

REVIVAL
Psalm 126

August 2, 2009 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

Psalm 126:1-6 – ¹ When the LORD brought back (Heb. *shub*; *restored*) the captive ones of Zion, we were like those who dream. ² Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with joyful shouting; then they said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” ³ The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad. ⁴ Restore our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the South. ⁵ Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. ⁶ He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying *his* bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves *with him*.

Revival is something that is often misunderstood today. Some think that revival happens only during weeks in the spring and/or fall dedicated in a particular church for revival. I am not suggesting that the pastors of such churches would relegate revival to those days alone as if the Holy Spirit could not work on other occasions. But what about those in the pews? Some that I have described as “revival junkies,” show up during these special weeks and receive their spiritual fix for four or five months and are quite content. Others I would suggest do benefit from these special weeks. But is it revival?

Martyn Lloyd-Jones once preached a series of sermons on the subject of revival. In those messages, Lloyd-Jones stated, “The history of religion is the history of revivals.” By that he meant that redemptive history is marked by times in which God’s work among His people is raised to a higher level through the Spirit’s power. Eventually, however, the Spirit withdraws that heightened outpouring of His power and the people descend to a lower level. *Revival*, then, are those peak times in God’s kingdom when God intervenes in the affairs of His people for the purpose of reviving and restoring His work. Regarding those seasons of revival, Lloyd-Jones said, “God does more in five minutes than man did in the previous ten years.”¹

Psalm 126 describes such a time in the history of God’s chosen people. It is a song penned by the psalmist during a time when Israel returned from captivity, most likely the Babylonian captivity. The occasion for this psalm was either the laying of the foundation of the second temple (Ezra 3) or the reinstatement of the Feast of Tabernacles during Ezra’s ministry (Neh. 8). This was a great day for the people of God, so great that Steve Lawson deemed it to be one of the greatest revivals in the annals of God’s kingdom—the revival at the Watergate when the people cried out to Ezra to “bring out the book” (Neh. 8:1), referring to God’s Word.

So this is a song of revival and restoration. The psalm divides naturally around the Hebrew word for “restore.” We will see first the gratitude for God’s past restoration in vv. 1-3 followed by a plea for present and future restoration in vv. 4-6.

I. Gratitude for Past Restoration (126:1-3)

The psalm begins with the recognition that it is the Lord who alone is able to revive and restore a people to Himself. The psalmist understood that the God brings His people into captivity, and the Lord delivers from captivity. As we have seen in our studies on the importance of Christian suffering, whenever the Lord leads His people through trials, His intent is not to destroy them or leave them forever but only to refine their gold and consume their dross

¹ From Steven J. Lawson, *Holman Old Testament Commentary: Psalms 76-150*, 281.

(1 Pet. 1:7). This then is a reference to the deportation of Israel to Babylon in 586 B.C. Lest we miss God at work in their captivity, I remind you that God raised up Nebuchadnezzar to chasten His people by leading them into captivity and then Darius, Cyrus and others to deliver and restore them. The first, the King of Babylon, desecrated the temple and commanded his army to destroy it. The second, King of Persia, issued a decree that the temple be rebuilt and others that it be fully funded by the Persians. But behind it all was the Lord who orders all things for the good of His people.

And all of this happened to **“Zion,”** the city that God loves more than any other. How do I know that? Psalm 87:2, “The LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the *other* dwelling places of Jacob.” If the Lord allows Zion such experiences of suffering and distress, then who are we to think we are exempt? We too will face such times in a fallen world. It is then that we, like these people, remember what God has done.

1. The reaction of God’s people (vv. 1-3)

A pastor quoted this Psalm at a minister’s conference in England in 1990. He was describing the ecstasy that accompanied the collapse of communism in Czechoslovakia. Previously Christians had live under restrictive threats. Only one worship service a week was allowed by the government to some select groups. But after the renting of the Iron Curtain, Christian pastors could preach openly in the streets. Teaching on Communism in the state schools was replaced with a course about God and Christianity. Long-repressed believers in Christ were overjoyed. As the pastor said, “We thought we must be dreaming.”²

That illustrates what the people of this psalm experienced. When the Lord restored His people from their captivity, everything seemed like a dream. They could not believe it. Some of them could barely remember living in the promised land as a child. Most would have been born in Babylon and only heard stories about it. O. Palmer Robertson comments, “No matter how great you might imagine your future to be, the reality may be greater... Because his ways are higher than heaven above earth, the realities of restoration appear as dreams when they actually occur.”³ How is this? Because God is great and “is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20). He more than meets our anticipations—He far exceeds them!

They acknowledge God’s work of deliverance in their joy, **“Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with joyful shouting.”** This is the initial reaction of all those who have been delivered. The excitement and enthusiasm overwhelms them, so much so that they can’t contain themselves. The joy of the Lord becomes a part of their being. The immediate focus is on what the Lord has done in v. 3, **“The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad,”** not on the bondage and captivity of the recent past. In all of this, God alone is the Restorer who receives all the glory.

2. The reaction of the surrounding nations (v. 2)

Does that describe you this morning? Those of you that have been delivered from the bondage of your sin and given new life in Christ, are you glad? What do others see in you, especially the other nations, those who don’t know Christ and have never been delivered? What a sin it is for God’s people to go about moaning and groaning, failing to acknowledge the

² From O Palmer Robertson, *Psalms in Congregational Celebration*, 359.

³ *Ibid.*, 361.

greatness of God's intervention on their behalf! God has redeemed us from sin and guilt. He continues to weaken the power of sin in our lives. He will ultimately free us from the very presence of sin and evil. Every day is a divine blessing and proof of God's restoration of you in Christ. Joy and gladness should ever be the mark of those who have been set free by God. If deliverance from the Babylonian captivity provided such joy for God's people in the past, how much more should it those who have been delivered from the destruction of sin and death and hell through Christ today?

II. Plea for Present and Future Restoration (126:4-6)

- **Great Awakening in New England**
- **Bible Belt South**

1 Peter 4:17 – For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God.

⁴ Restore our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the South.

1. Intense sorrow

⁵ Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. ⁶ He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying *his* bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves *with him*.

Ecclesiastes 3:4 – A time to weep and a time to laugh; A time to mourn and a time to dance.

- **Criticize; pray for what we want; blame anyone and everyone but ourselves**

Isaiah 65:18-19 – But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create Jerusalem *for* rejoicing and her people *for* gladness. ¹⁹ I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people; and there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying.

2. Intentional sowing

- **VBS – seeds**

1 Corinthians 3:5-7 – ⁵ What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. ⁷ So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.

3. Anticipate change

Jeremiah 31:10-13 – ¹⁰ Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare in the coastlands afar off, and say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him and keep him as a shepherd keeps his

flock.”¹¹ For the LORD has ransomed Jacob and redeemed him from the hand of him who was stronger than he.¹² They will come and shout for joy on the height of Zion, and they will be radiant over the bounty of the LORD—Over the grain and the new wine and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; and their life will be like a watered garden, and they will never languish again.¹³ Then the virgin will rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old, together, for I will turn their mourning into joy and will comfort them and give them joy for their sorrow.

The repentant worker will be a rejoicing worker!

Conclusion

1. Prayer

Most people have heard of the Welsh Revival which started in 1904. It began as a movement of prayer. Seth Joshua, the Presbyterian evangelist, came to Newcastle Emlyn College where a former coal miner, Evan Roberts aged 26, was studying for the ministry. The students were so moved that they asked if they could attend Joshua’s next campaign nearby. So they cancelled classes to go to the next meeting where Seth Joshua prayed publicly, ‘O God, bend us.’ Roberts went forward where he prayed with great agony, ‘O God, bend me.’

The movement went like a tidal wave over Wales, in five months there being a hundred thousand people converted throughout the country. The social impact was astounding. For example, judges were presented with white gloves, not a case to try; no robberies, no burglaries, no rapes, no murders, and no embezzlements, nothing. District councils held emergency meetings to discuss what to do with the police now that they were unemployed.

As the revival swept Wales, drunkenness was cut in half. There was a wave of bankruptcies, but nearly all taverns. There was even a slowdown in the mines, for so many Welsh coal miners were converted and stopped using bad language that the horses that dragged the coal trucks in the mines could not understand what was being said to them. That revival also affected sexual moral standards with the illegitimate birth rate in two areas dropping 44% within a year of the beginning of the revival. The revival swept Britain, Scandinavia, Germany, North America, Australasia, Africa, Brazil, Mexico, and Chile. As always, it began through a movement of prayer.

2. Preaching

- **Peter at Pentecost**
- **Reformation (especially Calvin)**
- **Great Awakening (Edwards, Whitefield, Wesley, and others)**
- **Expository preaching today**

3. Planting

Matthew 9:35-38 – ³⁵ Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. ³⁶ Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and ³dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then He said to His disciples, “The

harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. ³⁸ Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”

4. Purifying

- **An outcry of confession and repentance of either precedes or is produced by revival.**
- **There is always a humiliation of self and an exaltation of God.**

While I sing, let me admire the Lord’s kindness to my country, to his gospel church, to mankind, to my soul. And, in my remaining distress, personal or relative, let me sow in mourning and supplication, that I through grace reap joyful deliverances, and everlasting consolations.