

# Spiritual Liberty

by James Bourne

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*James Bourne's sermon on 'Spiritual Liberty' emphasizes the transformative power of God's grace in liberating us from sin through repentance and faith.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 126:1-3, Psalm 126:5, Psalm 145:1, Psalm 145:8, Philippians 1:6

**Topics:** "Spiritual Freedom", "Heart Transformation"

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## Description

James Bourne preaches on the turning of captivity in Psalms 126:1, emphasizing the softening of the heart towards the Lord and the discovery of the evil within us, leading to self-abasement and spiritual transformation. The sermon highlights the joy and singing that come from God turning our captivity, leading others to acknowledge the great works He has done. It delves into sowing in tears, the comfort of the Holy Spirit, and the assurance that God will bring His work in us to completion. The sermon concludes with a call to praise the Lord, recognizing His greatness, mercy, and compassion.

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## Transcript

"When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream." (Psalm 126:1)

This when is the word we must first look at; it implies something we have to expect and wait for, when will this good thing be done for us, this turning of our captivity? Now many think this "turning" means getting clean out, as they say, so as to never get bound again; but it need not denote only anything so fully as that. For any little softening of the heart leading us to the Lord, and to wait for him when we begin to discern that the distress and misery we feel and which works such death in our souls is the Lord's discovery to us of the evil of our hearts, and causing us to fall down under it in self-abasement and abhorrence before him; this is such a measure of the turning of our captivity which those who feel it would not part with for all the world.

Do not call these things little; you will before long perceive that they are exceedingly great, and that they will have no end. The kindling of the love of God in your heart, and faith and hope in him, may be damped, but will never die. "Then was our mouth filled with laughter and our tongue with singing" (verse 2) when the Lord turned again our captivity--spiritual laughter and spiritual singing. "Then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them." (verse 2) This is what is sometimes said of God's people by the world.

Afterwards the church say it among themselves: "The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad. Turn our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south." (verse 3,4) Our captivity comes from the cold cutting rebukes of the law, signified by the north; and these streams from the south are the softening, melting showers of the Holy Spirit. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy." (verse 5) What is sowing in tears? It is not laughing with the world about nothing, but mourning to God under a sense of godly sorrow and repentance.

It is described in Jeremiah, "Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child together: a great company shall return thither." And how shall they come? "With weeping." This is sowing in tears, is it not? "I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters," different waters naturally suit different comforts God will apply to the various cases of his people.

"For I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn." (Jer. 31:8,9) Ephraim is each individual of this people. The firstborn in a great family is always more honoured and set by, but here all God's children are called the firstborn. Some of you have a good inheritance, but you must look to it that you loose not the privileges that belong to you; do not let them lie buried in a napkin or hid under a bushel. "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." (verse 6) These sheaves are the ripe fruit brought to perfection.

There is first the tender bud, then the blossom, then the ripe fruit. These budding hopes upon your spirit shall be brought to perfection. God will not leave his work half done. What he begins he will finish. The Apostle says, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." (Phil. 1:6) And when all this is done then you will be "like them that dream." David says, "I will extol thee, my God, O King; I will bless thy name for ever and ever."

Now he could not do this if he did not feel he had cause. He tells the cause afterwards, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised." (Ps. 145:1,3) He is great but we are little. All greatness belongs to him, and all littleness to us. The Psalmist says the same thing again, "Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite." (Ps. 147:5) He knows everything and understands the end from the beginning. We know nothing and can do nothing, but what he gives up power to know and do.

Afterwards David speaks of the works of the Lord, and what he will do for his people. "He lifteth up the meek." Who are these meek? Those whose spirits are brought down under his mighty hand, and with their mouths in the dust to say, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have, sinned against him." (Micah 7:9) "He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; he will deliver his soul from going down into the pit, and his soul shall see the light." (Job 33:27,28) Thus "he raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people." (Ps. 113:7,8) But he casteth the wicked down, to the ground. But, say you, I am not wicked. Stay awhile. There are but two parties in the world: those whose hearts, are brought down in self-abasement before God under a deep sense of their painful lost condition, and those who know nothing of this work. If you know nothing of it, you are the wicked whom he will cast down. My friends, this is a work little known in the professing world; few there are, who "rend their hearts and not their garments," (Joel 2:13) none but those whom the Spirit of God has made sensible of the sin of their nature and their actual transgressions. The Psalmist says, "Who covereth the heavens with clouds." Now these clouds denote many gloomy desponding thoughts which arise in the hearts of those sensible sinners, a feeling of their great misery and wretchedness; and these are the

clouds which are to "prepare the rain upon the earth to make the grass to grow upon the mountains," as the following words speak. (Ps. 147:8) This is the Lord's way. We shall not have the fruits of love and joy spring forth in our hearts, this is, a sense of peace and reconciliation with God, without a discovery of our sinfulness.

It says, "He delighteth not in the strength of the horse: he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man," that is, the fleshly confidence we have of our own does not please him. He brings all that down and only "taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy." (Ps. 147:10,11) These give him all the glory of their salvation, feeling their abject need in themselves, and utter sinfulness. Such glorify him by receiving out of his fullness those riches which he has treasured up the corn of Egypt; in this he was a type of Christ in whom are hid "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." "One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts...They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness." (Ps. 145:4,7)

My friends, I often think if you got more of the savour of this blessed work in your hearts, you would praise the Lord more. Now lay this to heart. For if I am set here by God to be a minister, my word will come against you another day if you do not profit. Do not say, he means me, but say, "God means me; and so you will find it serious.

"The Lord, is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works." (Ps. 145:8,9) Moses, too, makes this longsuffering mercy and goodness of the Lord his plea for asking for the pardon of the rebellious people. And it is particularly to be noticed what the Lord says, "I have pardoned, but as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with my glory." (Num. 14:20,21) This means that though he pardons, he will show that he will not be mocked; he will show the evil and bitterness of sin.

"He will take vengeance of our inventions." (Ps. 99:8) He means that we should greatly stand in awe here, and fear and reverence his holy name. How was Hezekiah made to feel this bitterness of sin, and to stand in awe of God, before he felt the pardon of his sin! "Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered me from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." (Isa. 38:17) How we see that the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm; yet is he "slow to anger."

The whirlwind is when the wind blows from all quarters at once and produces a bewildering storm in our hearts, and clouds of despondency and gloom overwhelm us. If these are sanctified to us, then these clouds are the "dust of his feet." How often I have seen the dust of a carriage coming and heard the sound, long before I saw the carriage itself. This is it, then, these gloomy feelings, if there is spiritual mourning over sin in them, bespeak his approach. I am sure that when the heart begins to sigh and to groan before God, as it was with Job (though perhaps you are hardly sensible it is after the Lord you sigh,) "Oh that I knew where I might find him," (Job 23:3) then that is the dust of his feet, and he will be found of you.

It is said, "The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him," (Nahum 1:5,6) that is, our rocky hearts. There may be terrible work to accomplish this, but "the Lord is...a stronghold in the day of trouble (Nahum 1:7) and he is strong enough to sustain us under trouble, for the

day of trouble may be long and very tedious, and to our feelings as if it would never end.

But the Lord is a stronghold through all, keep to that; and he knoweth them that trust in him. Do not listen to that "wicked counsellor" which imagineth evil against the Lord." (Nahum 1:11) He will whisper unbelieving thoughts in your heart against the Lord. Lay this to heart and pray for grace to resist all the evil and to overcome as David did. He says, "By thee have I run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall." (Ps. 18:29) What is the troop that David means here?

It is unbelief, pride, enmity, and all the multitude of evils together; these make this wall of separation he speaks of between God and him. But when God girds him with strength for the war, he can leap over this high wall.

The only way we can prevail is by confession and the prayer of faith. "Lord, I cannot pray," says one, "I have no light, no understanding. Lord, have mercy upon me." In this confession of weakness we shall find God girding us with strength, for his strength is made perfect in weakness. May the Lord in mercy instruct our souls in the knowledge of salvation, and lead us in his ways that we may go "from strength to strength," and in the end be made more than conquerors through Christ. Then with David shall we be able to sing a song of praise unto him: "I will extol thee, my God, O King; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever." (Ps. 145:1,2) Amen.

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