

Text: Psalm 126

Title: “Spreading Joy”

Before I get started let me encourage you to join us for our Evening of Prayer and Praise tonight at 5:30. In Psalm 46:10 the Lord invites us to be still and know that He is God. I can't think of a better way to conclude this Thanksgiving weekend than to do just that. Tonight we'll experience the power of silent, contemplative prayer in the presence of God and others.

Open your Bibles to Psalm 126. I'm preaching a series on a collection of the psalms called the Psalms of Ascent, Psalm 120-134. After the TCU/Baylor game this weekend and the fierce rivalry between those schools I was tempted to preach from Psalm 133 that begins by saying, “How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity.” But I'm sure all the competitive feelings have drained away and you all gave each other a big hug when you came to church today, so I'll stick to Psalm 126. Let's read Psalm 126:1-3.

The Psalms of Ascent are were likely sung by the people of God as they traveled up to Jerusalem to worship at one of the three great festivals or holidays (holy days) they observed as the people of God. These psalms reveal the hearts of the people of God who were stepping up and pressing in as they drew near to worship God. So we're allowing the Lord to teach us how to keep our focus on the Lord through the holidays that are always so stressful. How can we turn the holidays into holy days?

Some of these psalms have inscriptions saying they were written by David or Solomon, but most of them are anonymous. In fact Psalm 126 was probably written during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah when the Jews returned from their captivity in Babylon. Think how special it would have been for them to sing psalms like this as they returned to worship for the first time in 70 years. Maybe they thought they would never see their beloved city again.

Psalm 126:1-2a - When the LORD brought back (literally “restored”) the captives to Zion (that's Jerusalem), we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.

There's a special joy that comes from being restored ... of knowing that you are right with God. Psalm 30:5 says that God's anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.

And we are to bring that joyful worship to church each week as the people of God who have been redeemed and restored through Jesus Christ? So there is this testimony that flows out of the joyful hearts of God's people: “God has done great things in restoring us.” But that joy is not just a big deal for us, as the people of God; it is noticed by the nations ... by people who are far from God.

Psalm 126:2b-3 - Then it was said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things for them.” The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.

So there is the joy of God's people that is noticed by the nations who say, "The Lord has done great things for them." That's where I want us to camp this morning. God intends for all of the earth to worship Him. He has created everyone for that purpose. And those of us who experience His salvation are to be so joyous in Him, so faithful in our witness to His faithfulness, that the nations, the unredeemed groups of people around the world, would sit up and take notice.

Today we are surrounded by the flags of most of the nations of the earth. They remind us of the mandate of Jesus that we are to make disciples of all nations ... from every ethnic group, language group, and people group. I'm not sure we all get that. I'm not sure we all understand how central this is to our life as followers of Jesus. We can't just be concerned about our family, our church and our nation. We do not have the freedom to simply look at the rest of the world through American eyes. We must look at the rest of the world through Jesus eyes. Our hearts are to ache for the nations who need to know that the Lord has done great things for us in Jesus. We either need to be ones who are packing up and moving to places around the world to take the Gospel to the nations, or we need to be directly involved in helping others do that as we give sacrificially to Kingdom purposes and pray intelligently and fervently.

I have four friends coming to help us dream this dream and catch this vision. In fact, I'm praying that God will use their words to make your hearts ache for those without Christ among the nations.

Dr. Mike Morris is Assoc. Professor of Missions at SWBTS. **Dr. Rebekah Naylor** is a retired missionary who spent the biggest part of her adult life in India. **Neal and Jana Seaborn** are career missionaries who have taken early retirement from the IMB due to the financial difficulties we'll talk about in a moment. They're all members at Travis. Thank you for being available to help me paint a picture this morning for our church.

Mike Morris: You have a unique vantage point as a professor who teaches missions at Southwestern Seminary. Paint a picture for us of lostness in our world among the nations.

Rebekah Naylor: Our church is directly involved in taking the Gospel to the nations through our giving to the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention which funds a large portion of the budget of the International Missions Board. In addition to that our church gives to our World Missions Offering, 70% of which goes to the International Missions Board. Paint a picture for us of the importance of our giving in light of the unique and somewhat unprecedented challenges facing the IMB.

Neal and Jana Seaborn: Your assignment for the past few years has been to help people who feel God is calling them to pack and move somewhere in the world to take the Gospel to the nations. Paint a picture for us of the path to missionary service.

When it comes to this, there are only two kinds of people in the church. There are those of us who have packed their luggage and are moving to take the Gospel somewhere in the world. And then there are those of us who have to be directly involved in making sure they have the finances and the prayer to support them. Thank you, friends, for helping me this morning.

Now back to Psalm 126. The psalmist concludes his song with a prayer ...

Psalm 126:4 - Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negev.

The Negev is a desert region to the south of Jerusalem. And being a desert region where it rains very little. So usually, when the streams of the desert are flowing it's because it has rained at a higher elevation and the water has flowed down to fill the desert ditches that were dry for most of the year. Envision what would happen if the rains of God's grace were to fall on us so dramatically that revival would happen. And from that revival streams in the desert would flow to the nations. That's the way it happens in times of revival in Acts and in church history. The people of God freshly yielded to and filled with the Spirit of God become a mighty army taking the Gospel to the ends of the earth. It never just stops here.