

The Great God of Restoration

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Church: 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel

References: **Psalms 126**, Psalms 137:1; Matthew 1; Daniel 9:2; Jeremiah 31:7-14; Matthew 13

Introduction and Scripture Reading

To one of the Psalms. We've been in Psalms quite a bit this morning already. This Psalm again is towards the end of the Psalms, as all of those that were read this morning were as well. This is a much shorter Psalm than we have been looking at in our previous meeting. Psalm 126. Reading from the New King James Bible.

[Psalms 126:1-6 NKJV]

- 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.

I know the Lord will bless the reading of his word. Let's just approach his throne for a blessing upon it this morning.

Opening Prayer

Our gracious God and Father, as we approach your throne today, we thank you Lord for the praise, the thanksgiving, the **rejoicing** of those exiles coming back to the land that they've been separated from. And Lord, we thank you that you are the **great deliverer**. You're the great God of today. You're the great God of **restoration**. We thank you for this. And so, Lord, we ask your blessing as we meditate upon this psalm this morning for our benefit, we pray in the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

The Context of the Return

We don't know who wrote this psalm or exactly on what occasion, but all signs point to the return of the exiles, those who had been exiled to Babylon from Judah. There aren't any other captivities that actually fit right into this. There was a captivity, you might say, when David was overthrown by his son, Absalom. And he had, and then he came back to Jerusalem. But there wasn't, it doesn't seem to fit.

The great fitting circumstance here was when under **Zerubbabel**, the exiles came back from Babylon. And there they had suffered. Last week, we looked at Psalm 137. It was a song of those exiles who were in Babylon.

[Psalms 137:1 NKJV]

By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept
When we remembered Zion.

And it was by the rivers of Babylon. And it was by the rivers of Babylon. They sat down. It was useless to do anything. Their labor in the Lord was vain. And so they sat down. And they were despondent. They were mocked by the people there. They were made to serve hard servitude there in that land of their exile.

But now, it would seem, and we would like to apply it to the scene coming back under Zerubbabel, the first return. There was a return under Zerubbabel. Then there was a few later with Ezra. And then again, there were some with Nehemiah. So there were three returns. But the main one was under Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel, you know, was the appointed governor of Judah on their return. And Zerubbabel, you'll remember, if you read Matthew's account or his genealogy in Matthew, the genealogy of our Lord Jesus, Zerubbabel was in the direct line from Solomon to our Lord Jesus Christ. So he was, in fact, inheritor of the throne. But of course, he came back not as king, but he came as governor. But that did not lessen the great joy of those who returned from their servitude.

It says, when the **Lord** brought back the captivity of Zion. It was, the amazing thing to those people was that it wasn't a natural occurrence. It just appeared. The **Lord** did it. And if any work, **real work**, is going to be done, only the Lord can do it. Our efforts are really in vain outside of the Lord. And so they recognized that it was the Lord that had brought them back.

Captivity and Our Center

The captivity of Zion. We think of their, when they were in the land of their captivity, how they longed for 17 long years. They waited and waited and waited and waited. And it didn't seem like it would ever end. And even Daniel. We read in the ninth chapter of Daniel that Daniel understood by the prophets that the time that God had allotted to their servitude was just about over. And so he begins to pray for the return of Israel. And we read that it was the Lord that did it.

Now the Lord had chosen his servant Cyrus over a hundred years before. He even named him by name in the scriptures. That this man Cyrus, who would occupy the throne, Cyrus the Great, occupy the throne of Persia. That God would put it in his heart to release the captivity of Judah. And he made a decree for them to return to their land. And those that came back, they said it's the **Lord's doing** that has done this. It wasn't Zerubbabel that stirred up the people there.

It wasn't Cyrus himself. It was the Lord working through his servants. And those that came back says it was the Lord that brought back the captivity of Zion.

Now this psalm broken into three portions:

1. The first three verses is praise for the past.
2. Then verse four, the central verse, is petition for the present.
3. And then verses five and six, there is a promise for the future.

So, praise, petition, and promise. Three portions.

Well, when they came back and they entered the land and they arrived safely, about 50,000 of them, not very many, to occupy a land that size. And the great tasks that they were sent to do, to rebuild the temple, they would not only have to do that, they would have to restore the land. They'd have to break up the fields that had long lain fallow. There was walls to be dug. There were houses to be rebuilt. There was pioneer work to be done there. It was a great effort. But, at the moment, they did not care so much. They had come back to **Zion**.

Zion was the place where the law of God went out. That was the place where the throne of God was. Their central part. They had come back from scattered to foreign places where they did not feel at home. And they were back now to their center. And, you know, the same thing we might apply is when we are in captivity, too.

What are we captive to? Well, there are various things. There's the lusts of the flesh. We might be captivated by some lusts, particular lusts, especially the youth are a prey to this. There's the lust of the eyes. Our eyes are easily attracted to the God things of this world, the idols of the world. And we lose our center. We lose our praise. We lose our sense of oneness with our Lord. And we're exiled, as it were, from the very presence of God and from our center. And also there's the pride of life, which is the particular sin of old age, where we become satisfied with our lives, become proud. And we sit back and think that we are something, when in fact we are **nothing**. And we are just a vapor. And so we can lose. We can be in our captivity, no matter who you are. We can lose our center, our Zion.

A Zion is an interesting word. A Zion is hard to define, but I like to look at it as a sail on a horizon. A distant mountain peak. Something that stands out among everything else. And that's Zion. Zion is the place, **one place**. Now, the hills of Jerusalem are not very big in terms of the Himalayas or the Andes or the Canadian Rockies. It's not very big, but it stands out for its spiritual significance. It's the one place that God has chosen that when He sets up, when our Lord Jesus sets up His kingdom, it will be from there that He will rule the earth. And all the earth will look to their spiritual center, Zion.

Praise for the Past: Like a Dream

They have lost it. Our center today is **Christ**. If we lose our center, we become disoriented. We become like prey to the evil one in the world. And we lose our joy and our satisfaction. Now, they said when they returned, though, it was like a **dream**. Totally unexpected. Is this real? We're actually here once again, back to our roots. And in a place where all worship the one true and living God, where the priests are ministering again at the altar. And everything is good. The showers are coming from heaven. God is blessing us once again.

They had come back. It was a dream. It was a dream. His mouth was filled with **laughter**. They couldn't contain themselves. The rejoicing was contagious among them all. 50,000 rejoicing as they came back. And He says, our tongue was **singing**. And then they said, even the nations around, they saw. That decree of Cyrus went out. And that shook the nations. And they saw these Jews going back. The land that had been destroyed, the temple that had been burnt to the ground, the walls that had been completely flattened. And they opened to the attacks of the evil one. The land was gone. But now they were coming back. And even the nations around said, the Lord has, this Jehovah, their God, has really done something for them. And they agree. They say, the Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad.

Petition for the Present: The Streams in the South

But then, a realization, reality sets in. They realize that pioneering is a hard business. I remember stories my mother told me of, because my grandparents were pioneers in the prairies. The hardships they faced. There was no building materials to build a house. They cut sod, thick prairie sod, and build houses of sod. And they pounded the soil of that prairie soil. They pounded it flat to make a floor in their houses. They had no glass for their windows. They put paper, heavy paper. And then they oiled the paper so that some light might come through. And there, the sod roofs of those little houses. My mother was born there in one of those sod houses there in the prairies. And so, it was hard work. They worked from morning to night. The women and the men as well. It was hard on them. It was a hard life for those pioneers.

Well, coming back to this land was very hard. Not only that, there were a lot of enemies around. And they realized they needed more. They needed more to come. And so, you reread them there. Bring back our captivity, Lord, as the streams in the south. The streams in the south. Well, southern Judea, if you visit there today, you'll see how dry it is there. But there are times when the rains fall there in the Judean mountains. And the real little streams begin to fill up. And they flow. And they get into the bigger watercourses. And pretty soon, there can be in the lower parts of Judea, flash floods. And tourists are warned about these. They're very dangerous. Because those dry wadis, they call them, those dry wadis can suddenly fill with a rushing stream.

And so, the returning exiles, they say, we want a return like that. Bring, Lord, many. Bring back our captivity. Like the streams in the south. Just stream back to the land. Well, it didn't happen. A few trickled back again with Ezra. And then again later with Nehemiah after a few years. And slowly, they filled up the land again. It didn't happen then. But will that prayer be answered? Oh, yes. There will come a time. Turn with me to a lovely passage in Jeremiah chapter

31. Jeremiah chapter 31. There's a few verses here. I'll read them without making a lot of comment. I'm starting to read at verse 7.

[Jeremiah 31:7-14 NKJV]

⁷ For thus says the LORD: "Sing with gladness for Jacob, And shout among the chief of the nations; Proclaim, give praise, and say, "O LORD, save Your people, The remnant of Israel!" ⁸ Behold, I will bring them from the north country, And gather them from the ends of the earth, Among them the blind and the lame, The woman with child And the one who labors with child, together; A great throng shall return there. ⁹ They shall come with weeping, And with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, In a straight way in which they shall not stumble; For I am a Father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn.

¹⁰ "Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, And declare it in the isles afar off, and say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him, And keep him as a shepherd does his flock.' ¹¹ For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, And ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he. ¹² Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, Streaming to the goodness of the LORD--For wheat and new wine and oil, For the young of the flock and the herd; Their souls shall be like a well-watered garden, And they shall sorrow no more at all.

¹³ "Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, And the young men and the old, together; For I will turn their mourning to joy, Will comfort them, And make them rejoice rather than sorrow. ¹⁴ I will satiate the soul of the priests with abundance, And My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says the LORD."

There will become a time. That Jeremiah prophesies that this prayer will be answered. Bring back our captivity oh Lord. Not just from Babylon. But from the ends of the earth. They're going to come. From Argentina. And from Hobe province. From British Columbia. Yes. They're going to come. They're scattered now in every land. All over. Some probably don't even know their pedigree. God is going to restore that knowledge to them. And they're going to return to their land.

The Promise for the Future: Sowing in Tears

But now the promise. It's going to be a fruitful time. Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. That's a principle in scripture. Is it not? Not only for the returning exiles who are sowing seed for the first time. Imagine that. They were poor. They were poor. They didn't know how that land was going to reproduce. Their first sowing must have been with some apprehension. Would there be, would there be rain enough? Because the time that they sow is a time that might be dry. And they need the former rains to germinate. But they had not seen that. They didn't have the experience behind them. And so this precious seed, this seed that they may have carried all the way from Babylon. From Babylon. Or had purchased at price in the land. They, it was precious seed. It would be a, it would be a year before they would be able to reap the benefits. This was maybe the food for their children. It was a big investment. Seed is a big investment. Is it going to produce any value? It will investment pay off.

But they come. They sow that precious seed. They sow that seed. And those that sow, it says, in tears. In crying out to the God of the heavens. The one who will bless them. They cry out to him. And He says they will reap. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. That's a general principle. Now, verses five and six. This, this is a promise. What we have here is, it almost like a reiteration. A repeating of verse four. Only in expanding it.

But notice something that is different about this. In verse five, we read "those" or "they" who sown tears is in the plural. But now the Psalmist, no doubt directed by the Spirit of God, not knowing what he was doing perhaps, he brings it into the singular. "Those who sown tears," plural. But now he, he, it's singular. **He**. He brings it right down to the individual. Who is that individual? Who is the "He"?

The Great Sower: Christ and the Harvest

"He" refers to, I believe, he speaking of the **Lord Jesus Christ** himself. The incarnate Son. He came. We, we look in the scriptures for those things revealed to us by the Spirit of God concerning Christ. The scriptures are what He is full of. The scriptures are full of Christ if we look for Him. And here we see a little promise here that would come. It was a promise. It was a prophecy. And He came.

We read in verse six: "He who goes forth or continually goes forth weeping, bearing precious seeds, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his she..." Our Lord Jesus in His parables of the thirteenth chapter of Matthew talks about the seed being the Word of God and the field is the world itself. And He came into this world. He came forth from eternity past, from the Father's bosom. He was incarnated. The incarnation of God. He came. And he brought forth that precious seed.

The word there in verse six, "bearing precious seed" or "bearing seed for sowing" as the New King James and I don't know why they put that in there, that translation. The King James is perhaps the best. This one word, this "bearing precious seed," it's only used once in the Hebrew Bible. Once. And the word there is **precious**. The Word of God is absolutely precious in the world. It's the only word that can actually give life. He spoke and it was done. He commanded, it stood fast. And he blew into the nostrils of Adam the breath of life. He, that's the living Word. And he came forth bearing **precious** seed.

And did it have an effect? Yes. It brought forth some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred fold precious crop. And so doubtless when He comes again—and He's coming soon—He's going to come from into heaven with a shout. With the voice of the archangel. And with a love life. With the voice of God. And the dead in Christ are going to rise first. Then we, sheaves of the earth, are going to be caught up together with Him in the air. And so we shall ever be with the Lord. He's going to gather His wheat into His barn. And so we shall ever be with the Lord.

He'll doubtless come again with rejoicing. That shout then that by the Spirit of God will transform our earthly beings into a heavenly likeness of Christ. That shout is not the shout of, it's a **shout of joy**. "Come home, my loved ones! Come up!" It's a shout of joy. Finally He will reap the benefits of His sowing. That word that was sown in our hearts now has given us true eternal life. And each of us is going to respond to that joyous shout from heaven when He comes for each one of us.

May the Lord encourage us for these songs. Songs of praise. Songs of experience. And we just thank you Lord for this today.

Closing Prayer

We ask your blessing upon each one as we thank you for the refreshments. We ask you bless those hands that have provided and prepared them for us. And we thank you now in Jesus' name. Amen.