

Filled With Joy

by Jim Cymbala

God promises to give us songs of joy if we sow in tears and trust Him, even in the hard places.

Duration: 23:44

Scripture: Psalm 126:1-5, Matthew 6:33, John 8:36, Galatians 5:1

Topics: "Joy"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on Psalm 126 and highlights the joy and rejoicing of the people when the Lord brought back the captives to Zion. The speaker contrasts this joy with the sometimes depressing portrayal of religion by some individuals. The Psalm takes a turn and acknowledges the presence of problems and asks God to restore their fortunes in unfavorable circumstances. The speaker emphasizes the importance of sowing in tears and serving God faithfully, assuring that those who do so will reap with songs of joy, just like a farmer who sows in difficult conditions but eventually harvests abundantly.

Transcript

I want to give you just six verses which make up the whole psalm of one of my favorite psalms. It has a sentence there that I have held on to for more than 30 years and I've seen it so come true. Now, let's just look at the first three verses.

It's a very short psalm. Read it before you go to bed because God might give you something else out of it. It's Psalm 126 and here's what the first three verses say.

When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Look how some people have made religion so depressing, but look how they were rejoicing in God.

Back in the Old Testament, this is before Christ came. They were filled with joy and singing and some people, you have to shake them to get them to praise God, but look how happy they were. Then it was said among the nations, the Lord has done great things for them.

The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy. So, after warnings by the prophets for not decades, but for more than probably 150 years, God kept warning the people of Israel, turn back to me. Turn to me because if you keep going the way you're going, you're going to bring judgment on yourself and you're going to hurt yourself.

Sin hurts us, not only offends God. Why God says don't do those things is because there's a spiritual law in the universe that your sins will not only find you out, but the soul that sinned it shall die. Sin is like eating bad food.

You're going to get a bad stomach ache. It's like practicing unhealthy physical things. You will pay the price.

So, God warned and warned, nobody listened. So then God let them go into captivity and the kingdom of Judah went into Babylonian captivity. Babylon came in, conquered them, smashed down the temple, raised it to the ground, destroyed the walls of Jerusalem, and they went and took the Jewish people and sent them all over the Babylonian Empire.

But there was a prophecy in the Old Testament that after 70 years God would bring the Jewish people, disobedient though they were, out of his love and mercy, he would bring them back to Jerusalem. He would bring them back to the land. And this psalm probably comes from that period of time.

This psalm is remembering how God brought back the captivity of his people. His people were scattered all over the place. They didn't have any political power, but God, through a story which we won't go into, made it possible for the people, now the Persians had conquered the Babylonians, and the Persian king said, go back.

You go back to your land, rebuild your temple, rebuild your land, I'm sending you back. And here they thought they would never see Israel again, they never would see Jerusalem again, and now they're marching back. Not everyone went, because a lot of people just wanted to make money and stay where they were, and found a place in the Babylonian Empire, the Persian Empire now.

But the people who really loved God said, I gotta go back to the city of David, I gotta go back to the land of promise. So they went back, and now this psalm is remembering when the Lord turned back to our captivity. When we came back to the land and saw that God had brought us back, not because of anything in us, but just because of his mercy and love.

We were like people who were dreaming. You know we have the saying, it's too good to be... Yeah, in other words, I can't believe this. You know, talk about high-fiving.

They were doing all kinds of things, celebrating, and the psalmist, anointed by the Holy Spirit, is now saying, when God turned back the captivity and he brought us back to Zion, we were like men who were like dreaming, and we were jumping, and when we came back to the land after 70 years, some maybe were old enough to have remembered it, others had just heard about it. When we came back, we were filled with laughter, we were joyful, we were so happy, because God had done this. We didn't do it, God turned back the captivity.

And there's a good lesson in there for us. It's always good to look back and remember the great things God has done for you. You folks that are getting baptized this Thursday, maybe you're just a recent new convert, never stop remembering the life, the captivity, the bondage that you used to be in, that Jesus Christ has delivered you out of.

See, we're not going back to a land, we've got a spiritual freedom. How many of you can look back tonight and say, Pastor Simple, I might have died if it wasn't for Jesus, I might be in jail if it wasn't for Jesus. Lift up your hand if you have a testimony like that.

I could have wrecked my life, I could have ruined my life, but Jesus has saved me, he turned my captivity, whom the Son sets free, what, is free indeed. Everybody say amen to that. Don't just think about your problems, think about where God has brought you from.

It's always good to remember, that's what they're remembering, and this psalm, remember it was sung, it's been sung now for thousands of years. God put it in the Bible because what he's saying to us is, remember where I brought you from. I know you're not what you are supposed to be yet, none of us are, but we're not what we used to be.

So, and we're not where we used to be, living with that mentality. So we look back and we can rejoice. Why are we happy when we're praising God? Because we remember, I was blind, but now I see.

I was dead, but now I'm alive. I was chained, I had compulsive habits. We were being driven to destroy ourselves, and we couldn't stop it, but God turned the captivity around.

It was Jesus Christ who did it. Come on, one more time, amen. We'll say yes to that.

But there's more to it than even just salvation, that's the main thing. Sometimes you and I can look back since we've been a Christian, since we've been a Christian. Some of us have gotten in some really bad places since we've been a Christian.

Am I not right tonight? We've done things, we've said things, we fell away from our faith, we backslid, we got involved in things we shouldn't have, and God, only God and us know how it could have turned out. I'm talking about since we've been Christians. Have not some of us in this building or not all of us been disobedient at times? Some of us very, very disobedient.

I got an email from someone just recently, Pastor Simba, I can't believe God has had such mercy on me. I'm married against the warnings of my parents, against the warnings of any spiritual leaders. God was giving me a red light saying, don't marry him, don't marry him, don't marry him.

I didn't listen to anyone. I had all the answers full of myself, did it. God could have just let it blow up and just destroy my life.

But even in my rebellion and unfaithfulness, God was greater than my mess, and he has un-messed my mess. Can we say amen to that? Can we say amen? How many have experiences like that since you've been a Christian? Just wave your hand at me. Wave your hand at me.

Come on. Oh, my goodness. Come on.

That's what I'm talking about. We were out there, vulnerable, not able to help ourselves, but who turned to captivity? Remember, God turned to captivity. They're not celebrating what the Israelites did, they're celebrating what God did.

So, they just said, oh, my goodness. They're just rejoicing. Now, that's a good lesson.

Also, filled with laughter. Remember this, new believers and congregation, the joy of the Lord is our strength. Whenever you see a morose, overly serious, depressed Christian, that is not a sign of spirituality.

That's a sign something's wrong. Because if anyone in this world should be happy, it should be us. Do I get an amen? I mean, we should be thinking back where God has brought us from, rejoicing, laughing,

happy, clapping our hands.

Oh, I was so grieved on Sunday. I very rarely have been that grieved in my heart. I looked at some visitors who were here, looking at some of the people who had stood when the choir was singing.

And I could just discern they were judging and sneering the people, because they were a little emotional and they were standing. Maybe in their church, they never stand or lift their hands. And some of the people were moving a little bit, but not out of order.

And the choir was singing, and they just looked down at it. Listen, something's wrong with you if you don't want to rejoice in the God of your salvation. Come on, do I get one last hallelujah? It was so grieving to me.

It made me think of how Jesus felt when he saw those Pharisees and Sadducees, religious, just full of judgmentalism, judging everybody, looking down on everyone, thinking everybody's a fanatic because you're not as dead as they are. That's what's happened. People are so dead.

If you're not dead like them, they call you a fanatic. Now, there's such a thing as fanaticism. It's against the Word of God, and it can hurt meetings.

But, oh, listen, I am so glad that I can rejoice. You know what? Let's all stand, give God a standing ovation. Come on.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

Thank you, Lord. Where you brought us from, where you've delivered us from. Hallelujah.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Hallelujah.

You may be seated. Sometimes it's just good to praise the Lord. Remember that.

Look back and keep rejoicing. No matter how difficult things are, remember where God has brought you from. And then all the deliverances along the way.

Oh, my goodness, how he's helped some of us. If it was appropriate and we would all tell our stories, we wouldn't have enough time to tell all of our stories. But they would be inappropriate to tell some of them.

But we know where God has brought us from. And then the end of the psalm. Because you see, no matter how good things work out for you, and no matter where God has brought you from and brought you through, new believers do not be surprised by the fact that there'll be new battles to fight.

Some people think it's all over. You get baptized, I'm never going to have a problem the rest of my life. Thank you, Jesus.

There are problems. So, out of nowhere, the psalm does a U-turn, but it's so true to life. It's so true to life.

And you remember this, because this is the part that is most precious to me. The psalm goes on to say, restore our fortunes. Well, wait a minute, I thought you were just celebrating.

Now, what are you saying? Restore our fortunes, oh, Lord, like streams in the Negev, in the midst of harsh conditions, arid, dry, barren land. Run streams, God, and do what needs to be done in unfavorable

circumstances. And here's my verse.

For those who sow in what? Shall reap with songs of joy. He who goes out, this is for every pastor, every worker, everyone who's praying for a loved one, everyone who's hanging on to God for your son or your daughter. I don't care how it looks.

He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him. So now, the picture is, look, and I close. The picture is, in that land, southern part of Israel, very, very hard to grow crops.

And sometimes, it's very, very dry and arid land, very hard. And sometimes, there's a lack of food. So now, what are you going to do with your seed? What are you going to do with that? You're going to use it for food for your children, or you're going to go out and sow it so that you have a hope for the future? Parents have been known to cry as they've gone out sowing their seed.

So here's the principle that God lays down. Whoever sows in tears will reap in joy. Let's just look at that one.

Whoever sows in tears will reap in joy. Now, sometimes, you can sow seed in the ground and a farmer can do what he wants, but certain unusual circumstances come. There's so much rain or there's a drought, and even though you've sowed properly, you won't get what you're supposed to get.

That happens. There's a shortage of oranges. There's something, there was a freeze in Florida.

And even though everything was done right, who knew the freeze was going to come? But spiritually, this never fails. Whoever sows in tears will reap in joy. If I know anything, if I believe in anything in the Bible after Jesus Christ, I know this.

Whoever sows in tears will reap in joy. Whoever brings their problem to God, their brokenness to God, whoever pours out their heart to God, whoever sees that mountain that looks so big and instead of giving up says, God, it breaks my heart what I'm facing, but I sow in tears to you. I give this thing to you.

Or whoever obeys God and keeps serving even when it's hard. And you cry when you sing in the choir, or you're serving the children, or you're cleaning the building and your mind isn't on the building, it's on that situation at home. And you give it to God, and you give it to God, and your heart is broken, but you give it to God, you obey God, you're faithful to God, you sow in tears.

God says, I guarantee you, you will reap with songs of joy. Listen, listen, listen. You do your part.

God says, do your part. I'll do my part. You sow in tears.

You give it to me. You trust me, even in the hard place, even when you have to wipe away tears. Haven't you ever wiped away tears when you pray? Never be afraid of crying, new believer.

Never be afraid of crying, because sometimes the best prayer is no words at all, it's a tear. God understands tear. My friend, Gordon Jensen, all those years ago, wrote that song, Tears are a Language, God Understands.

David said, I lay in bed at night, and I water my bed with tears. Paul says, I travail like a mother giving birth till Christ be formed in you. Jesus saw Jerusalem, and he wept over it.

Natural emotions, when you go out to God, are totally proper and right. But God says this, you give it to me, even through tears. I will work on your behalf.

You do your part. I will bring you to the place where you will have songs of joy. Now, to someone here who's tempted toward depression now, you're ready to give up.

Do not give up. Listen to the promise, those who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy. God will give you maybe tears for the night, but remember, joy comes in the morning.

There's a period... Listen, listen, listen. There's a period of time where it's hard. I'm telling you the truth now.

You know, Sister Bookstaff and I were walking back with a group of other people from lunch today, and we were talking about all the formulas that ministers try to come up with in life, all the little formulas. Just serve God, and you'll never have a problem. And just speak the word, and there'll never be a difficulty.

It's all false. Life is a mystery. The greatest saints in the world have gone through heartache, but God gives them joy in the morning.

It's an absolute necessity. It's a law. God has said, whoever lives for me, serves me, even to the point of difficulty and tears, I will give them songs of joy, songs of joy.

Pastor, how will he do it? I don't know. When will he do it? I don't have the faintest, but his word is true. Let everybody be a liar, but God's word is true.

He will give you songs of joy. Hang on, don't give up. Let your tears be your weapon.

Never be embarrassed to cry. Never be embarrassed when you're praising God or when you're praying to God. Never hold your emotions in if it's natural.

Don't work up emotions, because tears are a language that God understands. And the final note is, God says, those who follow me and trust me and serve me, even in the hard place, they're going to be like those farmers who go out with the pouch. In the Hebrew, it's a picture of a pouch, and a guy just goes in and takes a handful of seed.

And the ground is so hard, it looks impossible, but he sows his seed. And things are so difficult, he's even crying as he sows the seed. But God says, that farmer will doubtless wait till the seed does its work, wait till God blesses it, but one day he's going to go back to that same field with his sickle, and he's going to harvest so much that he's going to be walking back with bundles of harvest and all of that.

He sowed, God added the blessing, he's going to reap, and that's what's going to happen to us. We're going to sow in tears, but we're going to reap with songs of joy. Is life always easy? I'm telling you the truth, life is not always easy.

And I want the kind of faith that J. Hudson Taylor had, great missionary to China, started China Inland Missions. In 1850-something, he went there. Then he came home, and he was so restricted in his spirit, because he saw so few workers just in some cities on the coast of mainland China.

There were some missionaries. We're talking prior to the Civil War in our own country. So he went back, and he started to make appeals throughout Great Britain, and he told people, come to China, come to

China, there's all these millions of people dying without Christ.

So he got these workers, and while he was there, his wife had some children in England, and then she had another one, two boys, and then I think then finally a girl. And his girl was his delight. She would get up in the morning.

She loved God. She was only eight years old, and she would tell her daddy when she saw them worshiping idols in China, Daddy, they shouldn't do that. If they only knew Jesus, they wouldn't be worshiping those idols.

And he loved her, and then out of nowhere, she got sick and gone in a day, dead. And here he went out with a broken heart, dressed as Chinese. He was the first missionary to ever do that.

He was a very controversial person. He shaved his head, and he wore, in that day, they wore the long queue in the back. He wore a totally Chinese dress, and sophisticated missionaries didn't do anything like that back then.

And here he went into inland China, left his sons and his wife behind him for weeks at a time with a broken heart, sowing seed, not seed in the ground, sowing the gospel of Jesus Christ, sowing it. And now, partly through him and the work of so many great Chinese Christians, that country has more Christians than any other country in the world. And at one time, someone said, there's no sense even going there.

No one will ever turn them from superstition to the gospel of Jesus Christ. So sometimes in life, it gets hard. How many, since you've been a believer, man up, woman up, how many have had difficult moments, right? Come on, right? Son, daughter are sick, you don't know why.

It doesn't go away right away when you pray. And you're saying, God, where are you? But those who sow in tears, they will reap in joy. Those who go forth with their seed, those of you who are called to do work, any pastors that are here, you keep sowing that seed.

Oh, I remember some days, it still happens now, but when my daughter was away, my heart would be broken, and I would say, God, how can I preach to anyone? How in the world can I preach my daughter's away? I don't know where my daughter is, and you want me to preach? I can't do it. And God would pull me together. My father-in-law would call me and pray over the phone.

Jim, in Jesus' name, you go to the church and you preach this Sunday. You do not stay home. You do not give in to this.

But no one knew what was happening, really. But with a broken heart, sowing the seed, oh, God brings back joy. Not only all the people who found the Lord, but he brought my daughter back.

He's going to do it again. Come on. For every one of us, put our hands together.

Tell the Lord you love him out loud. We love you, Lord. We love you, Lord.

Father God, we look back on our lives, and all I can see in my life is grace and mercy. We look back and we see where you have brought us from. The messes, the pits, the deception.

The anger, the lostness. We rejoice today that you have broken our captivity and set us free. We thank you, Jesus, for breaking our captivity and setting us free.

And we're never going to stop remembering all the deliverances, all the answers, all the blessings. But Lord, we also understand your word that there's more battles to fight. There's mountains that come in front of us.

There's valleys we got to walk through. There's things that happen. We don't know why.

Why did this happen? But we have decided today to trust you in the good times and to trust you in the difficult times. You're not only the God of the mountain, you're the God of the valley, Lord. Come on, let's put our hands together.

The God of the mountain. The God of the valley. Those who trust in the Lord shall be like the mountains that surround Jerusalem.

We're not going to fluctuate. We're going to be solid like those mountains, Lord. And we love you, Jesus.

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