

“When Joy Returns”
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Readings:

Psalm 126

Introduction

- Are you a joyful person?
- When you think about your life, would joy be one of the words that describes it?
- It is so easy to identify problems, disappointments, and things we wish were different.
 - But joy can sometimes feel harder to find.
- Psalm 126 invites us to see our lives through a different lens.
 - It teaches us that God's people can find joy
 - in the past,
 - in the present,
 - and even in the future.
- Today, let us walk through this psalm together and discover how God's faithfulness gives us reason to rejoice in every season of life.

1. JOY IN THE PAST

- Let us begin with the first three verses:

"When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy... The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy."

- The people of Israel are looking back.
 - Their past was not easy.
 - They had experienced exile, loss, separation,
 - and the destruction of their beloved temple.
 - There were moments when it seemed that everything had fallen apart.
- Yet when they remember those years, they are not focused on their pain.
 - They are focused on what God did.
- They say, "We were like those who dream."
- God had brought them home.
 - God had restored them.
 - God had done what seemed impossible.
- When we look back, we can remember difficult seasons.
 - But we can also remember God's faithfulness.
 - We can remember prayers He answered,
 - doors He opened,
 - people He placed in our lives,

- and moments when He carried us through circumstances we thought we would never survive.
- Sometimes we become experts at noticing what is wrong.
 - We can quickly identify what needs improvement.
- But gratitude requires intention.
- And this Psalm reminds us to stop and notice the evidence of God's grace.
- So before we move on, close your eyes, and take a moment to remember what God has done in your life.
 - The Lord has done great things for us.
 - And because of that, we can rejoice.

2. JOY IN THE PRESENT

- But life is not lived in the past. ○ The Israelites celebrated what God had done, yet immediately afterward they prayed:

"Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev."

- Just one verse earlier they were celebrating. ○ Now they are crying out for help?
- The reality is that their restoration was not complete.
 - They had returned from exile, but many struggles remained.

- The temple was still in ruins.
 - The future was uncertain.
 - Life was harder than they expected.
- They had memories of God's goodness, but they still faced present challenges.
- The Negev mentioned in the text is a desert.
- Let us watch a video that shows us what the streams of Negev are.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WZ_XF3X6mo
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- o Most of the year it was dry and barren.
- o Yet after heavy rains fell in distant mountains,
 - powerful streams would suddenly rush through the desert,
 - bringing colour and life where there had been only dust.
- That is the image the psalmist uses.
 - o "Lord, bring life to this dry place."
- Maybe your past contains beautiful memories of God's faithfulness,
 - o but your present feels dry.
 - A relationship is struggling.
 - A burden feels heavy.
 - A prayer remains unanswered.
 - A door remains closed.
- We can choose to constantly look back and wish we could relive better days.

- Or we can choose faith and cry out.
- The Israelites brought their pain to God.
 - They prayed.
 - They trusted.
 - They believed that the God who had acted before could act again.
- That is why joy is still possible in the present.
- Joy means believing that God is still at work even when we cannot yet see the outcome.
- Because the same God who restored yesterday is able to restore today.

3. JOY IN FUTURE

- The final two verses say:
"Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them."
- This is a beautiful promise.
 - Notice that the tears are real.
- The psalm does not say, "Pretend everything is fine."
 - It does not tell us to ignore grief, disappointment, or hardship.
- The people are crying.
 - They are sowing through tears.
- But they are still sowing.

- Because they believe there is a harvest coming.
- There are seasons when we wonder if things will ever change.
 - We pray and see no immediate answer.
 - We work and see little fruit.
 - We carry burdens that seem too heavy.
- In those moments, God invites us to keep sowing.
 - Keep praying.
 - Keep serving.
 - Keep trusting.
 - Keep believing.
 - Because God is faithful.
- Christian joy is based on the presence of God's promises.
- Scripture promises a faithful God
 - who walks with us through every trial
 - and who ultimately brings redemption from our pain.
- The tears we plant today are not the final chapter.
 - God is able to transform them into joy.
 - That future hope gives us strength for today.
- We can keep moving forward because we know that the harvest belongs to Him.

CONCLUSION

- So let me ask you again:
 - Are you a joyful person?
- You are if you can see God's hand in your past.
- You are if you can trust Him with your present.
- You are if you can believe in Him for your future.
- Psalm 126 reminds us that joy is not tied to one moment in life.
 - We rejoice because God has been faithful.
 - We rejoice because God is faithful.
 - And we rejoice because God will remain faithful.