

Take Heart! The Lord Can Do Amazing Things

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[0:00] Do you ever feel stuck in the ordinary, like nothing exciting will ever happen again?! There are certainly times in our lives, probably more so than not when we feel that way.

! And not just personally, but we as the people of God, as God's people, where we feel that things are just going to keep on going on in this small way that they are going on. That's part of the Christian life. That's what it means in part to be a pilgrim here. And it's been a while, I know, but in these Sunday afternoons, we've been going through that small song book in the middle of the Psalms called the Songs of Ascent. They were pilgrim psalms, psalms to be sung as the Israelites made their way from their hometown up as they ascended up to Jerusalem, up to the temple, up to Mount Zion. And so these psalms acted as sort of a hitchhiker's guide to the Christian life. When Stephanie and I went to Ethiopia, we picked up a special guidebook, a tour book. You see them at Barnes & Noble with all the different countries. And they're books that tell you where to go, what to see, what not to do, what to avoid, what to be careful of, what not to miss. And that's what this little song book in the middle of the Psalms is. It's a tour book of the Christian life. It has the good, it has the bad, it has the troubling, it has things to avoid and things to look forward to.

And today we're going to come to Psalm 126. Psalm 126. So please take your Bibles and turn there, and I'm going to read the psalm in its entirety. It's six verses. Psalm 126.

When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. 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.

Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.

[2:47] If I could summarize the psalm in a sentence, it would be this, to take heart, the Lord can do amazing things. Take heart. The Lord can do amazing things. Now, where does the psalm meet us? We have to get to that first place if we are going to understand it. Where does it meet us? Well, it talks a lot about joy, doesn't it? But that's not where it meets us. It talks about past joy, and it talks about future joy, joy. But that's not where the psalm meets us. It meets us when we're stuck in the ordinary, when we feel small, dry, not very fruitful. It meets us in the days of discouragement and sadness. It meets us in the days of small things, where it feels like the amount of work that you do to reap a little bit of fruit is so much. So it meets us in our discouragement. And then it says, come with me. It doesn't, that's where it meets us, but it doesn't leave us there. Now it says, come with me. Let's go back to the past. And let's think about God. That's a good place to go when we're discouraged. Let's think about God. And that's what the psalm does. And so in verses one through three, the psalmist sits us down on the sofa, and he takes out the scrapbook of God's family, the history of God's working, and shows us a picture from the past. You do that sometimes, don't you? And that's what the psalmist does here. And so here we look at this picture, and here are these folks. There's a lot of people in this picture. It's after the Babylonian captivity. And as we look at the picture, everyone is almost in a haze, in a haze, almost. There's a smile on every face. There's laughter in every mouth. And then on the outside of the picture, we see some people that are looking at the people in the middle, and they're saying, wow, they're amazed at what God has done for them and what has happened. Out of nowhere, out of nowhere, in the most surprising, magnificent way, God returned them to Zion. And now they are laughing.

They're laughing with joy. Now think about that picture for a second. How did Israel get back from the Babylonian captivity? How did that happen? Did they come up with a great scheme? Do you read anywhere in the Bible about a great political plot, or political maneuvering, or a great army, or

anything like that? Was it at the end of a long political fight? Well, not at all. They weren't planning it. They weren't preparing for it.

They weren't thinking it was even a possibility. They didn't do a single thing to make it happen. But out of nowhere, Cyrus was put on the throne, Cyrus the Persian, and he said, you can go home. Now go home. And they went. And then as they went, they said, I just can't believe it. Pinch me. This is just too good to be true. I must be dreaming. I never thought this could be. I never thought I would be here. I never thought I would be back. But here I am. It's almost too good to be true. The Lord has done great things out of nowhere, surprising, amazing things. So they were stuck in the ordinary. They were stuck in the day of small things. They were stuck far away, not really much of a hope, humanly speaking. They were stuck in the obscure and the unimportant. But then God acted in a very surprising way. He moved the heart of a king, and that king sent them on their way home. And just like that, everything changed. So we're called to think about that. In our discouragement, we're supposed to think about what God has done in the past. So we put down that picture. See, the wonderful thing about being in God's family is you have a big scrapbook, and it's full of things and events of God doing amazing things. So we're going to put down that picture, and we're going to pick up another picture. And it looks very similar to the first one we looked at. God's people are full of joy. There's laughter in every mouth. There's a smile on every face.

[7:16] Now, the clothes are different. The people's faces are different. This isn't the return from Babylonian captivity. This is something else. This is what happened in the Reformation in the 16th century.

Now, think about how the church was. It was buried in darkness. It was buried under the rules and superstitions of men. It was living in darkness. The word of God was hidden. Godless men ruled in the church. Things were bleak. Things were dark. How could anything change? The downward momentum of time, and the godlessness seemed to be so powerful. There was so much downward momentum.

How could anything possibly change? Well, the Spirit of God came in, and he stormed in upon Europe, and he changed things forever. Where there was darkness, he brought light. And so the sun started to shine where no one thought the sun would ever shine again. And the clouds of darkness fled.

Now, things that just never could be, it seemed like, came to life. The faith that was so buried came to the forefront. Now, was it planned? Was it plotted? Was it schemed? Was it the thoughts of men that accomplished it? Well, if you know anything about Martin Luther and the Reformation, you know as he was nailing those 95 theses to the door in Wittenberg, which started this grand Reformation, he wasn't nailing that paper to the wall, to the door, saying, I want to start a Reformation. That was the furthest thing from his mind. But God did it. The Spirit of God came, and God's people were like those who dreamed.

Can this really be happening? Can the gospel that was so long buried come back to life? Can this really be happening? And the answer is yes, because with all things, with God, all things are possible.

[9:27] God can do amazing things. Now, let's put down that picture, and let's pick up another picture. And the times are different, the clothes are different, the people, it's new faces, but there's the same laughter. And beside that picture, there's written the same words, the Lord has done great things for us.

The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. Now, this is a picture of the Great Awakening. Do you know about that? The 17th, or the 1730s, 1740s, the colonies of the United States, so we're talking back in the colonial period, very religious place.

Very religious place. But there was a deadness resting on the land. There's a certain malaise, a certain tiredness and weariness to the whole thing. The church was full of half-hearted professors. There was very little power and dynamic in the Christian faith.

But then God's Spirit came. And it was amazing. I think we would have a hard time knowing what to even do with some of the things that happened.

Because they're so far from our experience. And they had, themselves, had a hard time understanding what was going on. Listen to what Jonathan Edwards wrote. As he recorded the events of this time, he's talking about, in this particular portion, he's talking about 1741. And he brings up two months. Just listen.

[11:09] The months of August and September were the most remarkable of any this year for appearances of the conviction and conversion of sinners and great revivings, quickenings, and comforts of professors. So people were being saved. They were being convicted. The professors were finding such comfort in the gospel. For extraordinary external effects of these things, it was a very frequent thing to see a house full of outcries, faintings, convulsions, and such like, both with distress and with admiration and joy.

But this was remarkable. The work of God seemed to be almost wholly upon a new generation. But now we had the most remarkable, wonderful work among children that ever was in Northampton. The former outpourings, he's talking about something that happened in 1735. The former outpourings of the Spirit were remarkable for influences upon the minds of children, beyond all that had ever been seen.

But this far exceeded that. Indeed, as to the influence on the minds of professors, this work was by no means confined to a new generation. It wasn't just for the children.

Many of all ages partook of it. But yet, in this respect, it was more general on those who were of the young sort. Now, I know that's some old-time language.

[12:41] It's in the afternoon. You're tired. But did you hear what happened? The gospel was being preached, and it came with such power and authority that people were so overwhelmed with both their guilt, and some were so overwhelmed with the amazing grace of God that they couldn't hold themselves together.

They cried out. They wept. They fainted, even. And did you hear about the young people? During the Great Awakening, teenagers and young people were saved, not just one or two at a time, but hundreds and thousands were gripped with the gospel.

It wasn't like anything we have ever seen. It wasn't just a few here and there, but hundreds and thousands of people were saved. And God's people were overwhelmed with the greatness of God, and they cried out, The Lord has done great and marvelous things for us, and we are filled with joy. God can do amazing things. Now, have we seen anything amazing in our own day? Something like that. Well, I think the answer is yes in part.

So we put down that picture, and we can look at a picture that's closer to our own day. You know, 40, 50, 60 years ago, it was almost like Calvinism and the doctrines of grace were a relic of the past in this country.

[14:18] There was really no such thing as a Reformed Baptist. I mean, I'm sure there were, but as a movement, as a group of people, Calvinism, the doctrines of grace that we love, it seemed like it was on its last legs.

It was held just in a few Presbyterian churches for the most part. But then God started to act, and he did act. It was amazing.

And now the scene is totally different in our country. The Reformed faith is now not that next-to-dead thing that it seemed to be back then, but it's sweeping the nation. That truth has conquered millions of people.

40 years ago, we would have been a very odd bird, very interesting, little, obscure church. But now we are part of a large, broader movement where the grace of God is loved and appreciated.

Young men are believing this and preaching this and teaching it. No one could have saw that coming. No one could have seen that happening. Now, the lesson I'm just trying to show from these events is God, take heart, God can do amazing things.

[15:26] We looked at a biblical, what he did in the past. See, God is not bound. Praise the Lord. He's not bound by our expectations. He's not bound by small, ordinary things.

God doesn't have to save one or two at a time. He could save thousands in a day. Pentecost shows us that. That doesn't exhaust God. That doesn't tire him out.

That wasn't a one time. That can never, ever be. Because with God, he can do all things. So Pentecost shows us that God can do amazing things. The Reformation shows us that. The Great Awakening shows us that.

God is quite able, and God is quite willing to do big, surprising, amazing things. That's one of the points that we are to get from Psalm 126.

So as we're sitting there in our, some, you know, maybe discouragement, we don't, in our own lives, we don't feel like we're getting much fruit. In a day of small things, take heart.

[16 : 26] God is not bound. He can do amazing things. Now here's the second lesson I want you to learn. God will do amazing things. God will. So now we're not talking about the past.

We're talking about, and we're not talking about just possibility. We're talking about what God will do. God will do amazing things. So after dark, there's going to be light.

After sowing, there will be reaping. After tears will come joy. God will do amazing things.

Now that's verses 5 and 6 of Psalm 126. Now this psalm, it ends on this high note. It ends on this positive note.

Because with God, our story is always going to end on a high note. With joy. There's always a happy ending when you're with God.

[17 : 25] So why do we love fairy tales so much? Why do they resonate? Why do we love stories that are like that? Well, because they tell us that despite, no matter how bad it gets, no matter how dark it gets, no matter how far away and distant, victory and goodness seems, good wins.

There is joy at the end. At the end, there's going to be this surprising turnaround. This unexpected change of situation.

And so Sleeping Beauty is going to wake up. Snow White is going to live. Hansel and Gretel will escape the witch and they'll get to eat the candy house at the end.

Psalm 126 is saying that, brothers and sisters. God will do amazing things. No matter how dark and bleak it feels now, the tears, the sorrow, the weeping, the work will come to an end.

And there will be a time to rejoice. After the sadness, after the hard work, after the labor, will come joy.

[18 : 44] Now there's going to be a great revival that consumes the whole heaven and the whole earth. Where death itself will be banished, sin itself will be destroyed, and the whole creation will come back to life after its long, painful sleep under sin.

that will happen. God will do amazing things. Isn't that why the resurrection is so precious to us?

Amen. All those who we've laid to rest will come back in their heavenly bodies. And they're the first fruits of the new creation and the whole earth, the whole cosmos will take part in it.

God will do amazing things. And so what should we do? What should we do? Here's the third lesson. We should pray for revival.

Look at verse 4. Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev. So sandwiched in between these amazing things in the past and these amazing things in the future, there's this prayer for God to do something surprising today.

[20 : 09] The psalmist says, revive us. Restore our fortunes. Take us out of these small things and give us something greater. Do something surprising for us.

And he compares it to streams in the Negev. Now, the Negev is this dry, dusty, pretty much usually barren land of Israel. But it's filled with riverbeds where most of the year there's no water.

And because there's no water, there's no fruit. There's no trees. There's very little flowers. But then something happens. It rains.

Out of nowhere, it rains. And now, the riverbeds are filled with water. And now, where there were no flowers, there was no plants, things come to life and the desert blossoms.

Where before, a week ago, you could look and there it was. It was dry, barren, dusty. Now, there's life blooming out of everywhere.

[21 : 12] The psalmist says, revive us like that. So here we are. This is what we need so much of the time, don't we? We feel dry. We feel dusty.

We feel like we can only eke out just a little bit of fruit, a little bit of change, a little bit of holiness in our lives and it can be so discouraging. There's so much of the time, isn't it true, that that joy that we want is so distant and there's so much sorrow and disappointment and it's hard.

It's just hard. And brothers and sisters, what we need is revival in those times. We need God to pour the rain of His Spirit upon us and make us to blossom, restore us like streams in the Negev. So, here we are. So for many of us, not all, but maybe for some of us, we're in this day of small things.

We feel rather trapped in the ordinary. And I am not saying that there's not anything good or, I mean, God fills even our ordinary days with so much good that we shouldn't have any reason not to praise Him and thank Him.

[22 : 32] But maybe you feel trapped in that. You feel discouraged and disappointed. That's what happens in the pilgrim life. And that's why Psalm 126 is here.

And is there anywhere to look? Yeah. We look to God. God who can do amazing things. He has done remarkable, surprising things in the past.
He will do amazing, surprising things in the future. And that should encourage us to pray in our own day, Lord, revive us. Revive us.
We need you. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we have so much to thank you for.
We thank you for your patience with us. you know how discouraged and disappointed we can be sometimes with the fruitfulness of our own life, with where we are, when we are sowing and it feels like we're not reaping very much.
[23 : 41] Lord, encourage us with this side of you that you're not bound by small things. You don't just have a little power, a little grace.
You aren't poor. You are so rich, so able. We thank you that you are that way and that we can now look to you and we can say, revive us.
Send rain upon our hearts. Encourage us. I pray for my brothers and sisters who are discouraged in the way of the Lord. Pray that you would restore them and revive them today.
show them a side of you and your love. Show them a side of your grandeur and your greatness and your grace that all that you are would be for us.
That is amazing. Thank you for loving us. Thank you for committing yourself to us. And so, we don't have a reason to be discouraged because you are with us and you are able to do all things.
[24 : 46] So, I pray that you would send us on our way full of faith, looking to you, trusting in you to be that kind of God for us, powerful and good.
And we worship you. We worship you for all that you are, for your holiness, how every one of your attributes is holy and exalted.
We love you and we adore you and we ask that you would send us on our way, trusting in you, rejoicing in you. In Jesus' name, Amen.
Amen. Amen.