

“Living The Dream”

Psalm 126:1-6

Psalm 126 Holman Christian Standard Bible

Zion’s Restoration

A song of ascents.

1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

2 Our mouths were filled with laughter then, and our tongues with shouts of joy.

Then they said among the nations, “The Lord has done great things for them.”

3 The Lord had done great things for us; we were joyful.

4 Restore our fortunes, Lord, like watercourses in the Negev.

5 Those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy.

6 Though one goes along weeping, carrying the bag of seed, he will surely come back with shouts of joy, carrying his sheaves.

This Psalm so fittingly describes why we gather here on this special occasion to recognize and honor and praise and worship the God Who has brought us through our own version of a wilderness journey.

I. “Living the Dream” (Vs. 1-3)

Have you ever experienced something so amazing that you think, “I must be dreaming!”?

This Psalm begins with God’s people remembering when God did a great work. Some believe it was when the Israelites returned from being captives in Babylon. Others believe it was when a siege of Jerusalem was stopped by the miraculous intervention of God. We may never know exactly what the situation was, this side of heaven, but in any event, God did a great work in His people’s lives, and they remembered the joy they experienced in the past. Evidently, the handiwork of God that they had witnessed was so amazing that they thought they must be dreaming!

I stand before you this morning as I have many Sunday mornings in awe and amazement at what God has accomplished here at and with Boyce Baptist church.

Today we remember as well. During our time together over the past 16 years, I witnessed God’s handiwork in so many spectacular ways. From the miraculous ways in which He provided for such things as our stair chair to a new furnace (paid for before it was even installed), to repairs on the chimney at the parsonage when we discovered it was a ticking time bomb of a fire hazard to the amazing provision of how God provided the Baptist Builders to provide the free labor miracle which enabled us to complete the education wing and do so DEBT FREE!

In the past 3 years, particularly, we have seen God work in many ways and we have experienced the joy of His blessings many times. As church leaders, we were looking to developing a five-year even a ten-year physical plant improvement plan, prioritizing the many much needed repairs, renovations and improvements that were going to be needed on our aging facilities. Almost as astonishing as the miracle of the loaves and fishes, God took six small shingles and multiplied them into a \$54,000 insurance claim that resulted in the replacement of the roof of the church, new guttering and downspouts on both the church and parsonage, as well as all new siding on the parsonage. LIVING THE DREAM! We have witnessed, through the faithful and obedient tithes and offerings of Godly people, some of whom were not even members of the church, make possible the complete renovation of the sided entrance to the education wing with a new handicap accessible concrete ramp and new doors. Even though a new steel roof on the parsonage required some investment on our part, Skyfall’s willingness to carry an \$8,000 dollar balance for us made this new roof possible for us financially. In fact, due to Skyfall’s inability to provide their promised painter in time, they offered to remove the old parsonage tin roof and install the new roof AT

COST! In long term, this decision will save the church tens of thousands of dollars in having to paint the roof every 3 to 5 years. But God wasn't done! Scarcely two months into our repayment schedule, someone came forward and paid off the entire remaining balance! How can we not think we're LIVING THE DREAM!

Yet, I must share that I have oft times felt as though I'm alone in expressing my enthusiasm for all that God has done. I don't know if today will be different or still difficult in seeing some of God's people excited and joyful about all that He has done! (two fingers in "V" formation to create smile). I think God has earned a few "Hallelujah's!" don't you!? Is your mouth "filled with laughter" and your "tongues with shouts of joy"!? We Baptists have often look down our theological noses at those whose joy causes them to "speak in other tongues" and yet we won't express joy in English!

Now I am not as much concerned about people showing their joy as I am concerned about why then don't!
There was a man waiting in line at a CHECK-OUT STAND. He seemed AGITATED and IMPATIENT and had a very SOLEMN and GLOOMY look on his face. When the CHEERY young woman at the check-out said, "Good morning!" the man just GRUNTED. The woman was trying to loosen the man up by JOKING with him, but it was quite OBVIOUS that he wasn't in a JOKING mood. Finally, the young woman said, "Sir, can I ask you a question?" The man sighed and said, "What?" "Are you a PREACHER?" "No," the man replied, "why do you ask?" "Well, no offense, but you seem MISERABLE." "I am!" said the man. "I've had the FLUE for 3 days."

Sadly, many people have the same view of PREACHERS and Christians in general as does this young woman. Their concept of Christianity is that of being DEPRIVED of the GOOD THINGS of this LIFE. Now, granted, many of the things that the WORLD calls "GOOD," we, as Christians, should want no part of. Even so, there are those who feel that Christians can't have FUN of any kind.

A. One reason many people think that Christians can't ENJOY LIFE is because of the way that some of us ACT.

a. Sadly, many Christians go through life ENDURING their Christianity instead of ENJOYING it. An elder friend of mine used to say, "We act as if we were BAPTIZED in VINEGAR!"

b. Many of God's people haven't come to UNDERSTAND that one of the characteristics of a spirit-filled life is that of "JOY."

c. Someone once said, "The RELIGION that makes a man look SICK, certainly won't cure the world. "People need to see in us a JOY in Christ that cannot be QUENCHED by the STRESSES and HARDSHIPS of LIFE. We have so much for which to REJOICE, and we should never be AFRAID to EXPRESS our JOY wherever we are. How can we expect people to be drawn to a Jesus and a Christian life that apparently makes us so miserable? What are we offering them that's any better than the misery they already have?"

I believe God has provided us ample opportunities over these past three years, let alone all the years prior, that the people of Boyce Baptist Church should be shouting, "Hallelujah!" from the rooftops!

There was a man living in the hills of Arkansas who was brought to Christ. He was known as "Mr. Moonshine" because of the many LIQUOR STILLs that he had hidden away back in the HILLS. After becoming a Christian, his life CHANGED dramatically. He DESTROYED all of his STILLs and POURED out all of MOONSHINE he had STORED away.

One of his favorite expressions, whether in WORSHIP or just casually talking with a friend was "HALLELUJAH!" He would "HALLELUJAH" this and "HALLELUJAH" that. One day someone asked, "What does the word 'HALLELUJAH' mean, anyway?" He LAUGHED and said, "I really don't know. But I think it's a Hebrew word for 'HOT DOG! THIS IS IT!'"

B. I believe that's the kind of JOY we should have. "HOT DOG we've found it!" "PRAISE THE LORD, we're saved!" **OUR JOY SHOWS THE WORLD WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US- Psalm 126:1-3 (READ)**

We have known the joy of having friends and loved ones come to know the Lord. Some of you have developed a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. You have known the joy the psalmist speaks of. Some of you have experienced the dream-like state the psalmist writes of.

I can remember many times that I have stood in awe and joy, as I have seen God work miraculously in church and in many of your lives. Some of you, like me, have known great joy as we have seen God miraculously provide for and bless this church. I have spoken often about God's blessings to our church.

II. Fortunes Restored (Vs. 4)

After remembering God's faithfulness, the psalmist stopped and looked around. In verse 4 he says, "God, we remember what you've done, but now we ask you to do something miraculous again. God, you've blessed us, but not all of our nation is blessed. God, something is missing. God, restore our fortunes like watercourses in the Negev."

The Negev was the dry portion of Israel. It was the part that seldom saw rainfall. It was largely a dry, rocky, and unfruitful part of the nation. From time to time a rare rainfall in the area would transform the normally dry streambeds in the area, into raging torrents. When the water came, flowers and such would bloom, and life would return to the area. The Psalmist says, "God, we remember what you've done in the past and we rejoice. But God, the work is not finished, the land is not healed, God, do something special again."

Recently, "a rare burst of color softened the stark landscape of Death Valley, with clusters of purple. Pink, and white wildflowers dotting the black basalt mountainsides and great swaths of golden blooms bordering the blinding white salt flats on the valley floor.

Winter storms dropped 6 inches of rain on that thirsty desert – three times more than usual – encouraging wildflower seeds to sprout. Experts say this kind of show comes once in a lifetime. ... Death Valley hasn't seen such a wild array of flowers in about 50 years" (Orlando Sentinel, "Rains bring color, life to Death Valley", A8, March 15, 2005. Juliana Barbassa).

A normally dry and foreboding place, 292 feet below sea level, saw life, color, and beauty rarely seen in that place. A once in a lifetime occurrence, all because the area was blessed with something rare, rainfall.

In response to their prayer, God gave His people a vision. He showed them the part they are to play in the great transformation. He showed them a sower.

Don't miss this! God has not provided these miracles for our own pleasure and indulgences. God provides what He provides both to honor obedience and faithfulness, as well as to entrust us with the tools necessary to accomplish His will. An African story cloth hangs in our sanctuary as a permanent reminder of this church's commitment to missions and the spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ. God has honored that commitment. When this church voted to undergird Ben Lewis' Bible College training, God honored our efforts and sacrifices. The only young man this church has ever "sent out" in response to a call to the ministry, went rejoicing in his won heart knowing this church was backing him and doing our part to propel him into the pastoral ministry in which he now serves with his new wife, Maddie (another miracle) at his side.

My friends, God has blessed. He is blessing now, but many in our community still need to hear the gospel. There are more unsaved, unbelieving people in Clarke County and in our surrounding communities than there was 16 years ago when we began pastoring here. Our population continues to grow, and our churches aren't nearly keeping up with that growth, and I believe part of the problem is that we have forgotten our primary calling.

As we celebrate the blessings of God, I think it's time we remember our primary calling.

The Marines have many different positions, they have many different specialties. If you join the Marines, you can work with computers, fly planes, work as a cook, or many other things. But, when you join the Marines, you are first and foremost a rifleman. Before you go on to specialized training, before you can work in any other field, you must first qualify on the rifle range with a weapon. You are first of all a rifleman.

The same is true in the church. You and I are all parts of One Body, the Body of Christ. We all have different gifts. Some of us are called to preach. Some are gifted to teach, some to sing, some to clean up, some to serve, some to visit, some are called to a specific prayer ministry. Many different tasks the Lord has given us, but first and foremost in our calling is soul winning. You and I are to be busy leading other people to Christ.

General Eisenhower once rebuked one of his Generals for referring to a soldier as "just a Private." He reminded him that the Army could function better without its Generals than it could without its foot soldiers. "If this

war is won," he said, "it will be won by Privates." In the same way, the common, ordinary, one-talent Christians are the very backbone of the church. We have our great evangelists, our super congregations led by dynamic elders, and our wealthy brethren who are able to finance great works. But, if the work of the Lord is to be done, if the gospel is to be taken to the lost, it will be the "ordinary" Christians who will do it.

III. Sowing and Reaping (Vs. 5)

Fortunately, the Lord has seen fit to show us the way to return to our roots. He reminds us that our primary calling is to be sowers. Look there again at verse 5.

- Read verse 5

As we examine the sower, as we think of our primary mission, I would like you to notice God's formula for Harvest.

A. WE ARE CALLED TO GO

In verse 5 we are told, "the sower went forth to sow." We must not keep the precious seed of God's Word, in the storehouse, waiting for someone to come and ask for it. We can't sit in our church and in our services waiting for someone to come and visit, we must go.

You may remember the beginning phrase of the Great Commission. Jesus says, "Go ye therefore into all the world." Go. The sower does not waste his precious time in berating other sowers, talking about what they aren't doing. He doesn't waste his time talking about the great things he's going to do in the future. He doesn't allow his energy to evaporate in sentiment or song. He goes forth!

Let me ask you my friend, "Are you going forth? Are you a witness for Jesus in the community? Are you telling other people about the hope you have, about what Jesus has done in your life?" Jesus says, "GO!" "Go into the highways and hedges. Go along the byways and back roads. Go, and compel them to come in. Go!"

ILL.- A man said to a friend of his, "Come and have a round of golf with me on Sunday morning." "Oh, I couldn't do that, I have to go to church." "Well," replied the friend, "I don't know what kind of church you attend, but you can keep it to yourself. I have asked you to play golf with me a dozen times but you have never invited me to your church."

Could it be that some people are just waiting for an invitation? Here's another example of sowing gospel seed.

ILL.- A businessman landed in the Dallas airport and realized that he had an hour and 20 minutes before his next flight. He thought, "How can I be used for the Lord during this time?" He had a supply of gospel tracts with him. So he inserted one of his business cards inside each gospel tract. Then he gave them to the people who were waiting for their flights. But he didn't just pass them out and say nothing. Instead, he said to each person, "Pardon me. I have a little booklet here that explains how a person can become a Christian. Inside is my business card. I would like for you to read this tract and if you have any questions, I will be sitting over there waiting for my flight. I have some time and I'd be glad to talk to you. Or if you would like to write me, my address is on the card." At the end of that hour and 20 minutes people were standing in line to ask questions about how to become a Christian. And for weeks afterward, that Christian businessman received letters from interested people.

COULD IT BE, BRETHREN, THAT PEOPLE ARE THAT STARVED FOR THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST? I believe that many people are. They are just waiting for some compassionate, caring Christian to offer a witness to them. AND WE NEED TO DO IT!

We need to look for ways to witness to people. Be bold. Be like Paul who said in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes...."

The first ingredient in God's formula for harvest is going. The second element in God's formula for harvest is weeping.

B. WE ARE CALLED TO CARE

Years ago, a young minister visited Dundee, Scotland, deeply concerned that his ministry was producing such meager results. He decided to visit the scene where years before Robert Murray McCheyne had ministered in such evident power of the Spirit of God. McCheyne died at the age of 30, but not before God used him to turn Scotland upside down. The visitor asked the old sexton at St. Peter's if he could tell him the secret of the amazing

influence of Robert McCheyne. The old man led the young minister into the vestry. "Sit down there," he said. "Now put your elbows on the table." He did so. "Yes, that was the way McCheyne used to do it," said the old man. "Now put your face in your hand." The visitor obeyed. "Now let the tears flow! That was the way McCheyne used to do!" said the sexton. (Explore the Psalms Vol. 2, John Phillips, 1988. 478-9)

He that goeth forth weeping. The trouble is, our ministry is not watered with tears.

Jesus cried. The Bible records 3 times Jesus cried.

1. He cried once for a man. He cried for a dead man, his friend Lazarus, when he saw the sorrow and anguish that sin and death had brought.

2. He cried once for a nation. He stood on the outskirts of Jerusalem on a hill overlooking the city. There He cried at their lost condition.

3. He cried once for the world. In the Garden of Gethsemane, the tears rolled down, mingled with blood, as He thought of the lost world.

I believe the reason today that many of our Churches are barren is that we don't have any shedding of tears over the lost. Oh, we have people who shed tears, but over the wrong things. I heard Junior Hill say while he was preaching in a revival, that a man came up to him crying. He kept saying over and over again, we lost, we lost. Brother Hill asked him, we lost what? The man replied, haven't you heard, our team lost the ball game.

Jesus said in Luke 7:32, "ye have not wept". I pray it won't be said of our generation, that we didn't weep over lost souls getting saved. I believe one of the reasons many churches see so little fruit from their outreach is that it means so little to them. How often do churches reach out only because it is expected of them, or primarily so their church can grow or survive?

Let me ask you, are there tears in your prayers? Are there tears in your going? God says, "Go! Go caring! And third, go sharing!"

C. WE ARE CALLED TO SHARE

- verse 6 "Carrying the bag of seed" It is not enough for us to go, or to care, but we must also share. Verse 6 says, "Carrying a bag a seed. Other translations refer to it as "precious seed."

What are we to do as we go? It is not our job to share our political beliefs. It is not our task to share our economic philosophy. It is not our primary task to boycott and lobby. Our primary task is to carry precious seed, to share the Word and love of God.

Now it's mighty easy to sit in our churches and talk about what needs to be done. It's mighty easy to talk about how the Gospel needs to be shared, but who will do it if not you and I, and who better than you?

There are people all over the place just like that. Many won't accept my testimony because they think of me as a hired gun. In our current cultural climate, preachers rank in popularity somewhere between politicians and attorneys. People don't want to hear from preachers. They do want to hear from satisfied customers.

It amazes me, the number of people who will tell their friends about a good mechanic, but who won't talk about a great God. It amazes me, the number of people who will tell their friends about a sale, but not about their Savior. I get texts and emails all the time about some great bargain being offered. I wonder if Christians of today were as persistent and determined as telemarketers what a difference it would make!

God's formula for harvest. Go, Care, Share, and lastly, Harvest.

III. "BRINGING IN THE SHEAVES" (Vs. 6)

Verse 6 promises a glorious harvest. A joyous harvest. God says, "If you go, if you care, if you share, you will harvest." You will see fruit.

V. CONCLUSION

THE IMPORTANCE OF SOWING GOSPEL SEEDS