

# The Garden of Restoration

## *Psalm 126*

### INTRODUCTION

Someone once said that the most frequently published author is a person named:

Anonymous

Anonymous is the author of today's Psalm.

- There are 150 Psalms in the Book of Psalms. These 150 were written by at least six different writers.
- Some of these are credited to a particular author. Many have no credit given to them at all. They are anonymous.
- For example, King David is credited with writing 80 of them.
- Several more were written by his son, King Solomon.
- A group of musicians, known as the "Sons of Korah," wrote many as well. "Sons of Korah" always sounds like a country-western band to me, or the name of John Wayne movie.

But the authorship of Psalm 126 remains a mystery.

- There are many theories about who wrote it.
- The theory I like the best attributes it to Ezra, the Old Testament scribe and priest who is the central character in the book of Ezra and who makes a significant contribution to the book of Nehemiah.

Ezra comes into the Biblical story after the children of Israel spent many years in captivity by the Assyrians and Babylonians... right after the Persians under King Cyrus came to power. As the book of Ezra opens, we read these words:

The Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and also to put it in writing: "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem, and may their God be with them. And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem.'" (Ezra 1:1-4)

The first wave of Jewish immigrants was led by a man named Zerubbabel. Under his leadership the people rebuilt the Temple. It was a crude building, nothing like the beautiful Temple of Solomon.

- The second wave was led by Ezra, who came to Jerusalem to lead the first worship service in this newly constructed Temple.
- This was the first worship service in Jerusalem in 70 years. At least the first worship service for our God. Imagine that!

Some scholars believe that Ezra wrote Psalm 126 shortly after that first worship service. Let me read the first two verses again of tonight's text. This time hear them with that bit of history in mind:

When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dreamed.  
Our mouths were filled with laughter,  
our tongues with songs of joy. (Psalm 126:1-2a)

Can you picture the setting? After 70 years of captivity, these people were home. They had been "restored" to Jerusalem. And they were worshipping at the Temple! It was like a dream come true.

Welcome to the Garden of Restoration. In our Lenten journey from the Garden of Eden to the Garden of the Empty Tomb we find ourselves tonight standing with Ezra in this Garden filled with the joy of restoration.

Like the prodigal son, our journey outside of Eden has been filled with sin and its consequences.

- When that boy "came to his senses" and started home, he found that his father was ready and willing to RESTORE him to his rightful place as a son. Not a servant, but a son. Not just receive him, but RESTORE him.

But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:22-24)

Our own journey from Eden to the Empty Tomb will always bring us to a place where God restores us to our rightful place in the family of God.

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:11-12)

That's what salvation is all about. Now, notice what happens when we arrive at this Garden of Restoration:

## #1: THE NATIONS NOTICE

Verses 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. (Psalm 126:2b-3)

God doesn't operate in secret. When He moves in the hearts and lives of His people, He does so in order that the world may know Who He is and What He does.

In the Scriptures, Jesus Himself tells us the whole crucifixion sequence is so that the world would know that God was on the move. It might look like the devil was winning, but that would be a false interpretation!

I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me. (John 14:30-31)

When Jesus prayed what we call the "The Great High Priestly Prayer" just before His arrest, Jesus offered these words to His Heavenly Father:

I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:23)

That's one of the reasons it is so important for us to share our Faith Story. God works – not so that we can keep it to ourselves – but so that the world might know.

One day the Pharisees were tired of hearing the disciples talk about what Jesus was doing:

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" "I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out." (Luke 19:39-40)

## **#2: THE PEOPLE NOTICED**

Not only did the world notice this worship service, that experience caused the people present to look around and notice something too. Look at verse 4:

Restore our fortunes, Lord,  
like streams in the Negev. (Psalm 126:4)

That worship service was a time of great joy, but it was also a time of sorrow. Why?

- Because when these Jews looked around, they realized that not everyone was there.
- Some were still in captivity. Some opted not to return.
- This was a remnant, not a total return to Jerusalem.

Their joy was tempered with tears and prayers that God would continue to bring back His children. One commentator said it like this:

The beginnings of mercies encourage us to pray for the completion of them.  
(Matthew Henry)

For those of us who have a certainty about our eternal destination this psalm makes complete sense.

- We rejoice that Jesus Christ has forgiven our sins.
- But at the same time, we know that some people we love dearly are still in captivity. They don't what it means to call Jesus "Lord" and "Savior."

The prayer here is a beautiful one when you catch the imagery. I learned what it meant in my studies for this sermon, and I am sure I will use it frequently when I pray.

- For most of the year, the riverbeds in the Negev desert were dry and parched.
- But each year when the spring rains came, those same dry riverbeds would overflow with water – sort of like we have experienced in these past couple of weeks.
- So the prayer was essentially "Lord, let the captives come back to you like a flood." "Flood us with Your blessings!"

### **#3: THE PEOPLE RECEIVED**

The last two verses of the Psalm are God's promise to those who pray that prayer.

Those who sow with tears  
will reap with songs of joy.  
Those who go out weeping,  
carrying seed to sow,  
will return with songs of joy,  
carrying sheaves with them. (Psalm 126:5-6)

The harvest is coming! And it will be a time of great joy! But first a few tears need to be shed.

### **APPLICATION**

Close with silent prayers for the harvest.

Amen.