

**Psalm 126: 1-6; "The Lord has done Great Things for Us",
A Communion Sermon Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
in preparation for partaking of the Lord's Supper,
on March 1st, 2009, in the Morning Worship Service.**

This Psalm is relating the experience of the those Jews from Jerusalem and Judea who were taken captive to Babylon, and after 70 years God Himself brought them back to dwell in the land and rebuild the temple and conduct holy worship unto Him once again. In this Psalm it is the captivity of Zion, the Old Testament church of God which is in view. But it is a prophetic Psalm, in two senses, for the New Testament Church of God as well. This Psalm will have a great fulfillment someday in the conversion of the Jews to Jesus Christ, as a nation and as a people. And it will also have a fulfillment for the New Testament Church coming back from their "Babylonian Captivity"; of having been taken captive spiritually through believing in the false doctrine of Roman Catholicism and liberal Protestantism, during the 1260 days prophecy of the book of Revelation. The conversion of the Jews and their being brought into the Church at the end of the 1260 years will result in the ending of the New Testament spiritual captivity of the Church, and this same kind of joy will be the experience of all of Christ's people, Jew and Gentile, when they are united into one great Church in that day. The Jews were scattered among the nations after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and they have been in a desolate spiritual condition ever since they rejected their king and their Messiah; our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul explains in Romans chapter 11 that, "A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in". But a time is coming for them as a nation and as a people in which all the promises made to the fathers will be fulfilled for them, in their national conversion through our Lord Jesus Christ. In Romans 11: 26, Paul says, "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins." This will be one of the mightiest works of God's grace in the history of redemption. This return from their long period of national unbelief and their false understanding of the way of salvation will only come through their being converted to their Lord Jesus Christ.

It is mentioned in many places of Scripture but let me quote to you a couple of verses from Deuteronomy chapter 30. "Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the Lord your God will bring you back from your captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you." "If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts of heaven, from there the Lord you

God will gather you, and from there He will bring you." "Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which fathers possessed, and you shall possess it." "He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers." "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." Now, lest you think that this is not referring to our present time period of the Jews, living in their state of partial hardening, please consider; that verse 11 of Chapter 30 is quoted by the Apostle Paul in Romans 10: 6-8 concerning his desire for the conversion of his countrymen the Jews. "For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off." "It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do?'" "Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do?'" "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it." The Apostle Paul is speaking of the righteousness of faith; the righteousness which comes to the one believing in Jesus Christ. And so this morning, as we come here to remember our Lord and to celebrate the victories which He won for all of His people at the cross and by His resurrection; I would have each of us to think individually about our very real spiritual captivity, and our deliverance from it, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord has done great things for us. And He will continue to do great things for us by His grace from now to eternity and all through eternity. He has for every believer brought back their captivity. To prepare us for partaking of the Lord's Supper I want to touch upon 1st, what it feels like when we are converted to Christ when we are brought out of our captivity. Then 2nd; I would like us to briefly overview the great things done by Him. And then as we gather down front to partake of the Supper, I would like to speak about repentance in relation to our witness and fruit-bearing for Christ.

1st of all - What it feels like when we are truly converted to Jesus Christ.

(Verses 1 and 2)

Verse 1 says, "When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like those who dream." What was the captivity of Zion like? Well, if you will turn over to Lamentations chapter 3 with me, I think that I can show you. Here is Jeremiah's first hand report of it. It is not at all encouraging. "How lonely sits the city that was full of people!" "How like a widow is she, who was great among the nations!" "The princess among the provinces has become a slave!" So we see first of all, that captivity is a state of slavery. Look at verse 3. "Judah has gone into captivity, under affliction and hard servitude; she dwells among the nations, she finds no rest..." Captivity, for them, was a state of affliction and hard labor; of not finding rest. Look at verse 7. "In the days of her affliction and roaming, Jerusalem remembers all her pleasant things that she had in the days of old." "When her people fell into the hand of the enemy, with no one to help her, the adversaries saw her and mocked at her downfall." So when one was taken captive in that time they no longer had a home to go to, no longer had pleasant things coming them as they did in days before; no one

to help, and instead their adversaries mocked at their downfall. Look at verse 8. "Jerusalem has sinned gravely, therefore she has become vile." "All who honored her despise her because they have seen her nakedness; yes she sighs and turns away." You can see from this description that Zion's captivity led to feelings of being vile in her own sight and in the sight of others. It led to feelings of dishonor and shame. It led to feelings of being vulnerable, and helpless; of being exposed, and despised. Now look at verse 10. "The adversary has spread his hand over all her pleasant things; for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary, those who You commanded not to enter Your assembly." "All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their valuables for food to restore life." "See, O Lord, and consider, for I am scorned." You can see from this description that in their captivity that the adversary, their greatest enemies have gained the upper hand over them in terms of their not being able to worship as they used to. Foreigners had come into God's sanctuary and defiled it. Because of all these things really came upon them they had become people of sighing, people who were often hungry to the point of starvation. This is a very good description of captivity. It is being held in that state that I just described for you, and not knowing how long a time you would be there. It might be for the rest of your life.

Now I hope that you can see that the state of captivity which these people found themselves in was as a direct result of their sin. "Jerusalem has sinned gravely, therefore she has become vile." You will say to me, "She is greatly to be pitied because of these awful things which had come upon her." And how right you are. But I wonder if you have ever considered that this captivity, as we have it described for us here, is a very good description of the consequences and the state in which all men find themselves spiritually, if they are enabled by the Holy Spirit to see it, and understand that it applies to them. I would like you to be able to understand the captivity that sin brings people into. I would like to have you think about a few verses which will show you that this is true. John 8, verse 31 says, "then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.'" "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." "They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone.'" "How can You say, 'You will be made free?'" "Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.'" "And slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever." "Therefore if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." You see, sin always eventually leads into a state of captivity. A person may think that sinning against God shows his freedom and independence. But God cannot bless any sin that you commit. If it is pride and selfish ambition; you may get ahead in the world for many years. And God may actually bless you because He is kind and He designs His kindness in order to lead you to repentance. But if you do not repent, you will perish. You will be in captivity forever. If you live to yourself, and for yourself, you will end up not only losing all your worldly strength and wealth, you will lose your soul. Sin leads into a state of

eternal captivity if Christ is not trusted in. But if Christ is trusted in you shall be free indeed.

It is just like these people in the captivity, when they were brought back. They thought that they were those who were dreaming. Can God really do this great thing and bring us back out of our captivity, and even restore to us the privileges of worshiping Him once again? Yes, He most certainly could, and He did. And this is why these people's mouths were filled with laughter and their tongues with singing. How is it with you my friend this morning? Have you experienced the holy laughter that comes from having your sins all forgiven? Have you experienced being freed from sin's power; its stranglehold over your life? Are you able to sing the songs of Zion because you have been brought into right relationship with God through Jesus Christ and have been added to His Church? In Psalm 137, it says that the people sat down by the waters of Babylon and wept when they remembered Zion, after they were taken captive. They hung their harps upon the willows in the midst of it. That was because those who had taken them captive had asked of them a song, and those who plundered them requested of them mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" You see, you can't sing the songs of Zion if you are held captive in a foreign land. You can't sing the Lord's songs when men are mocking you and gloating in triumph over you. But faith in Christ does something quite extraordinary. It lets us sing the Lord's songs and it lets us laugh with a holy laughter knowing that we are forgiven; knowing that we have been brought back to God's blessing. Some people laugh because they would forget about the difficult things that they are facing in this life and in the next. They would laugh in the face of adversity. But faith in Christ can laugh knowing that Christ has overcome all of our enemies, and God's. He has done this so that we might be brought to God and we might be called the children of God. He has done this so that we might have eternal life. This is why we come rejoicing to this Supper today. And this is also why I believe that --

We need, Secondly, to review the great things that the Lord has done for us.

(Verses 2b and 3)

"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.' I think we need to remember that you and I as believers in Christ, have an adversary that once held us captive in his dark kingdom just as these poor Israelites had an adversary in those who took them and held them captive in Babylon. Theirs was Nebuchadnezzar and ours was the Devil. Turn over with me to 2 Timothy 2: 22 and I will show you how he used to work with us before conversion. Unfortunately, it is the way that he still at times tries to work with those who believe. Here in verse 22 it says, 'Flee youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.' 'But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife.' 'And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps

will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth., and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will." These verses are very revealing concerning what the Devil does to bring people into spiritual captivity. He tries to get them to fall to youthful lusts. Not only to sensuality or fornication or adultery; but also the more subtle sins of pride and selfish ambition. He does this not only with unbelievers but with believers also. This is why we must pray for each other as well as for those who do not know the Lord. It is Satan's work to cause divisions and contentions between believers and to cause them to strive with one another. But if you would be the servant of the Lord, you should not pursue this path of doing things. It is a path which displeases the Lord greatly. Christ gives a greater grace, and He gives a better way. It is called humility and gentle reasoning. We are not to be those who are self-appointed judges of other men. We are to learn the way of the Lord in how He would have us to view ourselves and how we should attempt to correct others. It is not by strong assertions of our own observations. It is by asking Biblical questions and giving Biblical answers in the spirit of gentleness. It is only the Lord Himself that can help us to do these things in a way that glorifies and honors Him. But this is why Jesus died. This is how the Lord does great things for us.

Turn with me over to Colossians 1, verse 13. "He (that is God the Father) has delivered us from the power (or domain of darkness) and conveyed (or transferred) us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." When we are converted to Christ it is a great thing. Because we are delivered from Satan's kingdom and brought into God's. "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking; it is righteousness, peace, and joy, in the Holy Spirit." (Romans 14: 17) These are the great things that the Lord has brought to us His Church, even through His death and resurrection. We are translated from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of light. He comes by the power and presence of His Holy Spirit and gives us the grace to be righteous and holy; yet also at peace and full of joy. This is a very great thing; it is the greatest of blessings that God bestows upon those who believe in Him. Christ suffered so that you could have joy and peace and a clear conscience and a pure heart. But it is also a great thing when Satan's schemes are defeated in relation to living our Christian life to God's glory, as well as His bringing us into the kingdom of light. Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 2, verse 5. You recall that Paul had had to write to the church there in Corinth, in his first letter, telling them to excommunicate a man from their midst who had fallen into gross immorality. This they did. But now that the man had repented, it had become known to Paul that this repentant man was being swallowed up in sorrow over his past sins. Paul says in verse 5, "But if anyone has cause grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent--not to be too severe." "This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow." "Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him." "For to

this I also wrote, that I might put you to the test whether you are obedient in all things." "Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive." "For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices."

You see, brethren, that even after conversion Satan has schemes to try to drag you and the whole of Christ's church back into the captivity that he once held you in. He does this by attempting to cultivate in your heart an unforgiving spirit; a spirit which holds a grudge. But this he cannot completely succeed in doing, if you belong to Christ, that is if you will walk learning the example and teaching of Christ. Verse 14 says, "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place." This is why we come to the Lord's table once again this month. It is to remember the great things that He has done; not only in dying for our sins on the cross, but also dying so that the true unity of the Church should be preserved and unbroken by believers themselves. Ask yourself this day if you are doing everything in your power to thwart the schemes of the Devil to destroy the unity of Christ's church? Are you doing everything in your power to preserve that unity that He died to establish? Are you praying and looking to Him for the grace that He alone can give to preserve that unity in the bond of peace? He died to make that unity a spiritual reality. He suffered so that you would have His grace working in your heart in relation to the way that you act toward, and think about, other believers. Let me ask you; are you hold things against other believers or do you lay them before God and try to work your problems out with them in a right spirit? When you come to the Lord's table, you come to give him the gift of your heart anew and afresh as you see what great things He has done for you. Remember the words of our Lord in Matthew 5: 23 and 24. "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way." "First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." "Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison." "Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny." You see that if you are not reconciled to your brother, that this is bringing yourself back into the captivity that Devil once had you in before you were converted. I am asking you to come to the table now, and resolve before the Lord today to be a forgiving, loving, tender-hearted, sympathetic, and understanding Christian with all other Christians; those who call upon His dear name. Then you will find the truth and the reality of these words, "The Lord has done great things for us." He does these great things in breaking the power of Satan over your life. He does them in giving you a new heart and a new mind, and grace to work in that new heart and mind so that you will no longer be a pawn in his perverse hands. Keep praying as Paul says in Romans 16: 20 that the God of Peace would crush Satan under your feet shortly. And come I would ask you to come down to the front now to

partake of the Supper of the Lord; to confess your sins, and to renew your vows of obedience to Him.

Now lastly - I would like to speak to you about repentance in relation to your witness, and your fruit-bearing for Christ before we partake of this Supper. (Verses 4-6)

"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." I take it that the tears which are being sown here by those who came back from the captivity, are tears of repentance over so many things that they had not done, which they should have done, to please God in their lives. They had been brought back but there was still a sense in which they felt like they were still in captivity. There was so much that needed to be restored; so much that needed to be re-built. This is the same way that it is for us spiritually this day, if we have been converted. If we sow in tears of repentance, we shall doubtless reap in having the joy of sins forgiven, and ourselves changed and transformed by the grace of Christ, to go forth to serve Him as workers in the field of the world in which we live. But the weeping that a repentant saint engages in is not only for himself and for the state of his own heart and failings in the sight of His holy God. It is also the weeping over the souls of those who are outside of the kingdom; those whom he loves, and would love more than anything for them to come to Christ. He wants with all of his heart for his loved ones and friends to come out of their captivity. By faith he tries to sow the good seed of the word of God upon the ground of their hearts. He wants to come again, in the Day of Christ, in the Day of the Resurrection, "bringing his sheaves with him." The sheaves are the living fruits of righteous living. But they are also the living fruits of converts born to God, and holy influences of life lived for God which have had their good and gracious effects upon the people that the believer knows. Let us remember as we partake this Supper that you and I will go forth from this time here today, bearing precious seed. It is the precious seed of gospel truth that will save the souls of fallen men. Let us learn by the grace of God to weep for lost, but to also to continually go forth to sow the seed of God's word to them. Let us pray, here today at this table for the strength and the perseverance necessary to be better witnesses. Let us pray to bear fruit to Christ's glory. As we partake of these elements, let us remember that Christ died so that we would bear much fruit, and thus we will prove to be His disciples.