

Psalm 126

There is a cycle in the Old Testament that repeats itself over and over again. It is Israel's constant rebellion against Jehovah, and Jehovah's continual faithfulness to Israel in turning them back to Himself. Israel sins; they refuse to repent and turn to God; God sends judgment upon the people. In mercy and grace, Jehovah delivers His people and brings them back again.

How many times does the Lord do this in our lives? We wander away from the Lord. We drift into a wilderness where there is darkness and danger. But the Lord stops us, steps in and intervenes in our lives and brings us back again to Himself.

We love reading Bible stories to our children about Gideon and Samson, great champions of the Lord, who were raised up by God to save His people from their enemies. But once they were delivered, it didn't take long for the people to fall away from the Lord again and go back to their sins. The Lord never gives up on His people and lets them go. He goes after them and saves them. Christ is always faithful to His people despite our unfaithfulness to Him.

We read in Psalm 126 the testimony of God's people to the faithfulness of God.

It begins with the words, "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion." There are two important dates in Old Testament History that we should be familiar with. 722 B.C. was the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians, and 586 B.C. was the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. Psalm 126 was written during the time the Jews were coming back to Jerusalem after the 70 years in Babylonian exile.

The words of Jeremiah 33 were fulfilled, "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Again in this place, which is desolate without man and without beast, and in all the cities thereof, shall be an habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down. In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the vale, and in the cities of the south, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the LORD. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah."

Psalm 126 is a testimony to the Lord's faithfulness in bringing His people back from their captivity. What can we learn from Psalm 126? I believe the message for us today is, "The Lord turns our sorrow into joy." How does He do it? He does it in three ways.

1. The Lord turns our sorrow into joy by bringing us out of captivity.

Judah, the Southern Kingdom of Israel, lived on as an independent nation until 586 B.C. Through the work of good kings like Hezekiah and Josiah, the people underwent periods of revival and renewal. But major prophets such as Ezekiel and Jeremiah foretold their end. It happened, according to 2 Kings 25, at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

After a fierce, prolonged siege, the walls of Jerusalem were breached and the city, along with its beautiful Temple, destroyed. The Ark of the Covenant disappeared. The Temple furnishings were carted back to Babylon. The cream of Israel's youth, including a young man named Daniel who would gain fame and recognition in a lion's den, were carried away from their home and spiritual center. In the stark words of 2 Kings 25:21, "So Judah went into captivity, away from her land."

While some Jews eventually returned to Judah, others remained in Babylon, which later became Persia. The captivity can be said to have ended with the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple, described in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Psalm 126:1 records the thoughts and emotions of the people as they went back to Jerusalem to rebuild. “When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.”

It was the Lord who delivered His people from their captivity. We can’t free ourselves from the bondage and captivity of sin.

Martin Luther writes in his book, *The Bondage Of The Will*, “that sin incapacitates human beings from working out their own salvation, that they are completely unable to bring themselves to God. The power of God is necessary to unshackle a sinner from their chains of sin. Luther writes, “Unredeemed human beings are dominated by Satan: Satan as the prince of this world never lets go of what he considers his own unless he is overpowered by a stronger power, i.e. Christ.

When Christ redeems a person, he redeems the entire person, including the will, which then is liberated to serve God.”

Those who are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ have been set free from the captivity and bondage of sin in their lives. Does Christ really loosen the chains of my sins? Did Christ lay down His life for me, a wretched and hell deserving sinner?

When we consider all that the Lord has done in bringing us out of sin, and freeing us from the dominion of Satan, and what He still continues to do in our lives we stand speechless. Christ restores fellowship with God. Christ renews our spirits within. We are like those who dream.

But Christ saving us from sin is not a dream. It is real and lasting. Believers are recipients of so great a salvation. Are you free from the captivity of sin? Is your master the devil? Are you miserable and in bondage to your sin? Come to Christ and He will set you free!

The Lord brings His people out of captivity from sin and darkness and this causes us to rejoice in the Lord.

2. The Lord turns our sorrow into joy by refreshing our souls.

A change of scenery can be very refreshing. In the case of the Jews returning from Babylon, the sight of Jerusalem must have been refreshing. True, the city lay in ruins. True, the work of reconstruction in Jerusalem would be hard, long and difficult. But the Jews were no longer in Babylon, no longer in a foreign country. They were now home. How the sight of Jerusalem must have been a refreshing sight to the Jews!

We read in verse 4, “Turn again our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the south.” Some commentators suggest that these streams refer to the Negev region of Israel. This was a very dry and arid landscape. Geologists tell us, “Although superficially barren, arid regions such as the Negev area support a remarkable diversity of plants and animals, all of which have developed highly specialized ways of coping with the harsh conditions.”

During the rainy season, streams would overflow into the Negev region, providing needed water which would flood the valley and bring needed relief and refreshment to the inhabitants. The Psalmist is praying for the flow of God's blessing to flood the hearts and lives of His people. How we need for the showers of God's mercy and grace to flood our souls. The world is such a dry and barren wilderness. But the Lord refreshes the souls of His people in His Word, under the means of Grace, and as we come to Him in the place of prayer. Not only do we as God's people adapt and cope with the wilderness of the world in which we live, but we prosper and thrive as God pours out His grace in our lives.

In Psalm 63:1 we read of David thirsting for the Lord, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is;"

Martin Lloyd Jones writes, "what is our greatest need? Our greatest need is life. Most people today are but existing; they have no life. When their pleasures are shut off, when because of war the cinemas and theatres and public houses and dance halls have to be closed they have nothing.

They have not got life; they are but existing, and dependent upon things outside themselves; they need life.”

But where can life be found? Where can refreshment be experienced in the soul. It is Christ who said, ‘I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly’ (John 10:10). Life means spiritual life; life means a relationship to God and an enjoyment of His fellowship; and Christ our Lord has it in all its fulness. He says, ‘He that cometh unto me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst’ (John 6:35). ‘The water that I shall give you, He says to the woman of Samaria, ‘shall be in you a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

We read in Isaiah 55:1-2, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.”

Do you feel dry and barren in your soul? Have you tasted from the broken cisterns of this world and have left you wanting? Are you in need of streams from God? Go to Christ who is the well of living water.

The Lord refreshes the souls of His people and this causes great joy in the heart of God's people.

3. The Lord turns our sorrow into joy by putting a new song in our hearts.

Before I was saved, I never used to sing. I went to Mass in the Roman Catholic Church and I never sang. You just stood there. You didn't have anything to sing about! You didn't even want to be there. Hearts were as cold as ice. The place wreaked of spiritual death.

Before I was saved, I was of all men most miserable. But when Christ opened my heart and I understood the gospel my heart sung out in praise and thanksgiving. It was like what we read about in verse 2, "Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing:"

We read in verse 3, "The LORD hath done great

things for us; whereof we are glad.”

We read in verse 5, “They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.”

The people who returned from exile did not think about Babylon anymore. They weren't preoccupied with the sorrow and pain of the past. They looked to the Lord now and the Lord put a new song in their hearts. They had a new beginning, a fresh start. This is what Christ does to sinners in the gospel. He changes and transforms them.

Listen to the song of Moses and the children of Israel when they sang after the Lord delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh in Exodus 15:1-11, “Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him. The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name.

Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red

sea. The depths have covered them: they sank into the bottom as a stone. Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy. And in the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee: thou sentest forth thy wrath, which consumed them as stubble. Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

Can you sing this song of deliverance? Do you have this new song in your heart today? Let us sing unto the Lord! Let us rejoice and praise the Lord for who He is and for all He has done in redeeming our souls.

The Lord turns our sorrow into joy at the Cross. It is at the Cross where Christ brings sinners out of captivity from sin, where Christ refreshes our souls, and where Christ puts a new song in our hearts. If you are here tonight and still miserable in your sins go to the Cross and Christ will save you.

If you are here tonight and profess faith in Christ go to the Cross and He will refresh your soul. Might we all be able to say with the Psalmist, "The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad." Let

us pray!