

PSALM 120

PSALM 134

# PSALMS

of ascent

## PSALMS OF ASCENT

### When the Lord restored - Psalm 126

#### SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**Connect:** What does it practically look like for you to “trust in the Lord” this week?

#### Warm-Up

1. Share a time in your life when you felt overflowing joy or relief after waiting for something to turn around. What made that moment so powerful?
2. How do you usually express joy or gratitude to God? Do you find that comes naturally, or do you sometimes feel “reserved” in worship?

#### Read Psalm 126

3. How would you describe the people’s emotions in verses 1–3? What kind of event might have caused such joy?
4. In the sermon, we heard that the Psalm likely celebrates Israel’s return from exile. Why would that have felt like a dream come true for God’s people?
5. How does the psalm connect *God’s action* (“the Lord restored the fortunes”) with *the people’s response* (laughter, joy, praise)? What can we learn from that connection?
6. What parallels do you see between Israel’s restoration and what God has done for us in Jesus?
7. Read Ephesians 2:4-5 - how has God restored our fortunes?
8. How can we ensure that we never lose our awe and wonder at what God has done for us?
9. Verse 4 shifts tone — from celebrating past joy to asking for more restoration. What does that tell us about the life of faith?
10. How does the image of “streams in the Negeb” (v.4) capture the idea of God’s refreshing grace?
11. What do verses 5–6 teach us about sorrow, perseverance, and hope?
12. How does this psalm help us understand the “now and not yet” reality of the Christian life — that God *has* saved us, but the world is still broken?
13. Read **Romans 8:22–25** and **Revelation 21:1–4**. How do these passages expand our hope for the “full restoration” still to come?

#### Apply

14. How can we ensure that the news of the Gospel sinks down deep into our hearts? What’s one way you could foster that this week?
15. What would it look like for our church community to express joy more freely — in worship, in conversations, and in everyday life?
16. How might the certainty of future joy (vv. 5–6) help you keep going through tears, trials, or waiting right now?

**PRAY:** Heavenly Father, thank you that you have restored our fortunes from death to life and have destined us for eternal life with you. Help us to see this news afresh each day and never lose our awe of it. In the midst of our tears, help us to remember the restoration to come when you return. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**TITLE:** When the Lord restored our fortunes - Psalm 126

**LOCATION:** St John's Wishart 9AM

**BI:** We have received great news of great Joy from God. We ought to be glad and rejoice as we wait for the fullness of this to be revealed

**STRUCTURE:**

- The Lord has Done Great Things
- The Lord Will do great things
  
- The year was 2014.
- Australia were playing England in an ODI - (that's cricket for the uncultured among us)
- And it wasn't looking good.
- We were set 300 to win by England and at a score of 7 for 206 - Australia looked hopeless.
- In the grandstands, people were leaving.
- But in the Calder Family, we have a rule - never leave an ODI until the last ball.
- So while people were leaving, my mum and I stayed.
- But then a player by the name of James Faulkner came out into the middle.
- And he started getting into his work, even while two batsmen got out, leaving us at 9 for 244 - again, no hope!
- And then he started hitting out more and more. And more and more.
- And we couldn't believe what we were seeing! It looked like Australia could actually do it!
- It came to the final over - 12 runs from 6 balls to get Australia to Win. England just needed to take one wicket. You could cut the tension with a knife!
- And then he hit a 4, another 4, and then another 4 - Australia WON and the stadium went Berserk!!
- And when I say Berserk - I mean Berserk!
- Everyone was on their feet! People were shouting with joy, tears of joy were shed, people started hugging strangers, we could feel the concrete grandstand literally shaking under us!
- When James Faulkner restored the fortunes of Australia at the Gabba in 2014 - we were like those who dreamed, our mouths were filled with laughter and shouts of joy - we were glad.
  
- But when I come here on a Sunday and hear the Gospel and preach it, and sing it, and celebrate it in the Lord's Supper - the best I can do is a bit of a smile and maybe JUST MAYBE take my hands out of my pockets.
- And I don't recall ever hearing shouts of joy from the pews!
  - When Australia won the cricket match - the crowd went WILD! BUT
  - When we come and worship together - the crowd goes MILD
- And Yet Psalm 126 - describes God's people laughing with joy, almost bubbling over - because of what God had done for them.
  
- This is again, a psalm of ascent. A psalm to be sung as people walked up to the temple.
- It's quite possible that the Psalmist here is recalling the people's return from Exile in Babylon to go and rebuild the city.
- After 70 years of living in a foreign land because of their rebellion, the people were let back into the land in 538BC by the leader Cyrus.
- They were told to go back, and rebuild the temple and the city and the walls of the city, and take back the things that were taken from them 70 years ago.
- There was only one problem. The return from Exile and the rebuilding of the temple wasn't all that it was cracked up to be.
- Yes - they had been rescued, but there were still better things to come for the people of God.
- And the psalm reflects this.
- It's got two verses:
  - Firstly, it describes the people's reaction to God's restoration. 1-3
  - But then it calls on God to restore the fortunes again. And expresses that God will restore and redeem his people. V4-6

- **The Lord Has Done Great Things**
- V1 "When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream."
- When the Lord acts and saves - it always leads to praise and joy.
- When God rescued the Israelites from the Egyptians and through the red sea, Moses and Miriam (Moses' wife) sung! They all sung!
- When the Ark - the symbol of God's presence and rule - came into Jerusalem under King David - David Dances - he was leaping and dancing!
- The Psalms are full of songs of praise and joy
- This Psalm in particular could have been about the people's return to Jerusalem after exile..
- And these are often in response to God's saving work among the people and for the nations.
- But what about today?
- We haven't really been on the receiving end of any great military victories lately.
- Some of us are suffering with sickness, declining health - physically and mentally and in cognition..
- Some of us have loved ones who are suffering with these things.
- Some of us are just so tired from the rapid pace of work, family life, fitness, and social life that we are just a bit exhausted.
- We're a bit of a motley bunch here!
- And yet - we are so much more than just a motley bunch...we are a saved bunch.
- Those who have their trust in the Lord don't necessarily have physical restoration yet, or an overflowing bank account...
- But we have complete LIFE restoration! LIFE Resurrection! LIFE Redemption! LIFE Reconciliation!
- The Lord has done great things for us - in Jesus Christ!
- *A restoration project is getting a house or a car or a guitar or whatever, back to its former glory or its former state.*
- *Sometimes these types of restorations can leave the thing in better condition than its original condition!*
- Well - we have a brilliant and fantastic restoration through the grace of God.
- We were in need of restoration because we were dead in our rejection of God and rebellion against him.
- This is what is called Sin. Sin isn't just the 'biggies' like murder or robbing a bank - no sin is any way of life that's opposed to God's good design for us.
- It's when we lie - big or small; when we gossip; when we look at another person in lust; when we get angry; when we misuse our finances - that's sin.
- This is all rejecting God's way and rejecting God's rule.
- And it's something that every human being is guilty of.
- I'm guilty of it! I'd be the first person to admit my sin.
- And the penalty and punishment that sin deserves is God taking away life from us. It deserves punishment. It deserves death.
- If we as God's creation - reject the creator and decide to go our own way, then that deserves us having no more part in that creation.
- Romans 8:23 begins by saying this "For the wages of sin is death"
- Ephesians 2:1 begins by saying "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked"
- We were dead under his punishment and penalty for sin.
- That's worse than exile, that's worse than being financially poor, that's worse than a difficult health diagnosis!
- Death is not good! Punishment is not good!

- We're in need of intervention. In need of restoration!
- And that's exactly what Christ has done for us.
- Romans 6:23 continues by saying "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
- Ephesians 2:4-5 says "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved"
- God has gloriously restored us back to life, has provided us with forgiveness and reconciliation and hope - through the coming, the death, and resurrection of his son Jesus.
- Jesus took the punishment of death, he took on the sins of the world onto himself on the cross - and destroyed them in his death. Sin is Gone!
- And Jesus didn't stay dead but rose from the dead - meaning that the check cleared, he gives us life and has made us right with him!
- We can come into the very presence of the awesome creator of the universe, we can fall into the arms of the one who flung stars into motion, we can talk to him as a child talks to their parents - because he has restored us in our relationship with him.
- We are destined not for eternal death, but eternal life with him! Marked as his own!
- The Lord has done great things for us!
- Do we know this!?
- Have we got it not just in our brains, but in our hearts, and souls, and guts?
  
- Sometimes it's easy to forget. Sometimes it's easy to lose our awe and wonder at it...It's easy to go through the motions.
- *There's a street in Toowoomba called Margaret street. It's stunning. It's got trees overhanging it which in the autumn turn a beautiful golden brown, in winter all the leaves fall off, but then in spring - they turn into this brilliant canopy of green!*
- *When I moved there and drove up that street for the first time - I was awestruck. I was like "This is amazing! How incredible! I'm going to love living here!"*
- *But it didn't take long for me to stop being awed and start being grumpy because of the traffic because I became overfamiliar with the street.*
- Isn't it like that sometimes with the grace of God?
- We can become so overfamiliar with it that instead of dreaming, or laughing, or shouting with joy, we nod our head and yawn!
  
- But this is what the Psalmist reflects on
- V1 "When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad."
- Seeing how good we have it with God ought to lead to spontaneous praise! Shouts! Laughter! Joy!
- And did you notice that the Psalmist and his mates were so excited and so thrilled - that even the other nations stood up and took notice?
- *If you're part of any facebook local community groups, they're generally filled with people advertising their business, or looking for a lost dog, complaining about parking, and noise complaints...*
- Imagine if we here at St John's were so overjoyed and loud with shouts of joy because of the Gospel that on the wishart page people were messaging saying "What on earth is going on at 10 Greenwood St - they sound like they're having a blast!"
- And we could respond with - of course we are, because God has restored our fortunes, has forgiven us...
  - *I will sing the wondrous story of the Christ who died for me...*
  - *In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine, a wondrous beauty I see,*
  - *for 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died, to pardon and sanctify me.*

- *Praise my soul the king of heaven - ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like me his praise should sing!*
- *"In Christ alone, who took on flesh Fullness of God in helpless babe;*
- *This gift of love and righteousness; Scorned by the ones He came to save*
- *'Til on that cross as Jesus died; The wrath of God was satisfied*
- *For every sin on Him was laid; Here in the death of Christ I live, I live"*
- *"Guilty, helpless, lost were we Blameless Lamb of God was He*
- *Sacrificed to set us free Hallelujah, what a Saviour!"*
- And I could keep on going...//
- If I had to offer a critique of the modern reformed-evangelical church, as we are here at St John's - it would be that we are still very upper-middle class British stiff-upper-lip type people.
- We're a bit polished, a bit polite, and we can sometimes disregard emotions as being "too experiential"
- Yes we've got solid theology in our heads, but we sometimes disregard our hearts and our guts.
- I think we need to learn from our Pentecostal brothers and sisters here.
- Learn from their joy! Their expression of their emotions!
- We need to learn from Ps 126 - which urges us to be filled with laughter and joy!
- Friends, God has done great things for us.
- But while we should be joyful - we also know the reality of the world which we live in and our lives, this side of eternity.
- Because while God has done great things for us, we still live in a fractured world, we still have hearts that are prone to sinning, we still have bodies that are decaying!
- So always being happy and laughing - can be a denial of our reality and emotions.
  - I don't think that's healthy! That's not realistic!
- But we need to remember that God **will do** great things for us.
- God has done...great things...now...God will do...great things...not yet.
- We live in the now...and the not yet.
- **The Lord Will Do Great Things**
- The Psalmist turns from outward praise - to a call to God to work again
- V4 "Restore our fortunes, Oh Lord, like the streams in the Negeb!"
- Negeb is a desert in Israel and its streams only come when there has been an absolute dumping of rain.
- Even though the fortunes have been restored - there's still better to come
- Even after the Israelites went back into the land, it was far from the former glory of what they had before, they were still impacted by the other nations around them, but most importantly, they still had the problem of sin.
- They needed something better!
- And the Psalmist knows that even though there were tears and sadness, and still work to be done, the best is yet to come:
- V5 "Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him."
- When it talks about sowing here, he could be potentially talking about working for God - or giving our whole lives for God. Serving him.
  - *We forget that in an agricultural world, the act of sowing is really an investment. For those around 500BC - this could have meant putting all your finances into the seeds, in the hope that the seeds would grow into plants.*
  - *There was no real guarantee. And no government subsidies! It was a risk.*

- But the guarantee here is that those who give all of themselves to God, will receive so much more to come.
  - In Luke 9:23-24 Jesus says "And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."
- For us - that will all happen when Christ returns again.
- We heard in our reading from Revelation, that there will be a new heaven and a new earth.
- A physical resurrection, a physical place, where there will be no sickness, no more death, no more pain, no sadness, and no tears.
- In fact, God will wipe those tears from our eyes himself.
  - *Just think about that - the same hands that flung stars into motion will tenderly wipe away our tears.*
  - *And our sorrow will be turned to shouts of joy.*
- And we can have confidence in that final restoration because we have already been restored!
- Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee that this will all happen.
- He will return - and make all things right.
- And we will be able to worship him, shout for joy, laugh in joy - for eternity in his presence.
  
- So we can join in the Psalmist,
- Rejoicing with shouts of joy because of our resurrection, reconciliation, restoration, through Jesus
- While calling on the Lord to come and restore our fortunes.
- The Lord has done great things.
- The Lord will do great things