

The Lord Has Done Great Things

INTRO: From the unauthorized biography of Noah

“And the Lord said unto Noah: “Where is the ark which I have command you to build?”

And Noah said unto the Lord: “Well Lord, I have had three carpenters off ill. The gopher-wood supplier has let me down, even though the gopher-wood has been on order for almost 12 months. What can I do Lord?”

And God replied, “I want the ark finished within seven days and seven nights.”

Noah replied, “I will make it so.”

But it was not so. So the Lord said unto Noah, “What seems to be the trouble this time?”

And Noah replied, “My subcontractor has gone bankrupt, Lord. The pitch which you commanded to be put inside and out of the ark has not arrived. The plumber has gone on strike. Shem, my son that helps on the ark side of the business, has formed a boy band with his brothers, Ham and Japheth. Lord, I am feeling hopeless!”

The Lord grew angry and asked, “What about the animals, male and female of every kind that I ordered to come to you so they would be able to carry on their species after the flood?”

Noah replied, “Lord, they have been delivered to the wrong address but should be here by Friday.”

The Lord said, “How about the unicorns, and the birds of the air by sevens?”

Noah wrung his hands and began to weep, saying, “Lord, the unicorns are a discontinued line - I can’t find them anywhere for love or money. And the birds, they only come in half dozens. Lord, you know how it is.”

The Lord in His wisdom replied, “Yes Noah, I know how it is. Why do you think I have caused this flood?”

TRAN: Now that is far from a true biblical story, and all done tongue in cheek.

However, it introduces our topic for the day which is hope. Noah was experiencing a hope shortage. Many of us have probably felt the same at different times in our life, or over different things. Things go wrong and we are ready to throw up our hands and call it quits because we are running out of hope. Yet God has something better in store for us than sending a flood to restore hope. God offers Himself.

READ: Psalm 126

- I. To many of us, this life can feel like a difficult drudgery
 - A. Tolkien described it as a “long series of defeats”
 1. That is what Noah felt in our made up story

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2. That can be what life feels like a lot of the time - a long series of defeats
 - a) Just when you start to get ahead, something else comes along to knock you down
 - b) Just when you get past your child battling with health concerns, you have an auto accident and don't have the money to get your car fixed
 - c) Just when you feel like you have reconnected with your spouse after a rough patch in your marriage, a special relative passes away
 - d) When the job market is coming back strong, and are feeling as if you are secure again in your career, your boss tells you that you are very secure in your career - as long as you uproot your family and move to Wyoming
- B. So we get it, life can be rough
 1. The beautiful thing about this Psalm is the focus of it
 2. Psalm 126 focuses on restoration, and restoration leads to hope
- II. The background of this Psalm is a little difficult to pinpoint, but very important
 - A. It more than likely was after Israel had been in captivity
 1. To freshen you up, after King David, and his son Solomon, the kingdom divided for many years
 2. Eventually the northern part was conquered in 721 BC, and then the southern part was conquered in 586 BC
 3. By 444 BC Nehemiah came to build the wall of Jerusalem
 - a) We talked about Nehemiah last year
 - b) Just before Nehemiah came back, the Temple was rebuilt - not nearly as grand as the first temple
 - B. This Psalm is known as a "Song of Ascent," meaning it was sung as Israel would walk up to the city of Jerusalem with the temple in view
 - C. So put yourself in Israel's shoes
 1. You were in captivity and you remember living in a foreign land, far from your primary place of worship
 2. The Jews are getting excited as they approach Jerusalem
 - a) Back in 2013 I went out to New England to visit my former students, to watch Nicole Dean play college volleyball, and do some genealogy
 - b) If you had been with me in the car, at almost midnight, you would have seen a giddy middle aged man bouncing off the walls of the car as he got closer and closer to the town he lived in 16 years ago
 - c) I drove through town looking at how things had changed, and how things had stayed the same - driving past people's homes I remember where they lived

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- d) But the greatest was the next day when I drove past the church I served in
 - (1) Remembering the times of worship with the church family, and the students
 - (2) Remembering the crazy things I had the students do in YG
 - 3. You are now getting closer to what the Jews felt as they approached Jerusalem
- III. The Psalm begins with the great things God has done in the past
- A. The Jews are not remembering loss, or defeat - they are thinking over restoration
 - B. They begin by remembering when the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion
 - 1. Zion was a spot near Jerusalem, and becomes a name synonymous with Jerusalem itself
 - 2. It was such a great memory that they felt like they were in a dream
 - C. Now, we may not know all the exact details of when and what they are referring to, but we do know what the book of Psalms views as restoration - turn to Psalm 85:1-3, 8-13
 - 1. Look at what is included in restoration
 - a) In verse 2 - God forgives and covers sin
 - b) Verse 3 - God turns aside his wrath and anger - why? Because sin is forgiven
 - c) Verse 8 - God promises peace
 - d) Verse 9 - Salvation is near, His glory will dwell with them
 - e) Verse 10 - Love, faithfulness, righteousness, and peace are together
 - f) Verse 11 - Faithfulness springs up from the ground, righteousness from heaven
 - g) Verse 12 - The Lord gives what is good and heals the land
 - 2. The author in Psalm 126 is remembering that God has restored Israel
 - a) Forgiveness is issued, God's wrath is turned aside, peace and prosperity are promised
 - b) It is an incredible time of remembrance so much so that back in Psalm 126, the author says it is like a dream
 - D. Have you ever done something that is just a reminder of your sin?
 - 1. Maybe you tried to choose your own path apart from God and something happened and you have a tangible reminder of your sin
 - 2. Years ago while helping at a Christian camp I received a reminder of my stubbornness
 - a) One of the other kids on the trip was quite rude and frustrating on the trip - and really had not treated me in a kind manner

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- b) So I was on the dock and need to get back to shore but they were sitting across the dock
 - c) I would have had to ask them to move to get to shore - except for the fact that I could jump to shore if I was careful
 - d) So instead of asking politely for this person to make some space so I could pass, I tried to jump to shore
 - e) I whacked my leg on a pole on the dock and it cut me about 2 inches long, and about 1/2 an inch wide
 - f) I still have the scar from which is a visible reminder of my stubbornness
3. What the author is saying is our captivity used to be our reminder, but now that has been taken away because of the merciful God we have - He has brought us restoration
- a) This was so great that it was like a dream
 - b) We can hardly believe that this is reality
- E. What it brings about is laughter and joy in Psalm 126:2
- F. So great was God's mercy and restoration for Israel even the pagan nations took notice
- 1. Psalm 126:2b "Then it was said among the nations, The Lord has done great things for them"
 - 2. Remember Sanballat from Nehemiah - as much as he hated it, He could see that God was with Nehemiah
- G. Notice the change in verse 3
- 1. The nations notice that God did great things for them
 - 2. Then the Psalmist says "The Lord has done great things for US - and WE are filled with joy"
- H. What kind of things can you remember God doing for you that filled you with joy?
- 1. As you look back over your life, what has God done for you?
 - 2. My hope would be that you look back at your salvation with joy
 - a) You owed a debt to God that you could never pay
 - b) God paid it for you
 - (1) Not because you were so awesome that He just had to do it
 - (2) Not because you offered Him something that God needed so He decided to pick you
 - (a) This is not a cosmic game of kickball at recess
 - (3) God paid it for you because He is God - and He made a choice to pay that debt
 - c) If that does not get you excited nothing will

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3. We have been having more and more people share their stories of what God has done for them
 - a) It is awesome when our people get up and share what God has done
 - b) If we have a living relationship with God, each of us should have a story or stories of what great things God has done
- IV. Everything changes when we head to verse 4 - it has all become present tense
 - A. Verses 1-3 were past tense - what God did
 - B. Verse 4-6 are present tense and offer us a glimpse of what biblical hope is like
 1. READ: Psalm 126:4-6
 2. The situation has now changed somewhat from the beginning of the Psalm
 - a) At the beginning it sounds great!
 - b) God has restored!
 - c) We had so much joy
 - d) Even the nations noticed how great our God is
 3. Now at verse 4, the situation becomes a plea for God to restore again
 - C. This is where we pick up the theme of hope - biblical hope longs, biblical hope cries, and biblical hope labors
- V. Biblical hope longs - v. 4
 - A. The author after having remembered God's goodness, mercy and grace in the past is now longing to see that again
 - B. The word picture he is painting is clear
 1. The Negev literally means dry - so he has in mind a desert
 2. So the author is painting the picture as if he is in a dry time of life
 - a) We have no idea exactly what they are feeling other than a sense of dryness - we have no idea why
 - b) There is little doubt that we can understand feeling dry
 - (1) Maybe relationships have dried up for you and you feel like friends or relatives are not there for you the way you hoped
 - (2) Maybe just feel like you are running on empty - you just wish you could receive some refreshment like the author longs for in the middle of their dry season
 - (3) Maybe you feel dry in your relationship with God
 - (a) You are not experiencing much with God
 - (b) You struggling to read your Bible
 - (c) When you do, you feel as if you are getting little from it
 - (d) When you pray you feel like your prayers are just bouncing off the ceiling
 3. So the author is dry but longing for refreshment

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C. Isaiah 35:6-7 “Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs. In the haunts where jackals once lay, grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.”

1. This may be what he has in mind
2. This area was desolate - it was dry, it was basically good only for someone to die in
3. And suddenly, life springs up, joy so that the lame leap, waters gush forth

D. Jesus understood this idea and Jesus said, “On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.” - John 7:37-38

1. Are you thirsty?
2. Are you feeling dry - in life, in your marriage, in your faith?
3. Come to Jesus and drink your fill
4. When you believe in Jesus (not about Jesus) Christ has living water spring up inside that dryness and bring life

VI. Biblical hope longs and biblical hope cries

A. Sometimes God restores quickly like verse 4

1. Streams in the desert
2. Other times the road is slow and hard and arduous, but that allows us to play a role - like in verse 5

B. The picture that is painted is one that farmers of the day would know all too well

1. In dry ground, every seed that is placed into that ground is costly
2. The farmer could take that seed, or grain and instead of planting it, he could eat it, or use it to feed his family
3. Instead, he realizes the only way to reap a harvest is to sow the seed
 - a) He has to place the seed into the seemingly barren ground and trust that the rains will come to cause it to grow and bear fruit

C. Each time we give out, it costs us something

1. When we forgive, it is a costly moment
2. When we fight unbelief, it is costly
3. When we share the gospel message, it costs us
4. When we have to give out to trust in God, it costs us something

D. So those that sow with tears

1. They give out until it hurts

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2. They know it is costly - but they give anyway because they know the reward is yet to come
3. So when you forgive that person because of the wrong they committed against you - it costs you - it hurts sometimes
 - a) Maybe you had a right to be upset
 - b) But you know, the reward to forgiveness is far greater
4. When you share the gospel with a friend, and they look at you like you are from another planet
 - a) It is costly
 - b) But as you pray for them, and over time, you begin to see the fruit of your labor
 - c) You see their heart softening and let me tell you, on the day they come to Jesus Christ - you will reap with songs of joy
5. Sowing, giving out of yourself may be costly, but the rewards far outweigh the risks
 - a) Think of it this way: there was that moment in your relationship with your spouse that a risk was taken - saying "I love you" the first time
 - (1) We all know the drill - if you say it and they don't say it back - very awkward
 - (2) Yet, to put yourself out there, to run that risk could offer great rewards - and if you are in a happy marriage, that risk paid off
 - b) Giving out may cost, but you will never experience the joy without taking that risk

VII. Biblical hope longs, biblical cries and finally biblical hope labors

A. Now this is almost like the last one

1. Verse 5 - sow with tears = reap joy
2. Verse 6 - weeping carry seed = return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves
3. There is however a fine line - and the line in verse 6 moves to action
4. Verse 5 is almost theoretical
5. Verse 6 takes theory and moves to action

B. I don't know if you have ever had to repeat things to yourself to get yourself motivated to do things

1. Ever sat down to relax for a few minutes, notice the pile of dishes overflowing the sink - next thing you think is, "Well, the dishes aren't going to do themselves"
2. Or maybe closer to where we need to be thinking, ever put a certain verse on repeat when you are facing a difficult time?

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- a) When struggling in life you remind yourself of Isaiah 42:3 “A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.”
 - b) Or Isaiah 40:31 “Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength”
 - c) Or Psalm 41:10 “Do not fear for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”
3. This is what the author of Psalm 126 is doing: repeating to himself that joy comes when we trust and give out
- C. It begs a question - why does he have this hope - why is he so confident?
1. The answer is simple - God did it in the past
 2. God did restore Zion, and God can restore his fortunes, or his family’s fortunes and bring refreshment in the middle of a dry and barren time
 3. The hope is found in the faithfulness of our God

VIII. Conclusion

- A. Someone has said that if you could convince a man there was no hope, he would curse the day he was born. Hope is an indispensable quality of life.
- B. Years ago the *S-4* submarine was rammed by another ship and quickly sank. The entire crew was trapped in its prison house of death. Ships rushed to the scene of the disaster off the coast of MA. We don’t know what took place inside the submarine, other than men bravely clingy to life as the oxygen slowly ran out.
- C. A diver placed his helmeted ear to the hull and listened. He heard tapping. It was learned that the tapping was morse code. Amid the dashes and dots came a slow question: “Is...there...any...hope?”
- D. That seems to be humanity’s cry, “Is there any hope?”
- E. The answer to that question is a resounding “Yes, there is hope”
 1. Hope is found in Jesus Christ
 2. Hope is found in a gracious God
- F. If you are longing for hope, crying out for hope, laboring for hope, hope is found in Christ
 1. If you are here and you have never experienced that hope for yourself, if you have never come to Jesus Christ in repentance and asked forgiveness, I encourage you to let today be the day
 - a) See how Christ can change your life
 2. If you are here and you have experienced the salvation that Christ offers
 - a) Maybe you are just feeling dry - you feel like you need streams springing up in the middle of this dry time of life

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- b) Do what the author is doing - ask God to bring the refreshment you need
- G. The hope that all of us need is Jesus Christ - and all of us need to turn to Him today and ask for that hope
 - 1. Be like the widow Jesus told us about that kept coming to the judge for justice
 - 2. Keep asking for hope, keep asking for refreshment
 - 3. And based upon the faithful God we have, hope will come