

THE LORD HAS DONE GREAT THINGS**Psalm 126****Read Psalm 126**

INTRO: Forty years ago, today, Kathy and I were married on a picture-perfect summer day. The weather was perfect. The sun was bright. There was hardly a cloud in the sky. I was on Cloud 9. I still am. I mean look at me here! I'm ready for another 40 years.

Has it been a picnic? Nope! But it's been an adventure and I'd do it over and over again.

It's not good to get too comfortable in marriage because if you do you might take each other for granted. Marriage is work and its good work and it's fulfilling work.

But even as I say we should not get too comfortable in marriage, as you do the good work required, you certainly get used to one another. You soon know what the other is going to think before they think it. You find what they like, and, definitely for the husband, you will know what she does not like. ☺

As I've gotten used to Kathy, I've found I really do not like to be away from her. Just a day or two away is too long and weeks away from her is especially difficult for me. Now, I'm not going to put you through hearing about that again. You've heard me whine about what a baby I am when we're apart. I could do my best Bill Withers imitation and sing

Ain't no sunshine when she's gone

It's not warm when she's away

Ain't no sunshine when she's gone

Only darkness every day

Ain't no sunshine when she's gone

And this house just ain't no home

But I'll spare you and just get to my point. Back in 2012 when I was away from Kathy for 5 weeks on my sabbatical trip to India and Eastern Africa, I vowed to never take a trip like that again without her because such an adventure needs to be shared with my best half. I cannot count the number of times I said to myself, or those with me, "Oh, if Kathy could see this!" Driving up a volcano into a cloud forest in Nicaragua, and seeing clusters of the stunning Blue Morpho Butterfly I thought it, and then later that day as I looked down into a crater lake surrounded by lush tropical greenery on another volcano, I said it out loud, "Oh, if Kathy could see this!" and numerous times when I traveled through India and in Africa, again, "Oh, if Kathy could see this!"

You see, it's beautiful and I love it, but it's just not the same if Kathy is not there.

That was what the former exiles were expressing in Psalm 126 which I read as I began this talk. They were celebrating the wonder of being back in their beloved homeland after so many years in Babylon. They knew God had done such great things and he had kept his promises. They were home!

But some were not home yet. Some exiles were still away from their homeland, and the ones celebrating the restored fortunes of Zion, were mindful of that and they didn't want to enjoy it too much, at least not until they could all celebrate together.

We're like that ABC. Today is a celebration. After our practice run last week, today was the day our doors were officially open. That's to be celebrated! That's progress! It's been three months of exile in the far-off country of COVID-19.

But, alas, there are just a few of us in this room. Not everyone is ready to come back because it's not safe for them. Fully half of our regular ABC attenders fit into a risk category that makes it a very wise choice to join us on ZOOM – and we praise God you can.

But we look forward to the day of rejoicing when the restrictions are either gone or so relaxed that we can say it's safe for you all to be here in this room, IN PERSON! Oh! That will be the day! We look forward to that.

But since it's not today yet we will celebrate accordingly. Ours is a bittersweet celebration, like the people singing in Psalm 126.

Let's take a quick look at it and you'll see what I mean.

It seems too good to be true, but it's not

- The song begins, *When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion we were like those who dreamed.* (v. 1) Bill Baublitz was a part of ABC back in the 80s while he attended the Seminary, and he worked with me as a

painter for a couple of those years. He was always singing as we worked, and one favorite was the oldie that was already moldy by then, the Jimmy Clanton song,

*Just a dream, just a dream
All our plans and our all schemes,
How could I think you'd be mine?
The lies I'd tell myself each time.*

The Israelites thought they were in a dream. They had to pinch themselves in order to know they weren't dreaming and might wake to their former reality. They were afraid to celebrate. It was almost too good to be true. But it was true!

- So, they celebrated! In Babylon their hearts had been filled with the kind of sorrow that cause the mournful moan we see in in another Psalm,

*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, Jerusalem,
may my right hand forget its skill.
May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth
if I do not remember you,
if I do not consider Jerusalem
my highest joy. Psalm 137:1-6*

- And now they were back. The weeping is gone, replaced with mouths filled with laughter and tongues singing for joy.
- Are you celebrating the end of our exile? Restoration is coming and it shouldn't be a surprise or a dream. It's not too good to be true. Because . . .

God keeps his promises

- *The Lord has done great things.* He has. Remember Jeremiah 29 where the prophecy was clear – you will be in exile for 70 years and then you will return. God does what he says. Here they are. And the world was watching. And the world was witnessing the God of Israel at work. And the world proclaimed, "*The Lord has done great things for them.*" (v. 2c). And they got it. They owned it. God did it. God keeps his promises. He said he would do great things, and he did great things.
- Thank about it ABC. Think about what God has done for us over the past three months. He's preserved us. He's kept us healthy. He's actually prospered us. And we were able to worship together even though it wasn't in person. God never left us.
- Now what are we going to do with it? Before the quarantine, back when COVID-19 was Corona Virus and it was some foreign illness – we were coasting along. We were taking things for granted – actually getting too comfortable. Then we experienced a BIG change. And we learned from it. At least I hope we did. What are going to do with it? We CANNOT miss this opportunity.
- Satan wants us to. He threw a wrench into the recovery by poking a racial hornet's nest. How the church responds to the events of the day will define how we exploit the opportunity that came out of COVID. We need to take the lead and follow the Word of God. Let's take our cues from the Bible and not from Facebook or Twitter or Fox News or CNN. I mean how can we know what truth is when it comes to us in 280 letters or in snippy Facebook or Instagram post? Here is truth – in the Bible. Let's not mess this up.
- Finally. . .

Regardless of what we do, God will completely restore our fortunes

- Our Psalm implores God with *Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev.* (v. 4). This is vivid imagery of a desert gully (called a “wadi” in that region) that is full to the brim with replenishing water from a Spring rain. It spoke new life to the ones singing it. God’s complete restoration, for everyone, is on its way. God has done good things and he will continue to do good things.
- But we must do our part. There is a sacrifice. *Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.* (v. 5). It’s an investment. We look forward to when everyone will be back here in this room – all of you, who are out there in ZOOMland. But, know what else we must look forward to? The people who come to know Jesus by what they have seen in the lives of the children of God they know!
- Peterson puts those last three verses this way,

*And now, God, do it again—
bring rains to our drought-stricken lives
So those who planted their crops in despair
will shout hurrahs at the harvest,
So those who went off with heavy hearts
will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing.*

Psalm 126:4-6 (The Message)
- We’re not talking about sheaves; we’re talking about people who need Jesus. There are a lot of drought-stricken lives out there Church! There are people who sing *A change is gonna come*, but they don’t really believe it, their despair is too deep. Too many promises have been broken. They’ve just given up. There are other people who think the government can change things. Well, government can legislate, but it cannot, and never will, change hearts. Some people had high hopes for the Church to make a difference, but they only heard empty platitudes or, worse yet, felt hatefulness. The only change will come when hearts change, and the only way hearts can change is through Jesus being in full possession of those hearts.
- Songs of joy are being revived, but more voices need to join in. Let’s make sure we know that joy ourselves, and then let’s spread it around.

Conclusion: The Lord has done great things! We know it. We’ve seen it. Let it be seen in us. Some are still in exile. An exile that comes from looking in all the wrong places for the joy that can only come from knowing Jesus. Make sure you are the streams in their desert bringing word of restoration. Let it be said of those we touch “The Lord has done great things for them!” Amen.