

**Full Joy Through Jesus
Psalm 125 & 126**

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Psalm 125 & 126 (*These Psalms are part of a larger group known as the 'Psalms of Ascent.' Most believe the 'ascent' made by pilgrims and Israelites from the valleys surrounding Jerusalem as they went up to the Temple Mount to worship Almighty God.*)

Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds His people, from this time forth and forevermore. For the scepter of wicked shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous stretch out their hands to do wrong. Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, and to those who are in their hearts! But those who turn aside to their crooked ways the LORD will lead away with evildoers! Peace be upon Israel! When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad. Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like streams in the Negeb! Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! [Those] who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing [their] sheaves with [them].

Young children commonly dream about what adulthood will be like. Rarely is adulthood, though, what they (and we) dreamt. Sure, one may feel 10 feet tall and bulletproof for a while, but commonly, usually in our 30s or 40s the 'check engine light' (or worse) comes on and we begin again to dream of life being painless, free of fear & illness, and with peace in all areas.

The Psalmists of our passages desired for such truths to be their realities. In short they prayed for Almighty God to fulfill His promises. We believe that God is sovereignly at work in our lives now, but also that He *will* complete that work in us at *His* appointed time. And it is because of who *He* is that we know we do not hope in vain. As we consider these passages today, we will see from:

1. Psalms 125 that we have *Hope* of God's Covenant Protection –
and from
2. Psalms 126 that we have *Assurance* of Future Joy

Hope of God's Covenanted Protection

As we consider these two Psalms I want to begin by presenting to you a quote from historian Thomas Cahill who wrote: *The creation of an increasingly unwieldy and rigid bureaucracy, whose own survival [is] its overriding goal... the increasing concentration of the population into richer and poorer... and the desperation that inevitably follows; the aggrandizement of executive power; ineffective legislation promulgated with great show; the moral vocation of the man at the top to maintain order at all costs, while growing blind to the cruel dilemmas of ordinary life [are all combined reasons why Rome fell].*

- When we look back in history, we see that when people put their faith and trust in themselves and their stuff, their ways, ruin follows! Ruin is inevitable because of the overpowering and inescapable effects of sin in every human.
- But thanks be to God who offers Himself over and above anything and everything in this entire world.
- In verses 1-2 we read **Those who trust in are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, the LORD surrounds His people forever.**
- The relationship between God and those who place their saving trust and faith in Him is eternal. This world is in motion – yes physically our planet rotates on its axis while also revolving around the sun - but the rate at which things change is so quick that it's easy to feel many steps or years behind! And often times, the farther behind one feels the less motivated they are to catch up!
- You and I experience changes and shifts in relationships too. Instability sadly exists within many families – broken homes, merged homes, re-broken homes, abuse, neglect – all of these and more plague families in every country and every culture in the world!
- Tragedy can strike at any time. Let me give you an example from my life: Earlier this year I spoke with someone whose son suddenly died in car wreck while her husband was in hospice care. *You all probably*

know better than me how quickly and perhaps even tragically a life can change.

People are looking for stability, looking for community, looking for something-anything to grab ahold of! You and I *need* something stable we need something consistent, we need something constant on which to focus and place our faith, hope and trust in, in order to ground us and keep us from getting swept away. Nothing created provides that! Only Almighty God provides that! However, for God to provide these things – which He has promised to do – a soul must surrender itself to God. Faith must be placed in finished work of Jesus Christ. *Only* if you trust in Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit - will you have *full* protection and care of Almighty God.

- God offers and provides what our souls need. Regardless of times, circumstances or appearances, God has covenanted to do this. No war, virus, election, coup, or unrest can stop God from keeping His covenant love and protection from His children.

Beloved of Christ, the promise remains active! It was true during Old Testament times and it remains true from the New Testament era even to now. In 1Peter 2:4 and following, the Apostle Peter made this connection when he wrote: **As you come to [Jesus], a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen & precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood... through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Script (Isaiah 28:16): Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in *him* will not be put to shame. So the honor is to you who *believe*.** Belief, trust and faith in Jesus Christ leads Him to honor, bless, and glorify you.

Assurance of Future Joy

That promised glorification is our blessed hope! On that glorious day, which according to Isaiah 2 will include swords being turned into pruning hooks, when evil is vanquished and sin is no more, on that day, Almighty God will take the tears of His covenant people and replace them with joys forever more! *That* is the great day I hope you are looking forward to with anticipation and expectation!

When the Israelites returned to the Promised Land from Babylon they were so excited that it all felt like a dream. Even their enemies recognized that a power beyond Israelites was at work. But even though they were home, the people

found Jerusalem in total ruins; the Temple, for example, needed to be rebuilt from the foundation up. They knew that they needed God's covenant blessings and protection because of this. That is why the Psalmist asks for fortunes – that is to say God's mercy of provisions – once again as we read in 126:4.

- The Psalmist asked God to restore the fortunes of His covenant people, why? (First) So that the watching world would see God deliver it, (Second) that it would be recognized as God having acted on their behalf, and (Finally) respond to it all with saving faith in the only God who could have done it all.

It can be so easy to *not* ask God for what we truly need, can it not? Many a Christian throughout history – even today - can be overly kind. Many a believer – me being the prime example – make requests that are less than what we truly and fully need from God, because we believe that in our “humility” we hope God will say yes faster.

- But when we do that what are we really doing? Playing politics; trying to appear humble in order to garner greater sympathy from God. Such an approach is an attempt to manipulate God. Can God be manipulated? Of course not! What should we do then? The answer is to ask God for what you think you need, the full measure. Hold nothing back! That's what the Psalmist in Psalm 88 did.
- Remember when we looked at that passage back in July? That very dark and seemingly hopeless passage that accuses God for causing all the misfortunes, maligning, loneliness and close-to-death state of the Psalmist there? What did he ask of God? Simply put, for God to stop. And we also saw that the Psalmist would continue to lift that need of his each and every day until God said 'Yes' either in this life, or in the life to come.

The return from Babylon (which we cannot forget was an exile due to the extreme disobedience of ancient Israel for centuries), as amazing as it was, was still a call from Almighty God to difficult, painful, time-taking and at times dangerous tasks. I hope that should God call me to difficult or uncomfortable tasks that I would respond like those first Israelites returning to Jerusalem, or like St. Patrick. At 16 he was enslaved by Irish pirates; at 22 he escaped back to England and returned to his family. However, God was not done with him. God called him back to Ireland as a missionary. As the Roman empire crumbled, Irish

society was strengthened by the gospel through Almighty God's servant, Patrick.

- We have little of anything that Patrick wrote, but we do have what is called "St. Patrick's Breastplate," which was one of his prayers. May all our hope and resolve in Jesus Christ be as bold and firm in our faith as this: He prayed, *"I arise today through God's strength to pilot me; God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me, God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me, God's Word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me... God's shield to protect me. Christ to shield me today against poison, burning, drowning, [and] wounding, so that there may come to be abundance of reward. Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down... I arise today through a mighty strength."*

The honest truth is that this life may be filled with many tears, many hurts, many fears, many anxieties and likely much worse. However, with the power, protections and promises of Almighty God at work in, thru and around you, you can complete this life's journey with hope and joy. As surely as Jesus Christ arose from the grave, your tears will be wiped away by the nail-pierced hands of Jesus. In exchange for your tears and years of toil in this life, Jesus will give you an eternity of joy. Do you believe that? Know Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of Lords in the saving way He offers Himself, on His terms according to the Scriptures. Do that, and these promises are yours to be enjoyed now and forever more, all by His grace and His covenant-keeping love.