

Exposition on Psalm 126

by St. Augustine

The sermon exhorts listeners to do good works, such as almsgiving, and to trust that they will reap joy in the future, even in difficult circumstances.

Scripture: Psalm 125, Matthew 15:10, Luke 10:30, Luke 10:35, Romans 7:14, 1 Corinthians 15:55

Topics: "Redemption Through Faith", "Freedom From Sin"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about how man came into captivity through sin, being sold under sin by their own consent. However, redemption comes through faith in righteousness, as innocent blood was shed for the redemption of sinners. The Lord's act of turning back the captivity of Sion symbolizes the joy and comfort believers experience when freed from sin and restored to righteousness. He emphasizes the importance of guarding the heart and sowing good works in tears, knowing that they will reap joy in due time.

Transcript

1. ...How man had come into captivity, let us ask the Apostle Paul....For he says: For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. Romans 7:14 Behold whence we became captives; because we were sold under sin. Who sold us? We ourselves, who consented to the seducer. We could sell ourselves; we could not redeem ourselves. We sold ourselves by consent of sin, we are redeemed in the faith of righteousness. For innocent blood was given for us, that we might be redeemed. Whatsoever blood he shed in persecuting the righteous, what kind of blood did he shed? Righteous men's blood, indeed, he shed; they were Prophets, righteous men, our fathers, and Martyrs. Whose blood he shed, yet all coming of the offspring of sin. One blood he shed of Him who was not justified, but born righteous: by shedding that blood, he lost those whom he held. For they for whom innocent blood was given were redeemed, and, turned back from their captivity, they sing this Psalm.

2. When the Lord turned back the captivity of Sion, we became as those that are comforted Psalm 125:1. He meant by this to say, we became joyful. When? When the Lord turned back the captivity of Sion. What is Sion? Jerusalem, the same is also the eternal Sion. How is Sion eternal, how is Sion captive? In angels eternal, in men captive. For not all the citizens of that city are captives, but those who are away from thence, they are captives. Man was a citizen of Jerusalem, but sold under sin he became a pilgrim. Of his progeny was born the human race, and the captivity of Sion filled all lands. And how is this captivity of Sion a shadow of that Jerusalem? The shadow of that Sion, which was granted to the Jews, in an image, in a figure, was in captivity in Babylonia, and after seventy years that people turned back to its own city..

..But when all time is past, then we return to our country, as after seventy years that people returned from the Babylonish captivity, for Babylon is this world; since Babylon is interpreted confusion....So then this whole life of human affairs is confusion, which belongs not unto God. In this confusion, in this Babylonish land, Sion is held captive. But the Lord has turned back the captivity of Sion. And we became, he says, as those that are comforted. That is, we rejoiced as receiving consolation. Consolation is not save for the unhappy, consolation is not save for them that groan, that mourn. Wherefore, as those that are comforted, except because we are still mourning? We mourn for our present lot, we are comforted in hope: when the present is passed by, of our mourning will come everlasting joy, when there will be no need of consolation, because we shall be wounded with no distress. But wherefore says he as those that are comforted, and says not comforted? This word as, is not always put for likeness: when we say As, it sometimes refers to the actual case, sometimes to likeness: here it is with reference to the actual case....Walk therefore in Christ, and sing rejoicing, sing as one that is comforted; because He went before you who has commanded you to follow Him.

3. Then was our mouth filled with joy, and our tongue with exultation Psalm 125:2. That mouth, brethren, which we have in our body, how is it filled with joy? It uses not to be filled, save with meat, or drink, or some such thing put into the mouth. Sometimes our mouth is filled; and it is more that we say to your holiness, when we have our mouth full, we cannot speak. But we have a mouth within, that is, in the heart, whence whatsoever proceeds, if it is evil, defiles us, if it is good, cleanses us. For concerning this very mouth ye heard when the Gospel was read. For the Jews reproached the Lord, because His disciples ate with unwashed hands. They reproached who had cleanness without; and within were full of stains. They reproached, whose righteousness was only in the eyes of men. But the Lord sought our inward cleanness, which if we have, the outside must needs be clean also. Cleanse, He says, the inside, and the outside shall be clean also. Matthew 23:26 ...

4. But let us return to what was just now read from the Gospel, relating to the verse before us, Our mouth was filled with joy, and our tongue with delight: for we are inquiring what mouth and what tongue. Listen, beloved brethren. The Lord was scoffed at, because His disciples ate with unwashed hands. The Lord answered them as was fitting, and said unto the crowds whom He had called unto Him, Hear ye all, and understand: not that which goes into the mouth defiles a man; but that which comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man. Matthew 15:10-11 What is this? When He said, what goes into the mouth, He meant only the mouth of the body. For meat goes in, and meats defile not a man; because, All things are clean to the clean; and, every creature of God is good, and none to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving. 1 Timothy 4:4 ...

5. Guard the mouth of your heart from evil, and you will be innocent: the tongue of your body will be innocent, your hands will be innocent; even your feet will be innocent, your eyes, your ears, will be innocent; all your members will serve under righteousness, because a righteous commander has your heart. Then shall they say among the heathen, the Lord has done great things for them.

6. Yea, the Lord has done great things for us already, whereof we rejoice Psalm 125:3. Consider, my brethren, if Sion does not at present say this among the heathen, throughout the whole world; consider if men are not running unto the Church. In the whole world our redemption is received; Amen is answered. The dwellers in Jerusalem, therefore, captive, destined to return, pilgrims, sighing for their country, speak thus among the heathen. What do they say? The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we rejoice. Have they done anything for themselves? They have done ill with themselves, for they have sold themselves under sin. The Redeemer came, and did the good things for them.

7. Turn our captivity, O Lord, as the torrents in the south Psalm 125:4. Consider, my brethren, what this means....As torrents are turned in the south, so turn our captivity. In a certain passage Scripture says, in admonishing us concerning good works, Your sins also shall melt away, even as the ice in fair warm weather. Sirach 3:17 Our sins therefore bound us. How? As the cold binds the water that it run not. Bound with the frost of our sins, we have frozen. But the south wind is a warm wind: when the south wind blows, the ice melts, and the torrents are filled. Now winter streams are called torrents; for filled with sudden rains they run with great force. We had therefore become frozen in captivity; our sins bound us: the south wind the Holy Spirit has blown: our sins are forgiven us, we are released from the frost of iniquity; as the ice in fair weather, our sins are melted. Let us run unto our country, as the torrents in the south....

8. For the next words are, They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy Psalm 125:5. In this life, which is full of tears, let us sow. What shall we sow? Good works. Works of mercy are our seeds: of which seeds the Apostle says, Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not. Galatians 6:9 Speaking therefore of almsgiving itself, what says he? This I say; he that sows sparingly, shall reap also sparingly. 2 Corinthians 9:6 He therefore who sows plentifully, shall reap plentifully: he who sows sparingly, shall reap also sparingly: and he that sows nothing, shall reap nothing. Why do ye long for ample estates, where ye may sow plentifully? There is not a wider field on which you can sow than Christ, who has willed that we should sow in Himself. Your soil is the Church; sow as much as you can. But you have not enough to do this. Have you the will? As what you had would be nothing, if you had not a good will; so do not despond, because you have not, if you have a good will. For what do you sow? Mercy. And what will you reap? Peace. Said the Angels, Peace on earth unto rich men? No, but, Peace on earth unto men of a good will. Luke 2:14 Zacchaeus had a strong will, Zacchaeus had great charity. Luke 19:8 ...Did then that widow who cast her two farthings into the treasury, sow little? Nay, as much as Zacchaeus. For she had narrower means, but an equal will. She gave her two mites Luke 21:1-4 with as good a will as Zacchaeus gave the half of his patrimony. If you consider what they gave, you will find their gifts different; if you look to the source, you will find them equal; she gave whatever she had, and he gave what he had....But if they are beggars whose profession is asking alms, in trouble they also have what to bestow upon one another. God has not so forsaken them, but that they have wherein they may be tried by their bestowing of alms. This man cannot walk; he who can walk, lends his feet to the lame; he who sees, lends his eyes to the blind; and he who is young and sound, lends his strength to the old or the infirm, carries him: the one is poor, the other is rich.

9. Sometimes also the rich man is found to be poor, and something is bestowed upon him by the poor. Somebody comes to a river, so much the more delicate as he is more rich; he cannot pass over: if he were to pass over with bare limbs, he would catch cold, would be ill, would die: a poor man more active in body comes up: he carries the rich man over; he gives alms unto the rich. Think not therefore those only poor, who have not money....Thus love ye, thus be ye affectioned unto one another. Attend not solely to yourselves: but to those who are in want around you. But because these things take place in this life with troubles and cares, faint not. You sow in tears, you shall reap in joy.

10. How, my brethren? When the farmer goes forth with the plough, carrying seed, is not the wind sometimes keen, and does not the shower sometimes deter him? He looks to the sky, sees it lowering, shivers with cold, nevertheless goes forth, and sows. For he fears lest while he is observing the foul weather, and awaiting sunshine, the time may pass away, and he may not find anything to reap. Put not off, my brethren; sow in wintry weather, sow good works, even while you weep; for, They that sow in tears, shall reap in joy. They sow their seed, good will, and good works. They went on their way and wept,

casting their seed Psalm 125:6. Why did they weep? Because they were among the miserable, and were themselves miserable. It is better, my brethren, that no man should be miserable, than that you should do alms....Nevertheless, as long as there are objects for its exercise, let us not fail amid those troubles to sow our seed. Although we sow in tears, yet shall we reap in joy. For in that resurrection of the dead, each man shall receive his own sheaves, that is, the produce of his seed, the crown of joys and of delight. Then will there be a joyous triumph, when we shall laugh at death, wherein we groaned before: then shall they say to death, O death, where is your strife? O death, where is your sting? 1 Corinthians 15:55 But why do they now rejoice? Because they bring their sheaves with them.

11. In this Psalm we have chiefly exhorted you to do deeds of alms, because it is thence that we ascend; and you see that he who ascends, sings the song of steps. Remember: do not love to descend, instead of to ascend, but reflect upon your ascent: because he who descended from Jerusalem to Jericho fell among thieves. Luke 10:30 ...The Samaritan as He passed by slighted us not: He healed us, He raised us upon His beast, upon His flesh; He led us to the inn, that is, the Church; He entrusted us to the host, that is, to the Apostle; He gave two pence, whereby we might be healed, Luke 10:35, 37 the love of God, and the love of our neighbour. The Apostle spent more; for, though it was allowed unto all the Apostles to receive, as Christ's soldiers, pay from Christ's subjects, that Apostle, nevertheless, toiled with his own hands, and excused the subjects the maintenance owing to him. All this has already happened: if we have descended, and have been wounded; let us ascend, let us sing, and make progress, in order that we may arrive.

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