

## Psalm 126.<sup>1-6</sup>

### The cross

#### Background

The 'songs of ascent' are a manual on discipleship: and as they move towards the half-way mark, this psalm underlines the fact that it is a crucified Saviour you follow.

In some ways the psalm gives expression to the exhortation of [Hebrews 12.1-3](#) to fix your eyes on Jesus and to see in Him and His ministry the pattern for your life as His follower. It was "for the **joy** that was set before Him" that "He endured **the cross**."

That chord, comprising the twin notes of joy on the one hand and the cross on the other, runs through the whole psalm: and it's a 'chord' which permeates the whole of the believer's life as well, covering the past (".. our tongues [were filled] .. with songs of joy" – v.2), the present (".. we are filled with joy" – v.3), and the future ("..will return with songs of joy" – v.6).

When the psalmist spoke of the 'great things' which the Lord had done for His people and which had filled them with joy, he was thinking of the truly remarkable way in which they had been restored to their land after the long and painful years of exile in Babylon. His words, though, might have applied equally to the quite miraculous way in which they had previously been delivered from their wretched enslavement in Egypt.

Such, too, is the experience of the believer – *long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night: Thine eyes diffused a quickening ray – I woke, the dungeon flamed with light, my chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth and followed Thee* (Charles Wesley).

The joy is almost palpable! But it's a joy only known through the painful cauldron of conviction of sin: look at the language – a long imprisonment, being tightly bound, the dark night of the soul, a dank dungeon, and heavy chains constricting any movement. "Oh Joy, that sleekest me through pain," as George Matheson put it in his hymn.

That pattern of joy-through-pain which is experienced in conversion is found to be the pattern of your consequent discipleship: life being imparted to others through the deaths that are died to self: resurrection power released through crucified living.

It's that to which the second half of the psalm points. For your calling as a follower of Jesus is to be, metaphorically, a seed-bearer, sowing the Word – a task that is often costly and hard, but one which in the fulness of time will be seen to bear a substantial and joyful harvest: and it's those harvest songs of soaring joy which will resonate through eternity! "Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Cor.4.17)!

Along with **the first two 'days'** which deal with the psalm itself, I suggest **'day 5'** may be the one to turn to for the third set of questions. There are additional questions for the Community Groups which you'll find under those three days.

## 1) Monday 14<sup>th</sup> February – gospel

Read [Psalm 126.1-3](#)

*“The LORD has done great things for us and we are filled with joy ..”* (Ps.126.3)

The gospel is good news! What the LORD has done for us in Jesus is well described as ‘great things’: forgiveness, renewal, resurrection. And what that effects in our experience is well summarised as a deep-seated and enduring joy.

When you think back to your own ‘conversion’ in what ways can you identify with the words of that verse from Charles Wesley’s hymn quoted above?

What are the great things which the Lord has done for you over the years?

Is your living characterised by this deep-seated joy?

**Prayer:** *To You, my Lord, be the glory, great things You have done! Help me to remember all that You have done for me, and fill my heart with that joy in Yourself.*

## 2) Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> February – sowing

Read [Psalm 126.4-6](#)

*“.. Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy ..”* (Ps.126.5)

The path the Saviour had to tread is the path He bids His people walk. There is a cross at the heart of all genuine discipleship. ‘Sowing’ the seed of the gospel in proclaiming Jesus can be a sore and costly task: but be sure, there’ll be a glorious harvest!

Why is the gospel task of ‘sowing the seed’ often a tear-filled experience?

What is the confidence a local fellowship may have that the ‘seed’ of the Word of God which is sown in a community will bear its fruit?

How would you encourage fellowships which are seeing little or nothing of that ‘harvest’ from the Word that’s being sown – and indeed the opposite?

Read [James 3.13-18](#): into what situations may the Lord be calling you to be a ‘peacemaker who sows in peace’ today?

**Prayer:** *‘O Joy that seekest me through pain, I cannot close my heart to Thee: I trace the rainbow through the rain and feel the promise is not vain that morn shall tearless be’*

## 3) Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> February – harvest

Read [2 Corinthians 4.1-4](#)

*“We have renounced secret and shameful ways ..”* (2 Cor.4.2)

Like Paul, the ministry you exercise is in answer to God's call. However sore the trials you have to bear, however great the cost, you may be confident that God's work done in God's way will issue in an abundant harvest to the glory of the Lord.

How would you describe the particular 'ministry' which through the mercy of God you have?

What might be some of the 'secret and shameful ways' which you should be careful to renounce?

**Prayer:** *Thank You, Lord, for the privilege of ministry and for the assurance You give that my daily service, my 'labour in the Lord', however costly, will not be in vain.*

#### **4) Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> February – light**

Read [2 Corinthians 4.5-6](#)

*".. the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ .."* (2 Cor.4.6)

The 'great thing' which the Lord has done for you ([Ps.126.3](#)) has been His illumining of your heart, enabling you to see Jesus for who He is and to rejoice in all that He has secured. Your concern now is to commend Jesus, not yourself! Do that today!

How did the Lord 'make His light shine in your heart'?

In what ways in your daily living do you preach Jesus Christ as Lord?

**Prayer:** *Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was blind, Lord, but now by Your grace I see. Use me today to give such sight to others too.*

#### **5) Friday 18<sup>th</sup> February – life**

Read [2 Corinthians 4.7-12](#)

*".. death is at work in us, but life is at work in you .."* (2 Cor.4.12)

The principle underlying all gospel work is simply the pattern of Jesus' own ministry: for He now lives within you by His Spirit. Life is imparted to others as you're ready to die to self: resurrection power is released by 'crucified' living.

What has been your experience of this 'death/life' ministry to which Paul alludes here?

Paul will say [later](#) in this letter that God's 'power is made perfect in weakness': what are the 'weaknesses .. insults .. hardships .. persecutions .. difficulties' that you face, and why can you delight in them?

**In what ways is it true that 'death is (or needs to be) at work in us' as a fellowship of God's people?**

And in what ways can you see that 'life' is at work in others through the ministries of His church here?

**Prayer:** *Lord, I am both proud and comfort-loving by nature and don't take kindly to weakness, hardship and insults! Give me grace today to seek only Your glory.*

## 6) Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> February – hope

Read [2 Corinthians 4.13-15](#)

*"It is written: 'I believed; therefore I have spoken' .." (2 Cor.4.13)*

Whatever the present might have involved for him, it was the sure future hope to which Paul clung. The gospel has that future orientation – the best is yet to be: the cost you may have to pay in the present will bring a rich future dividend!

Sometimes it's hard to speak, even when you do believe! What helps you to speak to others about the Lord Jesus?

In what ways have you seen the Lord working through your trials in such a way that thanksgiving to God has overflowed on the part of others?

**Prayer:** *Whatever the day may bring, help me today, my Lord, to speak and act in such a way that those with whom I have contact will have cause to give You thanks.*

## 7) Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> February – glory

Read [2 Corinthians 4.16-17](#)

*".. inwardly we are being renewed day by day .." (2 Cor.4.16)*

Against the backdrop of eternity Paul could see that his present trials were but 'light and momentary': he could see also, that as well as his trials providing the Lord with a means of displaying His power to others, they were fitting him for glory as well.

Whatever may be your physical condition, in what ways are you aware of being 'inwardly renewed' day by day?

In the worship of God's people today on what will you be seeking to 'fix your eyes'?

**Prayer:** *May I look backwards with gratitude for all that You've done, upward with praise for all that You are, and forward with hope to all that You've promised!*