enemies that might want to take advantage of their recent repatriation of the land and the tender condition that would produce in any nation.

I want you to take very special notice of these next couple of verses here in this Psalm. Because they are very important.

He writes,

"5 Those who sow in tears (and to "sow" means to "plant." Those who plant in tears) shall reap with shouts of joy!

6 He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him."

Now I want you to stop there for a moment. And I want to talk to you a little bit about what these verses mean. Because you have to understand that it was probably very hard. And it's hard for us to imagine what it would be like to be taken away from our homeland.

Can you imagine being taken away from your home? And not just your home but your state, and your nation. And you're carted off somewhere else to live for a period of time in captivity. And then after a period of time, for whatever reason, you're released from that captivity. And you're allowed to go back home. But imagine what your home would be like after being gone for so long.

Now, you got to also remember these people were living in an "agrarian" society. They didn't have a local grocery store to go down and get their food from. They've got to grow it. They've got to grow it out of the land. Right? Which means, there's going to be nobody who's been taking care of growing plants and crops during their absence. Right? Nobody's been doing it.

You can imagine that the first year coming home. Of course, there's jubilation in coming home, we've been released from our captivity. But now guess what? There's nothing to eat. Or, there's at least very little to eat. I mean, yeah, there's maybe some fruit that's on some fruit trees. And we can do a little hunting or whatever the case might be.

But as far as crops go, there's probably a little seed left to plant. But you can't use that grain to eat. You got to plant it. I mean, you could use it to eat, I suppose. But then what are you going to do? Then you got nothing to plant with. No crops to harvest. They got to start, they got to plant. And then they got to wait for the next harvest to come.

I don't know if you can imagine what that would produce in a nation coming back home for like the first year. There's going to be a year of great leanness. Right? And you can imagine that there's going to be all kinds of rationing and conserving of whatever they've got to eat. And that's just going to be the rule of the day for a long period of time.

And the picture that is given here in these last couple of verses, is of the farmer who goes out to sow his crop. Because he's only got just a little bit of grain left with which to sow that crop. And he's got this seed and he's throwing it into the ground. Literally, into these plowed furrows in the ground in the hope that there's going to be a harvest in the coming months. That he's going to be able to bring out of that field and he's going to be able to feed his family.

But as he reaches into his apron, and that's where they would carry the seed in the apron. And they would, just reach in and then scatter it onto the ground. And as he's reaching into his apron to do that, he's probably thinking to himself, my wife and my kids would probably benefit from this grain right now. Right now. I mean, they're hungry right now but I've got to use this grain. And I've got to plant my field. Because I can't just take care of them today. I got to take care of them for the many tomorrows that are still to come. So, he goes forth sowing his seed.

But the picture of this, that the psalmist gives, is that he sows in weeping. He goes forth weeping as he sows because he knows that he's taking food out of his

children's mouths. But again, he says, that he shall come forth with rejoicing when he ultimately brings in the harvest, brings in the sheaves from that harvest, and brings the food along with it. He goes forth sowing the seed, believing that his efforts are going to be rewarded.

And he knows that it'll be rewarded with joy and laughter. There's a time of leanness right now. My kids are home crying for something to eat. We sow in tears, but we will reap with joy.

Now, why do I spend so much time talking about that? Well, the important thing to see here is that these verses are laying out for you and I, a principle that goes far beyond what is actually happening in the life of the Israelites at this time when they've come back into their land.

Because this whole idea of sowing in tears and reaping in joy is one that applies to the spiritual realm in many different ways. And it's one that we often forget about. We forget that even in the New Testament, Paul talks about the fact that we groan as in the pains of childbirth in our life, living our life today. (2 Corinthians 5:2)

We know that we're living in bodies that are constantly breaking down, decaying and getting older and more feeble. (2 Corinthians 5:4) We know that. But we also know that God has something better planned for us. And so we groan. Paul says, meanwhile, we groan as in the pains of childbirth. We're living in that sort of a thing. We're giving of our energy. We're giving of our lives. But we sow in tears knowing by faith, that we're going to reap with joy.

And I think about all of the missionaries throughout the years, who have gone out into various mission fields and sacrificed so much. Lived sacrificially. Lived that life of leanness. Maybe living in a place that you and I wouldn't even want to visit. Perhaps, enduring things like poverty and even the potential loss of life that living in certain areas of the world can potentially produce. And yet they do it for the joy that awaits them, for the... in the harvest of souls.

And so it's this same principle of going forth reaping, or rather, sowing in tears that they might reap with joy. It's the same thing.

I often see when I talk to maybe a woman who cries out day and night for her unsaved husband or her unsaved children. She endures the pain of the present moment knowing that she is sowing in tears. Sowing seeds of prayer. Belief. Laying down that seed of prayer with the faith that she's going to one day see a harvest and be able to rejoice in that harvest.

The harvest is coming. And it's a great and joyful time. It's something that you and I, we don't get to experience if we've never worked on a ranch or farm. It wouldn't be a ranch necessarily, but a farm. And I never lived on a farm. But I lived in rural areas and most of my friends were farmers, frankly.

And during certain times of the year, I would, because I had nothing else better to do, I would go out and help them with the harvest. And it was a lot of fun frankly. And it was a joyful time for the farmers because this is like payday. They work long and hard.

They're spending money throughout the course of the year in all the things that they have to do to get their crop in the field. And then when it finally is there, whether they were harvesting soybeans or corn, which is what we grew in Minnesota. Bringing that crop in from the field was a real joyful time. And people were happy because it was payday.

And the harvest is a joyful time. But many times, many times, the planting, and the nurturing, and the cultivating that goes along with the whole farming idea, is a very trying and very difficult time that calls for great patience and so forth.

And no less in the spiritual realm. And I'm aware that some of you are sowing in tears. I know that. Because I heard you talk about it. Whether you've got an unsaved family member or loved one. Or maybe you've got a broken marriage. Or a broken relationship with a family member. Or something in your life is just not as it should be. And you're praying about it. And you're crying out to God night and day for healing and restoration and you're sowing in tears.

But we do that knowing that there's a day down the road when our prayers are going to come to fruition in the sense of the answers that God has and so forth. Just know that this is a principle of the Lord.