

Ps 126

Caption: a psalm of ascents, for when the people were ascending, going up to Jerusalem

They did this for special festivals. So as we read it we can imagine the Israelites singing or chanting this as they walked on pilgrimage up to Jerusalem

We know King David wrote many of the Psalms, but this one is probably written about 400 years after King David after the return from exile in Babylon

There's two parts in this Psalm. The first talks about **the joy of serving a promise-keeping God**. God restored and returned the exiles they are full of joy

The second half is a call to God to keep on working, the people still **ache with longing for the kingdom** so they call on God to restore them again

Let's think about this word RESTORE

(Restoration Australia) I quite like watching house building shows, (my favourite is probably Grand Designs hosted by Kevin McCloud) but during lockdown with my mum, I watched a few episodes of Restoration Australia where they work to rebuild, restore a really old house.

There's something different about restoring: it's not renovating, or improving, but seeking to recreate the past.

A very difficult thing to do, the host makes sure we understand the tension: as foundations are strengthened and walls refreshed, there's the danger that a lot of the original charm could be lost. A lot depends on budget, can they afford to get quality work done?

These builders are hoping to recreate the past but that's a common desire for us too all through the pandemic, we've spoken longingly of the time life will "return to normal" now we're realising it's not that simple, life won't just go back to how it was before

This Psalm thanks God for his restoring work and asks him to keep restoring so

What does this restoration look like? Can we really hope to be restored? What is the true restoration God can bring?

The joy of serving a promise keeping God

God's people had been unfaithful, so they had been sent out of the promised land to Babylon.

but then, God kept his promise and made a way for them to return
This Psalm is recounting God's work in bringing them back from exile,
he's restored them
how happy they were
it felt like a dream, they were filled with laughter
Can this be real?! They thought
So as they walk up to Jerusalem they remember God's great work

Can you think of a time where you were waiting and longing? New car, return of a loved one

There's always something we're looking forward to, when my exams are finished then life will be great, when I'm better from this illness
once the longed for thing happens, we easily forget how much we longed for it
so this Psalm is a wonderful pattern for us
a reminder to rehearse, repeat all the ways God has provided.

The last two months I've been able to share stories of God's faithfulness to me and others I know in South Asia. It's sort of a strange experience to tell these stories multiple times, sometimes to people I've never met. But it's a huge privilege to have people ready to pray.
and I'm realising even more how much of a privilege it is to have this opportunity to rehearse all that God has done.

I wonder if you have regular practises for gratitude and thanksgiving?
I think the psalm you wrote together for the 50th anniversary of the church is a wonderful example.

Maybe at the end of the month you make a list and share it with someone
Maybe in your home group as well as prayer points, you share praise points

There's great joy in serving a promise keeping God

The Israelites had longed for their homeland and God had brought them back
Slowly they worked to rebuild the walls and then the temple

As they walk to Jerusalem, they retell God's work

They remember

God was honoured among the nations because of the great things he did
we are filled with joy

There is great joy in serving a promise keeping God

In the past few years, one of the most special opportunities my housemate Jenny and I had to share about Jesus was with a friend I call Vision, who came to stay with us for a few months. She'd been hurt by family and felt very alone, so when she arrived, she

timidly admitted she didn't even believe in God anymore. Which in our location is very unusual. But we were privileged to witness a softening in her, as she watched us pray, and accepted our prayers for her life, she slowly started to hope that maybe there was a God. She started to come out of her shell, grew in confidence. She was still a long way from knowing the true promise-keeping God, but we could see the beginnings of restoration in her.

So in the first half we see that there is great joy in serving a promise-keeping God,
now the second half:

The ache of longing for the fulfilled kingdom

As the people walk towards Jerusalem, v4 they sing: 'Restore our fortunes, O Yahweh'

Restore our well-being, 'like streams in Negev'

The Negev is a dry, desert-like region in Israel

So imagine the plants and flowers that pop up out of nowhere whenever it gets some water

A beautiful abundance

That's what they're calling on God for

Even as they remember what God has already done,
praising and thanking him for returning people from exile
they are prompted to call out for him to act again.

The return from exile was not straight back to normal, it definitely wasn't the good old days

in the book of Ezra we read how first under the leadership of Zerubbabel they managed to lay the foundations of the temple

But they faced opposition and 100 years later it still wasn't complete

Then under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah,
they made more progress, completing the temple and the city walls
but it's not like the former days

it's like all they can manage is a patch up job, not a full restoration

They're small in number, they feel weak

Maybe there are loved ones still in Babylon

They are longing for the way it was before.

This is the ache of longing for the fulfilled kingdom

V 5-6 'those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy

those who go out weeping with seed for sowing will return with shouts of joy'

So they still plant their fields weeping
There's disappointment, the ache of longing for what was
But at the same time they are hoping for what God will bring
'those who sow in tears will **reap**, will **harvest**, with shouts of joy'

It's such a beautiful promise isn't it

Such a rich metaphor –

I don't know much about planting and harvesting, the only food I've ever grown were tomatoes that sprouted in my balcony pots kind of by accident, but they did bring a lot of joy

Just imagine the returned Israelites, tears streaming down their face as they throw seed on the ground. They ache for the way things used to be, but they faithfully sow seed for the future, they trust God to bring growth

The sowing can apply to any task God's given you: the work you do, the way you care for others, the times you share Jesus with others

They may not be big things others notice,
seeds can be tiny things, a kind word, a smile, but God can grow big things through them

However you are serving this Psalm reminds us it's hard
there will be disappointments, there will be weeping with the work but we know the tears aren't the end

There's promise of new life, there's hope of restoration

What about for us?

I know for me there have been many tears the last few years.

Weeping as I've missed family and friends, tears as I've felt misunderstood, sadness as I see friends living without hope

*Our friend Vision's stay with us was cut short as she was forced to return to her family. That was quite a traumatic time for all of us. What was God doing? We had just started to read the Gospel of Luke with her and she was loving it! Just as we could see changes starting, the restoration seemed to be cut short, incomplete
There were many tears*

Back to the passage

God kept his promise that he would restore a remnant of his people to their land Israel

(He's a promise-keeping God)

these promises were recorded in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and other prophets

But they weren't completely fulfilled at the time the exiles returned

So the people sing "Restore us again"

Ultimately, we see the answer to these prophecies and the singers' prayers in Jesus

He brought the beginning of God's true Kingdom

He healed the sick, restoring health

He hung out with the poor, restoring their dignity

He died on the cross, ending the curse of sin

He came back to life, restoring the lives of all who trust him

Jesus' disciples slowly grasped that those promises from the prophets were being fulfilled again and more fully in Christ

But they were still left wondering...?

in Acts 1, just before Jesus ascends to heaven they ask him: when are you going to restore the kingdom to Israel?

Even as they are filled with the Holy Spirit

and equipped to spread the news of the kingdom far and wide

they faced many hardships and disappointments

they still longed for complete restoration

So this Psalm is a pattern for all of us following Jesus today

Just as the people of Israel were exiles, we're in exile

Adam and Eve were exiled from the garden

as humans we're still in exile

We ache with the longing for complete restoration

Australia is often called 'the Lucky county'

While we don't believe in luck, we can see that we are blessed with natural beauty, a stable government, good educational opportunities

So often where I live in South Asia, people are surprised I've come to live there, they always want to come to Australia, at least to study, but perhaps to work and live

Why would I leave Australia they ask??

Because as followers of Jesus, we know this life is not all there is

As wonderful as Australia is, a comfortable life here is not the goal

We're looking forward, longing for God's kingdom to be completely fulfilled,
for the earth to be reborn
for our return to the Garden Adam and Eve once called home.

So often we ache with longing for the restoration of our garden home
we shouldn't be surprised by times of tears and weeping

What are the things causing you grief?

Perhaps a family member who doesn't yet know Jesus

Living with continuous pain

Disappointment that plans haven't worked out again

These are all symptoms of a life in exile, but we serve a promise keeping God,
who is bringing complete restoration

He's not struggling to bring it in on budget, his resources are endless

He's also not confined to a time schedule,

We may see some answers to these burdens soon, others may need to wait till
eternity

With my friend Vision, I'm thankful we've been able to keep in touch, she's in a different city, but we've visited a few times. She's now married to a good man. She has a copy of Luke's gospel, although she doesn't feel confident to read it without us. God graciously protected us, gave us good resolution to a very messy situation. But we're still waiting, praying, sometimes with tears, for her to know the saviour.

Friends, let's be people who give thanks, remembering God's goodness
because **There is great joy in serving a promise keeping God**

At the same time there will be tears as **We ache with longing for the fulfillment of the kingdom**

but complete restoration is coming

– those who plant with tears WILL harvest with JOY