

Daily Devotional, June 25, 2020 Joy and Restoration

¹ When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those 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, Lord, like streams in the Negev. ⁵ Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. ⁶ Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them. Psalm 126 (NIV)

Psalm 126 was probably written by the Israelites when they were released from Babylonian captivity after Cyrus of Persia conquered the Babylonian empire. Their release by Cyrus must have come as quite a shock, as we read the words that begin this Psalm... "*we were like those who dreamed--*" as in, "Pinch me, I must be dreaming!" At the start of this psalm, the Israelites give praise for this great blessing that God has bestowed on them. Not only had they been blessed through having been set free, but God also blessed them by allowing them to reclaim their homeland after years of testing and growing their faith.

In James 1:2-4, James, Jesus' brother, talks about a faith that is developed and tested. **² "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (NIV)**

I am guessing that this is how the Israelites must be feeling as they ponder 70 years of living in captivity under Babylonian rule. God had been testing their faith, teaching them to persevere in their trials, in order to mature and become complete in their devotion to God. One can only imagine the exhilarating songs of joy they were now singing!

Yet, although their hearts are full of joy and praise, in v.4 we hear a request. The reality of the moment sets in and they realize that there will now be a great deal of work ahead of them. They are now in their own land and are faced with the destruction and the re-building that must take place. If there is one thing they have learned, they cannot do all of this work in their own power. So, they ask for God to "restore our fortunes", as if God were bringing waters to irrigate the desert region of Negev. Prayers of restoration to accompany their sowing amidst their tears of labor, will reap songs of joy.

In hearing the words of this psalm, do you find your situation somewhere in its verses? Are you today feeling as if you are caught up in some sort of captivity due to this shutdown, and are you praying to God for release from whatever has your mind and emotions held prisoner? Just as the Israelites discovered over their time of trial, we must trust by faith that God works in these times of testing to help us persevere, mature, and complete our faith. As your faith becomes more complete, lacking nothing, you will one day look back on God's deliverance from this present situation, or any other trial, and you will be able to say, "*The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.*"

Maybe you have already been freed from your struggles recently. Maybe illness or physical disability is behind you, the loosening on the restrictions of social distancing have made it easier to see loved ones again, getting back to work, or something altogether different has taken place. I hope that this psalm will find you praising the God who through mercy and grace, brings us through these trials and gives us hope! Remember to be ever grateful and filled with joy!

God's ability to restore life is beyond our understanding. Forests burn down and are able to grow back. Broken bones heal. Even grief is not a lasting state. Our tears can be seeds that will grow into a harvest of joy because God is able to bring good out of tragedy. When you find yourself burdened by sorrow, know that your times of grief will come to an end and that you will again discover joy. We must have patience as we wait, for God's great harvest of joy is coming!

Prayer: Father, our source of life, you know our every weakness. May we reach out with joy to grasp your hand and walk more readily in your ways. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.