

"Restore Our Fortunes, O LORD"

SCRIPTURE TEXTS: Psalm 126:1-6

Introduction

- 7th Psalm in the Songs of Ascents series
- Storyline of the pilgrim
 - Disappointment in hometown, and journeys into Jerusalem
 - Disappointment even within Jerusalem
 - [Last week]: Wickedness even among the rulers of Jerusalem
- [Last week] Meditated on the sovereignty of God even above the wicked rulers. Although believers are faced with sin and disappointments in the world and even in the church, God remains sovereign and shall not let wickedness prevail. He will keep his people, while he will drive away the wicked.
- [Today] Psalm 126 aims to encourage the faithful pilgrims in the face of the present experience of wickedness in Jerusalem. How? By expressing **joy in the Lord's restoration of his people in the past** and by expressing the **confidence that God will restore his people once again.**

The Text

A. Type of Psalm - Communal thanksgiving Psalm (meant to be sung by God's people together)

B. Structure/Flow of the Psalm

- Verses 1-3 - The Psalmist recalls and describes God's work in the *past*
 - "Restored" ... "filled" ... "has done" (Past tense)
- Verse 3b - The people's response to God's work
 - "We are glad"
- Verses 4-6 - The Psalmist prays with assurance of God's *future* work

- “Restore, O LORD...” and then what will happen? The people “shall reap with shouts of joy!”

Following the storyline of the pilgrim since last week, **God will not only not let wickedness prevail. He will restore his people.**

SERMON PROPOSITION: Although believers may be discouraged with present disappointments and sin even within the church, the testimony of God's faithful work in the past assures us of the restoration of his blessings in the future.

Point 1: God faithfully restores his people in the past

TEXT:

- Verse 1 — Recalling God’s restoration of fortunes (well-being) of Zion
 - “*Restored the fortunes*” — In Hebrew, “*turned a turning of.*” Suggests a once good situation that turned for the worse. Yet the Lord turns it back again into the good situation as it was before. Hence, “restore.”
 - Context — Possibly recalling the reign of wicked kings who just died, when the situation went well and was restored by God.
- “*Like those who dream*” — The experience was unbelievable, as if it’s just a dream and not a reality (E.g., when we dream or imagine good things, though not real)
- Verse 2 — “*... filled with laughter... shouts of joy*” — Not just their external situations, but also their heart
- “*... they said to the nations*” — Even others witness it, the saving work of God for his people
- Verse 3 — “*The LORD has done... we are glad.*”

[Now what do we see here?]

PRINCIPLE: It is the Lord who faithfully rescues and restores his people

- It is God who does it, not man
- In fact, it is God who faithfully does it, despite the unfaithfulness of man

Testimony of God’s restoration of his people (History of Israel)

- Cycle of God's blessing, man's disobedience, God's judgment, God's deliverance and restoration (e.g., book of Judges)
- And in the process, God does not only restore the situation of Israel, but he also turns their hearts to God—so that those who are true believers repent and love the Lord.
- God is faithful to his people despite their unfaithfulness

Testimony of God's restoration of sinful mankind in Jesus Christ

- Man's corruption due to sin. Man lost the image of God (i.e., true righteousness and holiness, the ability to truly know, love, and live with God)
- Yet God faithfully fulfills his promise. Jesus Christ lived perfectly to restore that image in us.
- 2 Corinthians 5:17
- And through the Spirit, we are being conformed into the image of Christ.

Again, it is God who does this, who restores what is broken and lost in his people:

- God is faithful *despite* man's sinfulness
- "God's changelessness lies in the assurance that God is reliable in his promises—not only because he *wills* to be faithful to his word but because he *cannot* change his eternal counsels, regardless of what creatures do." ~ **Michael Horton**
- God never changes. Hence, it is in his nature to be faithful even when we are not.

[And given God's faithfulness, how does the psalmist respond?]

In remembering God's faithfulness in the past, the psalmist responds in:

- Awe and gladness
- Again, we'll never have joy until we ourselves have experienced and realized God's faithfulness to us.

APPLICATION

- To unbelievers:
 - You might be like those who said among the nations, “The LORD has done great things **for them**.” Perhaps, you know your husband, parents, or friends are Christians, and you’re happy that “their faith” is working well for them.
 - Well, it’s not because they have a strong faith or dahil mabuting tao sila at malakas sila sa Diyos... It is because their God is the only true and faithful God.
 - This God is not just one who gives Christians a promise of eternal life in heaven. He also transforms their lives, renews their hearts, gives them joy in Christ—so that *“their mouth and tongue are filled with shouts of joy and praises to him.”*
 - Don’t you want to have that same joy? Don’t you want to know and experience the same loving and faithful God? Well, this God is making himself known to you as well every time we preach Christ.
 - Ask God that you will **not be just a spectator**, but that you yourself will experience God’s favor and faithfulness, and say, *“The LORD has done great things for me, for us.”*
- **Believers: Do not forget God’s faithfulness in the past**
 - Our tendency to always forget (Example: Israel in the wilderness, Christians who face trials and needs). Me and Yeng
 - God has always been faithful to us in everything, esp. our salvation.
 - So when we are faced with disappointments and sin in our lives and in the lives of those around us, let us remember that there is a faithful God.

[Transition]: The pilgrim in the face of sin and disappointment recalls God’s faithfulness in the past. And that gives him encouragement to pray with the assurance that God will restore his blessings in the future.

Point 2: God's sure restoration of blessings in the future

TEXT:

- Verse 4 — *“Restore our fortunes...”* — The prayer in the face of wickedness and disappointment. “Bring us back to the condition we once had.”
- *“like streams in the Negeb”*
 - What is Negeb? Negeb is a desert area where rain is limited to one month a year. Pero once umulan, ang bilis umapaw ng tubig sa mga creek.
 - Implies: Asking not for a simple, small-scale restoration. But asking God's *overflowing* blessings. So *overflowing* that those who sow in tears shall soon be filled with joy.
- Verse 5-6
 - *“... sow in tears... goes out weeping”* — Those who face wickedness in the land must have worked with **heavy hearts**.
 - *“Sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!”* — Right now, they may be in tears, but soon, they'll have joy. And not just simple joy, but great joy.
 - Notice the “shall...” language. It will certainly happen.

[What do we see here?]

PRINCIPLE:

- We should not simply remember that God is faithful. But God's testimony of faithfulness should give us reason to trust him and be confident in him
- To expect that he will restore and provide all that he has promised to his people. (i.e., the essence of trust in prayer; we pray in expectation, not doubt. Because God is faithful, we expect good things from him.)

And indeed, God fulfilled the Psalmist's prayer:

- Israel might have not been restored to its glorious days as in the days of king David and Solomon, yet God has been faithful in **restoring the true Israel**
- What fortunes? For instance, OT Prophecies that God's children from afar (from the ends of the earth) shall gather in as one people, the true Israel, receiving God's blessing

- It's been fulfilled in the Pentecost (Acts 2)
 - Many received God's Word (three thousand souls)
 - **READ Acts 2:43-47.** The rest of Acts: Influx of Jews and Gentiles to the church of Christ
 - **And since then, the church has always been growing.** Nagdaan ang madaming mga persecution, wars, pandemics, political and economic crises... and yet, God's kingdom remains. **Though there were times in history that the church seems losing, God always restores and establishes his people.**

God is faithful, and he also promised to be faithful. Hence, like the Psalmist, we have all the reason **to pray** and **expect** that he will be faithful.

CONCLUSION & FINAL APPLICATION

This is the meditation and prayer of the pilgrim in the face of wickedness in Jerusalem. Likewise, brothers and sisters, in the face of sin and disappointments in the world and even inside the church, **let us seek and expect God's restoration for ourselves and for the church at large.**

To individual believers:

- Experiencing spiritual dryness and coldness? Perhaps, you've lost your first love, your zeal for God, etc. Pray for and expect God's restoration.
- Even when it seems that God is not working, keep repenting, keep praying, keep seeking the Lord
- John 6:37 — *"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."*

To all members of the church:

- Churches will also face **seasons of spiritual prosperity and spiritual poverty** (e.g., recent issues). Often, it is in direct connection with how faithfully the gospel is being preached and lived out.
 - I'm aware of this as a new pastor: You once enjoyed rich sermons and teachings in this church, and now some would affirm that there's comparable insufficiencies in the pulpit.

- Then, brothers and sisters, **this Psalm is perfect for us.**
- Remember the times when ZCRC had no pastor at all, until the time you were blessed by God with someone who **teaches well and faithfully** (i.e., Pastor Lance). And so you may have some adjustments and see some insufficiencies in your leaders now, **do not be discouraged.** Take hope and confidence that, one way or another, God shall restore this church to better conditions soon.
- In fact, looking at the bigger picture, remember God's faithfulness to the church throughout history (16th century Protestant Reformation, Revivals in America). After years and even centuries of corruption and deceit in the institutional church, God restored his true church.
- I would even go as far as to say this: **Pray for Reformation and revival** among ourselves and other churches here in the Philippines
 - Recent Ausbury "revival" (February 8, 2023)
 - I don't know and cannot judge whether it is true revival or not
 - Only God knows and you'll know it by its fruits among those who were involved in it
 - But sadly, some **skeptics** sound like "revival" is something that is of the past and **should not even be desired** by serious Christians today.
 - Our tendency to be "allergic" to the term "revival" due to false understanding of revival and experience in many charismatic churches.
 - **What then is Revival?** *The supernatural work of the Holy Spirit wherein he makes the ordinary means of grace bring about true conversion in an extraordinary number of people at once.*
 - So you don't schedule revival. **You don't force it.** It is the Spirit's work. You don't seek the external manifestations of revival (non-stop tears, singing, praying, etc.).
 - But we're also **not closed to the possibility of revival in our midst**, of unspeakable sorrow for sin, intense joy for salvation, a clear and radical transformation of life, a boldness in witnessing for Christ, etc.
 - Ultimately, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones once preached, "*we seek not revival itself, but the Lord of revival.*" We pray that through the ordinary means of grace, God will work extraordinarily to many people, **that we will know him and that he will be real to us.**

- **Why pray and long for revival?** State of the churches and Christians today:
 - Many people are still blind to the truth in our Roman Catholic country (not Christian country). Many are blinded by mere human traditions.
 - Even among Reformed Christians: Doctrinal supremacy, but not transformed in life. Let's long for not simply the Reformation of our doctrines, but also the Reformation of our convictions, our practices, and our lives.
 - Can you say that you have deeper hunger and thirst for the things of God rather than the distractions and entertainment of this life?
 - Can you say that you are more quick to invest in the kingdom of God than that latest gadget or promo online?
 - Can you say that you are willing to follow Christ at any cost, even to the point of losing your reputation, your convenience, your own life?
- If we admit it, many of us Christians today (including myself) have become sheltered and comfortable and distracted unlike our forefathers in the faith.
- **Therefore keep praying for the gospel ministry.** That the Gospel be preached faithfully, with full conviction and power from the Holy Spirit. And that all of us who hear will be transformed by the Spirit.
- **Hope and expect that Christ will build his church and will give us and restore in us hearts and lives that are burning in love, joy, and zeal for the Lord and his kingdom.**

Finally, in the end, God will restore everything.

- We may not experience a perfect church here on earth, but when Christ shall come, he will usher in the new heaven and new earth, and gather his people in his glorious presence.
- **READ Revelation 21:3-4.** And that is where our perfect fortune lies.

So beloved, although we may be discouraged with present disappointments and sin even within the church, remember God's faithfulness in the past and be assured that he will restore us and complete his work for us in the future.

BENEDICTION: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24