

Joyful Expectations Beyond Covid 19

Contributed by Otis Mcmillan on Apr 27, 2021

Scripture: Psalms 126

Denomination: Methodist

Summary: Covid 19 has so many despondent and hopeless. The discovery of a vaccine has been a source of encouragement, but the journey has been long and hard. Yet, this psalm gives us a hope of a great turnaround.

Psalm 126 is called an ascension Psalm is psalms filled expectation and hope. It was one the song sang as the children of Israel went up to worship at Jerusalem. Some associate this psalm with the time after Israel was released from the Babylonian Captivity. Israel's history is filled with occasions of great deliverance by the hand of God.

Although we cannot date this psalm, we do know what was happening. The psalmist says, "When the Lord turned again the captivity." The psalmist clearly understood that what he is believing the Lord for is not a pipe dream. Israel has history with God. The psalmist understands that it was by the Lord's permission Israel were led into captivity, so only by his power they were set free.

When the Israelites had served in Egypt four hundred years, it was not Moses, but Jehovah, that brought them out of the land of Egypt, and out of the house of bondage. In like manner it was Jehovah and not Deborah that freed them from Jabin after they had been vexed twenty years under the Canaanites oppression.

It was God and not Gideon that brought them out of the hands of the Midianites, after seven years' servitude. It was he and not Jephthah that delivered them from the Philistines and Amorites after eighteen years' oppression. Although in all these cases, God used Moses and Deborah, Gideon and Jephthah, as instruments for their deliverance; but it was by the power of God they were delivered.

After seventy years of Babylonian captivity, it was not King Cyrus's valour, but the Lord's power that delivered Israel. It was not government's policy, but God's wisdom, that, overthrew the Babylonians and gave to Cyrus the victory, and put it into his heart to set his people free.

I want to examine Psalm 126 more closely today, because it provides for us a pattern for action as we come to celebrate his name. The Children of Israel had gone into Babylon with a promise from God. God promised a day of restoration and a day of return. After 70 years of Babylonian captivity, those promises were just about all the people had left of their religious heritage. They were held in slavery, the temple had been destroyed, the city gates had been burned with fire, and they no longer celebrated temple worship. During those 70 years, those who remembered Jerusalem told their children about a land the children had never seen. Jerusalem was no more real to the children of the exile than a fable, or a story of the past. The only thing left to them was God's promise to redeem his people out of slavery and to restore them to their home and to restore them to His worship. Then all of a sudden, without warning or expectation, King Cyrus gives an unexpected decree. There were over a hundred nations in captivity, but Israel only received a release: You Jews are free to return to your homeland. It's a Season of Expectation beyond crisis and frustration.

Covid 19 has so many despondent and hopeless. The discovery of a vaccine has been a source of encouragement, but the journey has been long and hard. Yet, this psalm gives us a hope of a great turnaround.

1. God can turn things around again - Psalm 126:1 "When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, We were like those who dream."

Somehow this blessing from God was almost unbelievable. It was like a dream. A bad dream can almost scare you to death, and a good dream causes you to hate to wake up. Some are refusing the vaccine because they it was developed too fast. They seem to forget that Our God can work fast and in unexpected ways. And, that is how the exiles felt when the Gentile King who held them captive decreed that they could return to Israel and to Jerusalem. Yes, it was real, it was so good, so real, that it made them feel that it was a dream – it was almost too real, and too good, to be factually true. And, yet, it was. In this season beyond Covid 19, God can not only turn things around; God can make you laugh again!

2. God can make you laugh again. - Ps 126:2 "Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them."

Many lost their joy through isolation and separation. It was amazing to see fully vaccinated persons visit their love ones in long-term care facilities. We should celebrate God's goodness with joyful praise. Notice the text says, "when the Lord turned our captivity, Then our mouths were filled with laughter and singing. Israel's joy stemmed from the proclamation, "You are free to go." There were still many problems ahead of them. They were two thousand miles away from home, their homeland was in shambles, they had limited resources and no standing army for protection. But if God says, you are free, It's time to celebrate. It's never too early. I know people say, "Never count your chickens before they hatch." But it all depend on whose watching the eggs. When God begins to move, our mouths should be filled. When God visited Abraham at age ninety nine, He said, Sarah thy wife shall conceive and bare a son. The Bible says, Sarah laughed in disbelief but less than a year later, she had a bouncing baby boy. This was so amusing to God until the child was named Isaac which means laughter. It's never too early to celebrate God's goodness. God's celebration should contain two elements: laughter and singing. We have COUNTLESS reasons to be thankful to God and to others. The scriptures tell us to give thanks, so whether we do it regularly or not, it's our duty to continually thank God, our friends, and our family.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

1 Chronicles 16:8-12 says, "Give thanks unto the LORD, call upon His name, make known His deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD. Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually. Remember his marvelous works that he has done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth."

Philippians 4:4 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice."

James 5:13 "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms." When there is laughter without singing something is missing, but when there is singing without Joy, something is also missing. "Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before

his presence with singing." (Psalms 100:1,2.) Ps 126:2 "Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them." In this season, God can not only turn things around; God can make you laugh again! And God will give you a new testimony.

3. God will give you a new testimony. God knows that the world is watching "...then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them."

The reality of God's goodness was verified by the world, the other Gentile nations. "Then they said among the nations, 'The LORD has done great things for them.' "And, The reality of the Lord's blessing was a dream come true with so much evidence that the other captive nations were saying, "The LORD indeed has done great things for them. Our praise is a witness to the world. The world is always watching. They are watching to see if we serve the Lord with gladness. They are watching to see if our praise is real; if our lifestyle holy; if our love is passionate? The world is watching our witness. Since Israel was so tremendously blessed, the world was listening for a response. The people of God responded, "The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad." Old Folks said, "I sing because I'm Happy and I shout because I'm Free." Mt 5:14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Up to now, Israel were only testifying about come out of Egypt, but they have a fresh testimony.

In this season, God can turn things around; God can make you laugh again, God will give you a new testimony and God can give new victory.

4. God can give us new victories. Ps 126:4-6 "Turn again our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the south. They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

The Psalmist understand that God's deliverance must sometimes be preceded by sincere prayer. As the Psalmist closes the psalm with a prayer, he looks back at God's previous blessings. Then he looks forward to a fuller, more complete and deliverance. We rejoice over God's blessings here and now; but look for a greater blessing to come.

God's deliverance isn't like a light-switch – either on, or off – it's a process. It has a beginning, and it has an ending. The singers of the Psalm, as they would go up to Jerusalem for the feasts, would look backward at the time when God began his promised deliverance; and at the same time they looked forward to the time when that deliverance would be complete. Notice the Psalmist mentions streams of the south. The southland was dry desert, but Isaiah promised that "it would blossom as a rose." When God sends the rain, suddenly the desert would bloom. God would send water in the desert and bring the high way down and make the crooked way straight. As a matter of Fact, God said, "Behold, I make all things new."

God's deliverance is a process that began with Israel, has become a reality for the church. Those in Christ have become new creatures, old things are passed away and all things become new. There deliverance was physical, from a physical place and physical enemy. Our deliverance is greater. For we have been delivered from the powers of darkness and translated into the kingdom of His dear son. God sent his Son into the world to die for sinners. He entered the world to redeem it from sin and death, we were like those who dreamed. The Lord has done great things for us and we are glad!"

Isaiah said it this way, "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying."

God's deliverance has a purpose. The Psalmist continues in verse 5,6 "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

The purpose of God is to win the world to Himself. Notice this text has two features; sowing and reaping. One of them is labor that may include sorrow, weeping, and tears. Laboring in the vineyard is costly and painful. We are called to share the Good News with a world in captivity. An announcement has been made, Satan's power has been broken, and they can find release and freedom in Christ Jesus. God delivered us that might help others find deliverance. The only way they will ever hear the good news is that we tell them. We must sow the word even if it difficult because there is a promise. Those who sow the good news of Jesus shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

Jesus said in Matthew 28:19,20 "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

Then Paul wrote, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all."

God's deliverance is a process, has purpose and comes with a promise. Our witness for Christ may not always be fun, but it is necessary. Sometimes, we may feel like quitting; we invest ourselves, our words, our actions, our money, all sorts of things in the lives of others with little results. Sometimes it feels like taking precious grain and burying it in the dirt.

But there is a promise of Joy. All may not believe, but some will believe.

So Paul says, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. And, may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it."

Psalms 126:6 "...shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

Jesus said, "lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."