



GROWING UP IN GOD
A JOURNEY THROUGH THE PSALMS OF ASCENT

Session 7 July 2011

Psalm 126 NASB

Thanksgiving for Return from Captivity.

A Song of Ascents.

¹ *When the LORD brought back 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.*

Joy and laughter, pleasure and pain, life...the pilgrims ascending the hill of the Lord bring to mind what it was like for those who had been taken forcibly away and could no longer go up the hill of the Lord to worship...

Recalling their history and the return of the captives from Babylon to Zion, the pilgrims sing this psalm of remembrance - what it had been like when they came home from exile and their joy at their homecoming...they had gone forth weeping, but come home to shouts of joy...

There is always a harvest from pain and disappointment if we use them correctly – seeds of pain can bring a harvest of joy...or bitterness, depending upon how we water them...

This psalm could be called a psalm of trust – they start by stating the fact that God brought them back from captivity and this release happened so suddenly that it was as if they dreamed...

Because of their persistent disobedience, Israel had experienced the very worst than can come to anyone; rape in the streets, cannibalism, a six-hundred mile forced march across a desert, the taunting mockery of the captors, only those of no use left behind...it was horrific, they had been forcefully taken away - women and children, men and boys, everything left behind, nothing but the clothes they stood up in...

But God had said after a certain number of years, He would bring them back to their own land –

Jeremiah 29:10 NASB

¹⁰ *“For thus says the LORD, ‘When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfil My good word to you, to bring you back to this place.’”*

God is true to His word and His word is true...He promised through the prophet Jeremiah who watched them go, that He would bring them back – they had spent 70 years in captivity and the prophet Daniel was with them...

Daniel 9:2 NKJV

² *in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the LORD through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.’*

‘When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed’.

Their problem?

They had succumbed to the customs of the nations around them, followed other gods, followed the ways of the people in immorality, unrighteousness and wickedness, they had even thrown their own children into the fire to satisfy the god Molech...and eventually, judgement had to come – the penalty for God’s people concerning transgression, iniquity and sin - living like the nations around them...

Israel had thought they had a vaccination against trouble because the Lord was their God: problem was, they didn’t acknowledge Him, they didn’t like His rulership, they didn’t like His instructions and they outright rebelled against Him...so after consistent warnings, punishment came, they were His chosen and they had turned their backs on Him.

The prophet Jeremiah stood alone and said *‘It will happen to you...’*

‘Naahhh, shut up Jeremiah you old Jonah...’

Then the nightmare began - the armies of Babylon came into the city, burned down the Temple and carried them off – captive.

Are you in a nightmare right now? Is sickness dogging you, poverty, or difficulties in relationships at work or at home?

We need to ask some questions when we are thrust into a nightmare –

What does this mean?

What should I do?

Am I reaping what I have sown?

Is this You?

Is this the devil?

Are You nailing something in my life?

Is this the cross at work...?

Rarely, in my limited experience, is God the author of your nightmare, as He was of Israel's.

If it *is* Him, it is because He has been trying desperately to get your attention in other ways and you haven't heard Him...or you have turned a deaf ear...

Most often I find it fits -

1 Peter 2:19 The Message

¹⁸⁻²⁰You who are servants, be good servants to your masters—not just to good masters, but also to bad ones. What counts is that you put up with it for God's sake when you're treated badly for no good reason. There's no particular virtue in accepting punishment that you well deserve. But if you're treated badly for good behaviour and continue in spite of it to be a good servant, that is what counts with God.'

But whatever it is, the nightmare **will** end – God knows just how much we can carry...

All suffering, all pain, all emptiness sown in God will bring a crop of joy.

God had said He would punish those whom He had used to punish Israel...

Jeremiah 25:12 NASB

'Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation...'

So, in His infinite wisdom, God uses one nation to punish another nation, and because of the wickedness of the heart of the Chaldeans, He destroys them utterly...

The Jews on pilgrimage singing Psalm 126 were no strangers to suffering, no strangers to the dark side of life...they carried the painful memories of exile in their bones and the scars of oppression on their backs.

They knew the dark night of the soul was a reality...their ancestors had seventy years to mull over what had taken them away from their homeland and the fathers would have told the children and their children's children...

Laughter doesn't exclude weeping.

And joy is what God gives us, we can't work it up, it comes from making the right choices when the nightmare is upon us.

It comes from turning **to** Him in our tears and pain, not away from Him; it comes from finding our rest in Him, not in tranquilisers or pain-numbing devices – food, sex, drugs, booze, even TV - anything to shut out the clamour, the pain, the confusion, the torment...

So we turn, if we are wise to Him in praise and worship, kissing the hand that hurts.

And at times like this, it is lamentation we engage in; lamentation, the highest form of worship – holding on to His hand, broken, weeping, helpless... 'even **though** all these things are true – **yet**, will I rejoice...'

Habakkuk 3:16 – 19 NIV

*'**Yet** I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us.*

*¹⁷ **Though** the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,*

*¹⁸ **yet I will** rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Saviour.*

*¹⁹ The Sovereign LORD is my strength;
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,
he enables me to tread on the heights.'*

For the director of music. On my stringed instruments.

Fear, calamity hits Israel - but Habakkuk the prophet, sings to the Lord his confidence, though he is terrified, that God is his strength. Though all this is true, yet I will rejoice in the Lord...it takes courage and maturity to respond in this way -

Though all these things are true, **yet**, will be joyful, I will rejoice in God my Saviour...determination rises up to see Him, worship Him, He is good, even though this is not good – I will set my heart to **trust**...I know Him, I have been travelling with Him for a long, long time...

In our ascent into the heart of God, distress, trouble and hardship will come and sometimes they camp with us for a long time...as we are going and growing we learn that thanksgiving, praise and worship are the only response, whatever the situation. As He lovingly knocks away every prop that we would hang on to in this life and makes our heart **His** home, we learn...

Lamentation, the highest form of worship – choice of choices, **I will** – everything's shaking, but I will trust Him...

And suddenly we find we **can** trust Him, depend on Him, relief and release comes, we find peace in Him, joy in Him, rest in Him...we were like those who dreamed...*'We are glad, He was right all the time...'*

This psalm does not give us joy as a package without experiencing pain; it shows up the smallness of the world's joy, the things in which the world finds pleasure and satisfaction and shows them to be useless in the face of privation and difficulty.

Growing up - maturing is about how you respond when the nightmare hits – the crisis shows us where we are...where our heart really finds its home...

He turns our captivity – He turns the tide in our lives from self-centredness, confusion and depression, from worldliness - to being centred on Him...

Bride of Jesus, how beautiful you are when you no longer have anything of your own but seek only Him...

When **He** turned our captivity, we were like those who dreamed...

There is an accelerating cost and a diminishing return for those who pursue worldly pleasure.

What is currently capturing you?

Wilderness experiences were not unusual for Israel – they had they had been there before...but captivity, this was something else again.

Their history is of a people who just **never** grasped the fact that when God said something, He really, really meant it – and **He** was the source, the root of their distress...the calamity that came upon them was because of their actions – the law of sowing and reaping had come into effect -

'You meet the conditions; I'll meet the promises'

In their persistent wilfulness and hardness of heart towards Him, they ignored Him and stored up trouble for themselves...

It was **not** God's intention that they should wander in the desert for 40 years; neither was it His intention that the first generation be buried in the sand. He brought them to the border of the Promised Land within a short time of their departure from Egypt and He was fully prepared to take them in...But they were full of unbelief and yearning for Egypt and unwilling, so He appointed a year for every day that the spies were in the Promised Land...for them to wander and die in the wilderness...

They were no strangers to His discipline, but they never learned – today they are still under His judgement and face a final seven years of great hardship before they will recognise their true Messiah, whom they pierced...

Zechariah 12:10

"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn."

God's word is true and He is true to His word.

Our joy is not dependent upon circumstances being right. Our joy is dependent upon Who we belong to, His eternal promises to us, and His faithfulness – hear Paul, in –

Romans 5: 3 – 5, 11 The Message

'We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling short-changed. Quite the contrary—we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!'

'Laughter,' Eugene Peterson says in his book 'A long obedience in the same direction' 'is a result of living in the midst of God's great works – enjoyment is not an escape from boredom but a plunge by faith into God's work.'

Joy comes because God knows how to wipe away tears...

This joy is not dependent upon circumstances, pleasure is physical, happiness depends on what is happening, but joy is a choice.

It's not dependent upon us escaping what is happening to us, but thriving in it. It is not dependent upon good health or wealth...we have a future and a hope that nothing and no-one can take from us. We are eternally secure and we know that all things are working for our good – how can we not rejoice, even in the midst of our tears and pain...all things are passing, God never changes.

God is for us.

He will wipe all tears away in the 'sweet bye and bye'...

Nothing can snatch us out of His hand...

We are His people and the sheep of His pasture...

Therefore, I will rejoice.

There will be a harvest from this time of pain, *I shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing sheaves with me* even if I do not see them this side of heaven...

Hear *Madame Guyon – imprisoned in the infamous Bastille –

*A little bird I am,
Shut from the fields of air;
And in my cage I sit and sing
Of Him who placed me there;
Well pleased a prisoner to be
Because my God, it pleases Thee.*

*Nought have I else to do;
I sing the whole day long;
And He whom most I love to please,
Doth listen to my song;
He caught and bound my wandering wing,
But still He bends to hear me sing*

*My cage confines me round;
Abroad I cannot fly;
But though my wing is closely bound,
My heart's at liberty.
My prison walls cannot control
The flight, the freedom of the soul.*

*Oh it is good to soar
These bolts and bars above,
To Him whose purpose I adore,
Whose providence I love;
And in Thy mighty will to find
The joy, the freedom of the mind.*

Our ascent is into the heart of God who loves us to distraction – *'my goal is God Himself, by any road dear Lord at any cost.'*

You can have as much of Him as you want - the choice is always yours...He will give you all of Himself – He's like that, a God of abundance, not measure – and He won't condemn you whatever you choose, He already knows the road you will take...so -

Which cup are you choosing?

Measure or abundance?

Your choice will determine the height you finally achieve...no blame, no shame...just a simple choice – *'my goal is God Himself...'* pressing on, or stopping here on this level – you choose – no guilt, no condemnation there is none 'in Christ'.

'When God turned the captivity of Zion we were like those who dreamed....'

He's turned your captivity, you were once lost, now you are found – are you dreaming of higher things in Him, making choices, pressing on no matter what, going deeper, going higher, inspiration, revelation...more, more, more...of Him, His beauty, His kindness, His nature, *'more of You in my life...'*

As you rest here and recover a little, as you look up, and see the peak rising steeply before you, take a little time to take stock; perhaps there is a need to reassess your priorities before you decide to continue the climb – going up requires we carry less and less with us...what will you need to leave behind at this level in order to reach the summit...?

*'Union with God' by Madam Guyon available from www.Amazon.co.uk