

Shouts of Joy

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[0 : 0 0] So tonight we are continuing our series in the Psalms and we're looking at Psalm 126. Maybe a very familiar Psalm for us, and maybe possibly one that we've held on to at some point in our lives.

And the reason likely that we might have held on to, or the reason that we could have latched on to one or two of these verses at some point in our lives is because the Psalms to do with us, it's concerned with the already and not yet, the already and not yet.

So we're most likely reading a Psalm which was written after the Babylonian exile. The first party of Jews have come home, they've returned to Jerusalem.

They are beside themselves with joy and excitement, but you fast forward to sometime in the future after that, after that excitement and that joy. And that's when the work begins, that's when the joy and the excitement of being released begins to weigh it off in a sense.

And they have to get on with rebuilding the temple and rebuilding the community and have to get on with life and it's not easy for them to do that. They want to be able to meet with God in the temple, but work has to be done.

[1 : 2 0] Life has to be battled through by these people. They have been set free from their captivity, but it'll take time before everything as it is meant to be.

There will be trouble before they can eventually meet with God as they want to in the temple. And for us, for the one who is saved until the day that we get to be with him, there is work to be done, whether we are in the workplace, whether we are at home, whether we are building and maintaining relationships with one another, whether we are trying to be holy and failing at it and trying harder.

There is work to be done, the psalmist says. And in the work, there can be tears. It can be hard. It won't always be hard. It won't always be painful, but it can be hard.

And it's certainly not always going to be easy. Though we have been saved and brought into God's family, though we know surely about the shouts of joy that the psalmist mentions, that joy will be experienced fully and perfectly when we go to be with God.

But until then, he says, we are in the already, but not yet. The Jews were set free, but they're yet to rebuild the temple. We have been set free if we belong to God and have been saved, but we're yet to know perfect peace and we're yet to be with him in eternity.

[2 : 5 1] So between now and then, between our getting up on our rest, between our going to work and coming home, between us being saved by Jesus and at last going to be with him until then that is work to be done, the psalmist says.

Whether we are building or we are waiting for others to come and join us, that it is work to be done, but the shouts of joy will be experienced again.

Possibly in this life and to some extent, but more fully and completely when Jesus comes back and wipes away every tear. So what do we do between now and then?

What do we do with ourselves in the already not yet, when it possibly even brings tears? What do we do? Three things tonight, just three points from the psalm.

Three things that the psalmist does as he thinks about this time of returning to Jerusalem and building life and getting on with it. The first thing he does, he remembers his fortune.

[4 : 01] He remembers the fortune that God has given to him. The start of this psalm is really the psalmist looking back.

He's been freed from Babylon. The Jews, this first group have gone home with him. After 70 years in exile, they have been freed and they have been allowed back to where they belong.

And this is described in one word. He calls it fortune or Zion's fortune, he says. And this translates literally or this phrase at the heart of it.

It means to turn from something and to turn towards something else. So when you read a fortune in this sense, it means to turn or return.

And when you read it here and when you look elsewhere in the Old Testament at the use of this word, especially in the prophets, it's used to gait us up towards something.

[5 : 07] And for the first people to read these words or to hear them, it's gaiting them up towards something. So judgment is prophesied, we know that in the Old Testament for the Jews.

They have in some way said that they want to be the boss. They'll do a better job at ruling themselves than God ever did. They choose to do what they know is wrong. They choose to sin and go against what God has said.

And so the prophets come and they warn these people that they're going to be judged for it and they're going to pay for it. But what else do the prophets say? What else did they bring to them?

They say your fortunes will be restored. Jeremiah is one example and he uses this phrase a lot in his prophecy.

Jeremiah 29, 13, you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes.

[6 : 08] Jeremiah 30 verse 18, that says the Lord, behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwellings. Judgment is coming, but their fortunes are going to be restored.

Their fortunes are going to be given back. They have disobeyed God and they will be exiled because of it. But there's going to be a great turning. There's going to be a change for these people.

So look at how he describes it, how he describes this change. 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 them. The Lord has done great things for us, we are glad.

In a lot of ways, it is hard to identify with the psalmist here because he's talking about a literal exile which lasted for 70 years and then he's talking about homecoming, we could call it.

[7 : 12] And that's alien to us, I think, in this part of the world and especially today, you know, 70 years in exile under foreign rule. We can't imagine that. We can't put ourselves in their feet.

It's not easy to identify with that. But one way, one way if you are a Christian, you can identify with that picture. If you are a Christian, you were saved from captivity and you returned towards freedom.

You were given fortune. Really, you were saved from something far worse than physical captivity. You returned towards something far greater than physical freedom and returning to a physical homeland.

We know that in some way and in some stage, we've put our hands up to God. We know we've put our hands up and said that we think we are the better bosses.

We know we've done what we've wanted. We know we've chosen at some stage or in some way to do exactly what God tells us not to do. We have chosen to sin.

[8 : 24] And in that state, the Bible says we are apart, we are lost. We are like the people here in captivity. But the moment he reaches down, the moment he hears your calls for safety and sees your belief, the moment he acts for you, he brings you out of that.

And you're brought away from captivity. You are given hope, hope of a safe life here and hope of a perfect life in eternity.

That's how we identify with the psalmist. That's how these fortunes are so great for us and even more so. When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, he took them from fear and he turned them towards freedom.

He took us from fear and he turned us towards freedom. If you are here tonight and you are trying to work this out, if you look at this psalm and you don't understand what to do, there are two sides that are very obvious in this psalm.

Either you are out in captivity, living in a way that God has said not to, or you've heard the words of Jesus and you've believed the gospel and you've come to him and he has brought you out of that.

[9 : 44] And he's made you safe and he's given you the promise of knowing God and being in his care. And before we carry on with the psalmist, before we look at any more of these verses, you need to know where you stand with him.

Because eventually this offer will be taken away. So you see now that you're living apart from him and you come to him and you're brought into freedom, or you carry on and eventually it will be too late and you will not be able to know his goodness.

See what the psalmist talks about in his first verse and know that it can be yours if it's not already. Believe in the gospel like Jesus tells you to.

Believe that he came into the world to deal with your trouble and your sin and not only your sin but your fear as well. And know that what the psalmist says about this unbelievable turning in his life, know that it can be yours as well.

We were like those who dream that our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy.

[11 : 01] One way we can think about these words here that the psalmist gives us, in every way we can think about it, being saved, being a Christian is completely undeserved.

And it's not something that we could ever have earned. That's what makes it so incredible. And that's what the psalmist is getting to in these words.

The psalmist and the people getting on with rebuilding Jerusalem, they are in the work, they're in the middle of it. The excitement of being saved free is surely waiting off for them now.

When you get up tomorrow, when we get up tomorrow, when work gets the better of us, when we are striving to build relationships with one another and with those around about us, when trouble comes and you don't know how you're going to get through it, remember your fortune, the psalmist says.

Remember where God has taken you from already. Between now and at last, someday having complete rest and peace, remember your fortune.

[12 : 13] Remember where God has taken you from. A big part of our lives, a big part of the Christian life is to do with remembering. You see that throughout the Bible.

You see Samuel raising up a stone, his ebonyzer, and he says thus far the Lord has helped us. He's looking back and he remembers how much God has already done for him.

Jesus is out with the disciples on the boat. And they're worried because they don't have food. And they're complaining and they're moaning. And what does Jesus do? He hits them with that question.

He says, do you not remember? Do they not remember what he's already done for them? Do they not remember how Jesus has already provided for them? A big part of our lives is taken up with remembering our fortune because it proves to us that God is faithful.

And it proves to us how far he has already gone for us. Remembering your work and your rest when you're toiling and you feel the cost of being on Jesus' side.

[13 : 18] And whatever aspect of life that might be, remember your fortune. Remember where you came from and what you've been turned towards. God was faithful the day he took you out of captivity.

He was faithful the day he took you out of Babylon and he will be faithful until the day that you get to be with him. Jesus, the Samus, waits for the struggle to end and he waits for these shouts of joy to return.

He remembers his fortune. Remember your own and see how God has proved his faithfulness even up until this evening.

So he remembers or he thinks about the people's fortune, but he doesn't stop there. He prays that it would continue.

Verse 4, restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the negate. So when they already, not yet, we've been saved, we've been set free, but we're not in a perfect state in any way at all.

[14 : 25] One day we will be with Christ in His presence. One day we will be set free from all our failings and all our faults. But until then we're living and we're working out our lives, all the faults and the failings included.

And in that stage between being released from Babylon and finally seeing Jerusalem rebuilt, the Samus comes and he asks, or he prays, restore our fortunes.

There is a shift in time here in the Sam, as he's writing this, once you reach this verse. If the Samus is looking back in the last three verses, he's in the present now, by the time you get to verse 4.

And he's, where at one point he was remembering the joy and the sense of unbelief that this actually happened, we reach verse 4 and by now the joy is wearing off of him. But now the excitement is not as much as it was back in Jerusalem where he has to get on with business, where the people have to get back to work.

So what does he pray for? What does he want? What do the people want? They want this turning and they want this restoration to continue. They want to experience the joy that they had again.

[15 : 46] When we say that we're not saying they want to be saved again, we're not saying they want to be released again, that's already happened, that's once and for all and we know that.

But they want to know the joy again. They want to experience even a hint of that excitement again and that peace again. One writer puts it very plainly when he says, he asks God for the good times again.

And when we think about that today, we think it's bound to be similar for us because we might have experienced great joy when we were saved, but that joy has not always been the same when we get up every day and deal with whatever worry comes and upsets us and frustrates us.

The peace that we had knowing that we were made safe, we probably don't have that same peace when we get up for school or uni or work. That freedom that we experienced, we probably don't think about that freedom when you go out into the world and it tells you you don't need a God and you don't need to be bound to Him or believe in Him.

Again it's hard in some ways to identify with the psalmist when he talks about this unbelievable joy. It's far easier to identify with him when he talks about the struggle and the pain and how distant these shouts of joy seem, how distant this joy of belonging to God seems.

[17 : 14] So see his prayer and make it your own. Pray in the already not yet. Pray that God will restore your fortunes.

We're not asking for wealth, we're not asking for health or anything like that. We're not asking for an easy life, but we ought to ask, we ought to pray that God would bring joy back to us and that He would bring peace to us again, the joy and peace of being cared for by Him.

The psalmist asks for something in this verse, he asks for something amazing. He asks for this peace and this joy to come back like streams filling up the negabes, he says.

The negabes is a desert or a dry land as it translates to in southern Israel and it's notoriously dry. It's completely dry and bad and it gets very little rainfall at all today or in Old Testament times.

The psalmist asks that joy would come to him like this desert filling up with streams. That's how they were freed initially, very quickly they went from being in exile to making their journey back and he prays, would we know that joy again?

[18 : 35] Will we know that peace again, even in the middle of our work and our toilet? Will we know joy even in that? Joy of belonging to God.

In our lives pray that God would restore our fortunes, that even in getting up in the morning we would know joy that comes from Him and that peace would come to us quickly like streams filling up the negabes and pray that we would want to know Him more because of that and that we would learn to love Him more because of that.

One more thing that the psalmist does, he takes assurance in knowing that these shouts of joy will be experienced again.

So today between our getting up and our rest, between us being saved and going to be with Jesus, we remember our fortune, we pray that it would continue, we pray that it would continue to grow with us and we take assurance in knowing that we will experience joy again.

In this life to some extent, but absolutely and perfectly at the end. In verse 5 to 6 the psalmist uses this picture of farming and in this time and in this place as it is written, farming and growing crops is difficult, it's not an easy thing to do, it's not always successful.

[20 : 16] Doing the work doesn't mean that it will bear anything and this is the other side of the streams of the negabes that we read about. On one hand maybe you will know joy coming to you quickly and you will know peace coming to you quickly because God says he can and he will do it.

But on the other hand you're like the farmer going out with the seeds and God says even in that time, this is the other side of it, even in that time it can be painful and it can be hard.

On one hand joy and peace comes in a moment but then he says there will be times when you will struggle on, there will be times in our lives and we'll be upsetting and we'll be difficult and we'll be frustrating.

So what does he say? Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy. He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing shall come home with shouts of joy bringing his sheaves with him.

Continue where God has called you in your school, in your uni, in your work, continue in it.

[21 : 34] Go out and sow, go out with your seed, get on with your work with some, he says, even if it brings you tears, even if it means you've got to cry through it and be assured that when you do there will be shouts of joy to follow.

The God who gave you peace and joy when he saved you, he has not left you, he has not lost you but he will continue to give you this joy of being cared for and being free and he promises that this joy and this peace will never be taken away from you.

In this life we will see it and otherwise more fully in eternity. Those two verses, they divide the rioters, they divide the commentaries.

Some would say that this is to do with general life like we've been talking about tonight, it's to do with working and living with one another and getting on with our fears and our frustrations. Some would rather that it's to do with evangelism and going out with the word.

I think it's fair to say that it picks up on both in this Psalm at least because the people who have returned, they are working, they are rebuilding, they are waiting until it is done.

[22 : 55] But it's likely that this Psalm was written on behalf of just the first group of people that returned to Israel. And so they are waiting for more to come back, they are waiting for others to join them, they are waiting for people to come home.

There are many still trapped in Babylon and the people are longing that they would one day return and it's got to be like that for us.

There are people in all our lives who have not known the joy that we have known and there are people who we talk to and we pray for and we try our best to show something of who Jesus is to them but they haven't believed yet.

And Mark 4, Jesus tells the parable of the sower who goes out with the seeds with the good news and it's a tough life, he says. It's not an easy life to go out and speak about Jesus but we are told to go out even if it means doing it in tears.

Speak about Jesus, pray that others would come in because God assures us they will. We don't know who, we don't know how but we know they will and we know He uses us to do it in our conversations and in our prayers and in how we live.

[24 : 19] John Payton, he was a late 19th century missionary from Scotland and he believed it was his calling to go out to the New Hebrides, a group of islands just off of New Zealand and to bring the gospel to these unreachable people groups and he was so sure about this calling and his pregnant wife was so sure about the calling that they took the sailing out, four months sailing from Scotland to this group of islands and only a few months of being there.

John's wife died, the newborn baby died, many of his missionary team were either killed or they fled for fear of life.

He faced constant threats to his own. But however we look at it, however we look back at that, he didn't neglect his call and over the years of translating the Bible and inviting tribes into his home, leaving and coming back again, he saw mass conversion.

He watched these violent people come and believe and trust in God and you know for many years he, this man was sowing in tears but shouts of joy came soon afterwards for him.

And however we get on speaking about Jesus, even if it means doing it in tears, God continues to bring people in and he uses us in that.

[25 : 56] So go out to where God has called you to go and in this time between now and rest, between toiling and going to be with him, remember your fortune.

Pray that it would grow, pray that you would know this peace and this comfort again and be assured that even in tears, whether it's in our daily lives, in our daily living or it's in evangelism, even if that brings tears, be assured that there will be shouts of joy which will be perfectly and fully realized when we are brought into eternity.

And look 14, Jesus, he tells the crowds, he tells them that whoever wants to follow him must count the cost of what it means to be a disciple and what we realize in that passage is that being a disciple has to take over all aspects of our life, whether with our family or our friends or in our work, we are disciples and there is a cost to it, Jesus says.

But we come to Psalm 126 and we say there might be a cost but there is a great joy with it.

Even in our tears, even in the struggle of living this life, the result is always going to be joy. Discipleship means joy for God's people.

[27 : 26] Living between now and going to be with him means joy. So remember your fortune, pray that it would continue and that it would grow and be assured that you will know shouts of joy in this life and absolutely when you go to be with him.

Let's pray. Our Lord, we thank You for this Psalm. We thank You for the psalmist puts to us and we ask that we would remember his words, we would take to heart what it means to live in this already but not yet world.

We thank You that You have brought us out of captivity, You have brought us out of Babylon and You have saved us and You have made us Your own. So help us to remember that.

Help us to remember the joy that we had when we were saved and the joy that we had of even opening your word for the first time and knowing that it meant something to us and the peace that comes with it.

And Lord, we pray that that would grow for us. As a church and individually, Lord, we pray that as this week goes on, we would grow in joy and we would grow in peace and that even if we struggle tomorrow with work, with school, whatever it might be, even in the struggles of that, we would know that joy follows on and joy comes to us.

[28 : 55] And so help us with these things. Remind us often we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen.