

## **SOW IN TEARS, THEN REAP IN JOY**

Psalm 126: 1-6 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

It started like so many evenings. The Irwin Mom and Dad were at home and their son Jimmy was playing after dinner. Mom and Dad were absorbed with jobs around the house and didn't notice the time. It was a beautiful full moon night and some of the moonlight light seeped through the windows. Then Mom glanced at the clock. "Jimmy, it's time to go to bed. Go up now and I'll come and tuck you in later." Jimmy went straight upstairs to his room. An hour or so later, his mom came up to check if all was well with Jimmy and if he was asleep. To her surprise, she found her son staring quietly out of his window at the moon and the moonlit scenery. "What are you doing, Jimmy?" "I'm looking at the moon, Mommy." "Well, it's time to go to bed now." As Jimmy reluctantly settled down, he said, "Mommy, you know one day I'm going to walk on the moon." Who could have known that that boy in whom that dream was planted that night, would survive a near fatal motorbike crash which broke almost every bone in his body, and that James Irwin 32 years later would step on the moon's surface, just one of the 12 representatives of the human race to have ever done so. Do you have any dreams?

This seventh psalm of ascent or degrees is a psalm of reflection—looking back—looking back on a dream God gave the psalmist—a dream that God brought to pass. I am certain for the Ertl and Klein families, if we could hear their full stories, following the wedding yesterday, that they today are looking back on a dream—a dream that began when Jason Walter Ertl was born 24 years ago, and a dream that began when Alyssa Jennifer Klein was born 22 years ago. Dreams are so important in our lives. Beloved, God is so good. He is good beyond our wildest dreams. In our 49 years of pastoral ministry, I look back on two churches I served first before coming here. I served as the College-Career Age Pastor in Cary-Grove EFC near Fox River, Illinois for three years and then I served between 6 and 1/2 and 7 years in the Evangelical Free Church of Bloomington, Normal, Illinois. When God brought Jinny and me here to Rock Springs in October of 1976, we had no idea that we would be here still serving this family of God in 2016. We drove here in our 1968 Chevrolet Caprice which served that first fall, winter and spring as our Jeep because we drove it everywhere. One day, I turned off the road up on the Belt Loop at the highest point and I drove up the 4-wheel drive, deep rutted road up to as high as I could venture in the Caprice. I sat down and began taking panoramic pictures of Rock Springs. Then I prayed to the Lord to help us reach this city without the Lord to Himself. We started out with a membership of 13 and a high in attendance of 32. Today, as I look back to those pictures I use to have on my desk taped together to show the entire city, I remember my prayers and I remember God's dream He placed in my heart. Beloved, dream for God. Dream big dreams

and don't forget to thank God along the way as you dream that He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think. Looking back on that trip up on the hill in the Caprice, it reminds me of God's goodness as if I were dreaming.

It is obvious that this psalmist is writing this psalm in reflection and praise after a great deliverance by God. Most commentators say that this psalm must have been written after the Jews came back from exile. Yet, placing this psalm after the exile doesn't make sense for a number of reasons. "When the Lord restored the captivity/fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream." Either way, the captivity of Zion or the fortunes of Zion do not refer to the Jews, but to Jerusalem, for even Mt. Zion in Psalm 125 refers to Jerusalem. The Hebrew word for captivity—or fortunes is **shebooth**. The meaning of shebooth means a restoration of prosperity, it can mean to carry off into captivity, but it also can mean to be imprisoned and to restored from imprisonment. Shebooth means to reverse misfortune and disaster and to restore fortune. So when was that done?

If we examine the fortunes of the Jews returning from Babylon, they came back, not to a dream, but a nightmare-- to a fight in the land with the people who were living there, with Tobiah, the Ammonite and Sanballat, the Horonite, and Geshem, the Arab. These evil leaders were bent on keeping Nehemiah and Ezra from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem or rebuilding the temple. What time fulfills the time of astonishment in Psalm 126? One time confirms the likelihood that King Hezekiah wrote this psalm. It is written down in Assyrian history by King Sennacherib about what he did to Hezekiah. He wrote, "Hezekiah himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage." This fits the picture of Hezekiah and Zion being besieged and captured behind their own walls—without food and water. II Chronicles 32: 9-23 Here are excerpts. Listen!

"After this, Sennacherib king of Assyria, who was besieging Lachish with all his forces, sent his servants to Jerusalem to Hezekiah king of Judah and to all the people of Judah who were in Jerusalem, saying, "Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria, 'On what are you trusting, that you endure the siege in Jerusalem? Is not Hezekiah misleading you, that he may give you over to die by famine and by thirst, when he tells you, "The LORD our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria"? Who among all the gods of those nations that my fathers devoted to destruction was able to deliver his people from my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you from my hand?... And he wrote letters to cast contempt on the LORD, the God of Israel, and to speak against him, saying, "Like the gods of the nations of the lands who have not delivered their people from my hands, so the God of Hezekiah will not deliver his people from my hand." And they shouted it with a loud voice in the language of Judah to the people of Jerusalem who were on

the wall, to frighten and terrify them, in order that they might take the city. And they spoke of the God of Jerusalem as they spoke of the gods of the peoples of the earth, which are the work of men's hands. Then Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed because of this and cried to heaven. And the LORD sent an angel, who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he came into the house of his god, some of his own sons struck him down there with the sword. So the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib king of Assyria and from the hand of all his enemies, and He provided for them on every side. And many brought gifts to the LORD to Jerusalem and precious things to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations from that time onward.”

I feel quite certain that this deliverance of the Jews from Sennacherib and Assyria made King Hezekiah write the words of Psalm 126: 1-3—“When the Lord restored the captivity or 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 us, we are glad.” In this psalm therefore, I see six mighty remembrances that King Hezekiah would remind us all of. These **six mighty remembrances** relate to how God fulfills the dreams He has given us, even when like Joseph, it appears our imprisonment or our affliction or oppression at the moment is forever.

**ALWAYS REMEMBER THE WONDER OF GOD’S DELIVERANCES. (I.)**

Notice Psalm 126: 1—“When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.” What does it mean—we were like those who dream? Let me suggest an uncommon analogy these days. For those of you young men and women waiting God’s way as a virgin for marriage is a difficult, but attainable goal and a discipline God expects of us in our single years. It can be very hard. In a culture that mocks virginity, and says “go ahead,” most folk in American do not choose to be imprisoned, like a bird in a cage—with no freedom to live as they want. Beloved, let me remind you, the wonder of doing things God’s way is that when God brings deliverance in marriage, it is like Christmas. The honeymoon of two young people who love Jesus, who have waited on God’s timing is that God’s deliverance in marriage is like opening a sealed package wrapped with new paper and a red ribbon. I remember the wonder of being married and having waited with Jinny, imprisoned by God’s call to purity—the enemy wants to tell us—“Gotcha! You are imprisoned. Yet, 49 years later this June 16th, I can say, “I will always remember the wonder of God’s deliverance in marriage. Looking back to my honeymoon, I was like those who dream. I felt like it couldn’t be, but it was true. I was a married man and what I had hoped for had finally come true.

Beloved, God's deliverances are not always able to be calculated as a young man and a young woman being faithful to him and disciplined. Sometimes the wonder of God's deliverances are miraculous and uncalculatable. I think of the great Scottish leader of the Scottish Reformation, John Knox, who prayed, "Lord, give me Scotland or I die." A would-be assassin studied the habits of John Knox. From a long ways away, he began to plan his assassination of John Knox. He saw from a great distance where John studied in his chair. Making dead sure of his plan the would be assassin planned for one shot to kill John. Yet, on one particular day, the Lord led John to leave the back of his chair facing the window. He got up and crossed the room to sit in another seat. No sooner had he moved than his would be assassin fired a shot through a window to where Knox usually sat with his back to the street. The bullet passed through the chair and hit a chandelier but not John Knox. Oh the wonder of God's deliverance as He directed him momentarily to another chair. Always remember the wonder of God's deliverances. Looking back, it was as if he must have been dreaming at the time. Secondly,

**ALWAYS REMEMBER REDEMPTION JOY AND LAUGHTER IS**

**CONTAGIOUS.** (II.) Notice verses 2,a 3b. "Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy;... The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad." I will never forget in the first year after coming here to Rock Springs from Bloomington, a dear brother I love who is Home with Jesus now, the brother stopped in and he saw where we were meeting in the little church building on Second Street. He said to me, "Don't you miss that beautiful building you built back in Bloomington?" All I could muster to say at the time was, "This is where God called me, so I rejoice here in His will." I will never forget in 1994, being in Moldova in a church that had lost its deliverance joy. 300 people came to faith in Christ in one service. The elders who invited me to come preach there went to my interpreter. His name was Adrian. They told him, "Don't be impressed with this crowd of people coming to Jesus. Where will they be in four years?" Adrian was a young man of God only 16 years old. He told me what had been said. I rebuked those words of the elders. I told Adrian, "Don't be trapped in the Pharisaism that robs a church of Jesus' joy. If there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 believers who need no repentance, who are we to kill Jesus' joy?" Beloved, I have seen it all over America—Pharisees who refuse to witness for Jesus will nevertheless put down any move of God when people come to Jesus. I weep for them. We kill God's church when we minimize the joy of a new believer coming to Jesus. That is deliverance joy, redemption joy. Our mouths should be filled with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy. We should be saying, "The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad. A church that doesn't get excited about new believers is a church on its deathbed.

I won't soon forget in 1990 going to a village in Ukraine that was under the banner of Lenin. After preaching that one night in that village town hall, 75+ folk came forward, following the mayor of the town coming forward to receive the Lord. I remember being asked back here in America, "Are they all still strong for God?" The person showed no joy. The Lord moved me deeply when I returned in 1994 to that village. There I found a new church building full of people worshipping the Lord. The leaders were born again. They had hunted a wild turkey and they made it just for me. The turkey was still tough, but I couldn't contain the joy. I was glad.

**ALWAYS REMEMBER THE UNSAVED NOTICE OUR JOY AND WANT IT TOO.** (III.) Notice Psalm 126: 2b, 3a—Then they said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." Why do the unsaved want our joy? They see it is lasting! The joy and laughter of the world is ephemeral. Last Sunday the Denver Broncos won the Super Bowl. The Bronco fans all over were shouting. I was happy they won. But today, a week later, the Bronco-mania is died down. The world sees our true joy and they cannot duplicate it. The heathen are compelled to say with sort of a grudging admiration, -- "The Lord has done great things for them," Israel was able to say with great conviction—"The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad." By the time Hezekiah wrote this psalm, maybe a year or more had passed, but the gladness was not gone. Have you come to know the overpowering wonder of the magnitude of God's deliverance and His redemption? The unsaved see our joy and rejoice with us initially, but their joy for us is short-lived. No other gods of the surrounding nations had been able to deliver them from King Sennacherib and his general Rabshekah. They did well to hear the report of Hezekiah and Jerusalem and to remark with obvious wonder and surprise. Sadly, the world wants our joy and laughter until they realize it is Jesus' joy. Fourthly,

**ALWAYS REMEMBER THE WAY GOD'S BLESSINGS FLOW DOWN TO US IS HOW THEY CAN RETURN AGAIN—THROUGH PRAYER.** (IV.) Notice that the psalmist, very well King Hezekiah is praying—"Do it again, Lord!" I read in Psalm 126: 4, "Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the desert, or the Negeb." As I read earlier, when Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet prayed together, God started the streams of His mercy flowing and flooding Jerusalem. Now instead of the Jews being trapped behind their walls and starving to death, they were safe behind those walls praising the Lord. The picture of the streams in the Negeb or the desert are a phenomena known well in Israel. Dry stream beds that you can walk across—those wadis as they are called are not capable of producing even a trickle of water. Yet when the rainy season comes, they fill up quickly and can become torrents. That's the change the psalmist prayed for again, recalling the past flood of blessings God brought when one king and one

prophet prayed. God can change the status of His people from dry river beds of hopelessness to flowing streams in the desert, filling our hearts with praise. Fifthly,

**ALWAYS REMEMBER TEARFUL SOWING IS THE PATH TO JOYFUL REAPING.** (V.) Notice verse 5. “Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!” Notice the path to joyful reaping is not maybe or a possibility. No, the verb is “shall reap!” There is no reaping without sowing, but this is not just sowing. This is sowing with the rain of our tears. Dr. Marcus Dods once wrote to a friend, “The world is unintelligible except on the hypothesis that it is for our schooling, and that he that sows in tears is the likeliest to have sheaves worth gathering.” The sowers of that time sowed with little prospect of rains to fall on their precious sown seeds. They bemoaned that fact. I wish I could tell you how often I have sensed a dry time and I have wept before God for a harvest. So it was true in Israel. God brought unexpected rains and sadness was turned into gladness. The picture here is of a man or woman patiently plodding along at his sowing task. As the sowing was done, the sower would often grieve over the apparent hopelessness of it, but he still plowed and planted on, bearing his seed for the sowing. The psalmist says this tearful sower will reap with shouts of joy. Notice it isn’t that he says, “Well, what do you know? We did get a little harvest.” Never! The sower turned reaper is now shouting. The little potatoes are astronomical, the corn is huge with full ears, the carrots are large and deep, the peas are full, and the beans are plenteous. God is saying to us, “Rock Springs, endure the dry wadi times and keep praying and sowing and crying out to me. Jubilant shouting is up ahead, praise the Lord!” That impossible situation that shows no sign of change has been flooded with God’s early and latter rains and the change is unintelligible to someone that knew how awful the situation was. This reversal of an unexpected harvest is God’s gift to His weeping prophets and people. Sixthly, and lastly,

**ALWAYS REMEMBER TRUE BELIEVERS JOY IS UNROBBABLE. IT IS REAL INDEED!** (VI.) Notice lastly, verse 6. “He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.” There’s no fake fruit when we sow in tears and reap in joy. What is God telling us at the end of this mighty psalm? He is saying, “There’s a glorious outcome on the way.” He is admonishing us, “Faithfully perform your God-assigned tasks, weep with passion for a harvest, wait for the Lord’s blessing, and be certain, His blessing will surely be bounteous—more than we could ever dream. Faith never quits expecting a joyful harvest. If the Lord can take a besieged king and his people who are dead in the water, waiting for the final blow, and deliver them all, how will he not also freely give us all things. (Romans 8: 32) I love you. Keep sowing, weeping, praying, reaping and soon—have the courage without fear to start shouting the victory. Amen.