

Restored!

Psalm 126

Pastor Jim Rademaker

We are a smaller, locally owned, non-franchised, insured, loss restoration company. We provide prompt and friendly service to our customers who have had the unpleasant experience of a structural fire, water damage/flooding, storm damage, or vandalism. We offer 24/7 emergency services and security board up services as well. ... It's more than just making money. It's about helping to pick up the pieces of someone's life and making it normal again. - *Rademaker Restoration & Remodeling, Little Chute, WI.*

"By the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!' How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?" If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy! (Psalm 137:1-6)

The year was 538 B.C. The Jews had been exiled to Babylon seventy years earlier. Seventy years is a long time. The people had settled down. They had established homes in the new land. Some of them had been born in exile. It was all they knew. And then suddenly, Cyrus, the new king, makes a proclamation allowing all the Jews to go home! (Ezra 1:1-4)

Seventy long years in captivity, and then in a moment, God turns things around. Just like that! They're in shock! They can't believe their ears. It was too good to be true. *Somebody pinch me, I must be dreaming!* It's impossible. It couldn't have happened. And yet, it did! They are now, back in Jerusalem. Back in the holy city. Back in Zion, the place where God dwells with his people. It all felt like a dream!

For centuries afterward, pilgrims making their way to Jerusalem each year for the feasts would have been keenly aware that this was the same route the captives had taken when they returned. And they would have marveled at God's graciousness in returning the captives to Zion.

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Job must have felt the same, when God restored him from all his suffering and made him prosperous once again.

The Apostle Peter felt it, when God rescued him from jail. It felt like a dream to him. In fact, he actually thought it was a dream. Acts 12:9-11 *"Peter had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision ... Then Peter came to himself and said, 'Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me.'*" (Ray Fowler)

Restored! God, is in the restoration business.

2 Peter 3:8-13 *But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ... But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Luke 4:14-17 *And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee ... And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,*

Isaiah 61:18-21 *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

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Luke 15:1-24 *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.*

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"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

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And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. ... the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ... And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ... the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate!"

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Ultimately, everything is restored in Jesus. You and I are restored in Jesus. Restored in our righteousness. Restored, in our relationship to God. United, as it was in the beginning. Creation restored in Jesus - with new heavens and a new earth. Joy restored, never to cease.

Restoration! God is in the restoration business. He loves to restore old, worn-out, broken down, ruined things. Throughout the many stories and subject matter of the Scriptures, there runs one outstanding story; one predominant theme – restoration. The restoration of mankind through a divinely appointed Savior. *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.* (Luke 24:27)

We too, the New Testament Israel, the Israel of faith, along with our father Abraham, join the believing remnant of Old Testament Israel. Our mouths are filled with laughter; our tongue with shouts of joy. We say to those around us, and those around the globe, "The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy!"

In the Scriptures, joy is not an end in itself, but a response to God. It's God, who fills our mouths with laughter. It's God, who puts a song of joy on our tongues. **Psalm 30** ... *Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. ... You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent.*

We live in a throwaway society. When something gets broken, what do we do? Throw it away. It's not worth fixing. Not worth the cost. Easier to get rid of it and get another one. You and I are broken. Broken by our sin. Broken by our unbelief. What does God do with us? Throughout the Scriptures, there runs one outstanding story; one predominant theme – the restoration of mankind through a divinely appointed Savior.

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; 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.

The captives were back in Jerusalem, but there was still much work to be done. They needed to rebuild the temple and rebuild the walls. They faced discouragement from within, and opposition from without. God had worked a great deliverance for them in the past. Now they needed to trust him to do it again. Do you know that that's like?

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negeb! Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!

There's nothing particularly sad about sowing seed. It takes no more work than reaping. Sowing is simply the work that has to be done, even when there are things in life that make us cry. As Bible commentator Matthew Henry puts it, "Those that sow to the spirit, in this vale of tears, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting, and that will be a joyful harvest indeed!"

He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

Hopefully, you'll never have the unpleasant experience of a structural fire, of water damage, of vandalism. But if you do, you can always call Rademaker Restoration and Remodeling. Yet, we all face the experience of death. Death in our sins. Death before the Judgment Seat of God. Only *Jesus* can help you there. And that, He has done! Dying your death, in your place. Rising, in your place. Restoring us, the way we were meant to be. Restored forever!

This is the third Sunday of the season of Advent. Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ. During Advent, we look back to when He came to earth as a babe. We look ahead to His second coming as the King. And we look to Him today as He desires to come to each of us as Savior and Lord.

The candle we light today is the SHEPHERD'S CANDLE. It reminds us of the shepherds who left their flocks to find the Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. It is an encouragement to us to leave our concerns, as important as they seem, and to gather around the baby of the manger and the man of the cross.

Restore us again, O God of our salvation ... that your people may rejoice in you! (Psalm 85)