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Psalm 126

Emotions are fascinating- everyone has an opinion on them. In the ancient Greco-Roman world, the Epicureans believed that negative emotion and pain was inherently evil, so the goal of life was to avoid pain and sadness as much as possible. The stoics believed that it was more virtuous to simply grit your teeth and deal with sadness and pain, which is why we call someone who is serious and somber a “stoic.” We see something similar today. On one end, we have some in our culture who say that your feelings and emotions are everything and you deserve to be happy! After all, the founders of our country said that it’s our right to pursue happiness! So, men leave their wives and children and say, “I just wasn’t happy, and shouldn’t I be happy?” Colleges have designated safe spaces for students who, heaven forbid, ever encounter something or someone who would make them feel unhappy, uncomfortable or upset. Wow- emotions are very important to us! On the other end, we have voices who say, “Facts don’t care about your feelings.” You can go on YouTube or TikTok and see people purposely go to college campuses and protests and purposely get people annoyed and angry by showing them the “facts,” and it’s meant to be entertaining. “Facts don’t care about your feelings.” “Emotions don’t matter! If you don’t like the truth, too bad! Get over it! You’re the problem!” One side says emotions are everything, one side says they are nothing.

Does the Bible have anything to say about this? After all, God is the one who made us, and therefore created human beings with the capacity to feel emotions. It would make sense to at least hear him out on what he has to say about emotions. Well, here in Psalm 126, that very topic is addressed in a powerful, nuanced, beautiful way. The point of this powerful, emotional Psalm is this: **“The Christian Life Is Filled With Tears and Song of Joy.” And that these tears and shouts of joy are 1. Intensified, and 2. Interdependent.**

**1. Tears and Songs Are Intensified.** Whenever we look at a Scripture reading, it’s important to try to consider the historical context of when it was written. From what we can tell in the first line, that God returned the exiles to Zion, that this was written some time after God’s Old Testament people Israel were in exile in Babylon. In order to understand the Old Testament, and the Bible as a whole, you have to understand some of the big historical events. One of the biggest ones was the Exile. In the 500’s BC, the nation of Israel was conquered and all the people were captured and brought to modern day Iraq to sit in refugee camps. It was a traumatic, horrible time for Israel- they weren’t allowed to be in their homes, their farms, or their temple to worship God. But after 70 years, they were allowed to return home and rebuild their towns, rebuild Jerusalem, rebuild their temple, and it was time of healing and restoration as a nation- both physically and spiritually- where they rededicated themselves to God’s Word and obeying his Law. It was a time of joy- God had finally had mercy on them! God had restored them. They were like those who dream. That line always gets me- what an odd thing to say! That sounds like a line from a Disney song, not a Bible verse. But the writer of this Psalm is saying that there was

a time when they were dreamers. Things were good, and they could only get better. They looked forward to the future and dreamed about all the ways that their farms, their families, their businesses, their culture would only grow and prosper. Things were so good that their enemies had to begrudgingly admit, “Yeah, their God is really powerful and he’s done great things for them.” And the writer says, “Yes! God did great things for us and our mouths are filled with songs of joy...” Also, “Do that again! Restore our fortunes like the streams in the Negev!” What’s he talking about? The Negev is the southern part of Israel, and to be frank, it’s not a nice place. It’s a desert- dry, windy, dusty, hot, not a lot of living things out there. But what you see in the Negev is these dry river beds that look like there may have been water in them centuries ago, but now they’re dry and sad! But once a year, the rains come, and when it rains in the Negev, it pours. And the rain comes down the mountains and forms these powerful, even dangerous torrents of water all at once and they rush down in a flash flood and bring water and then sometimes life into the desert and the Psalm is saying, “God, that’s what we’re like. We’re dead. We’re sad. We’re pitiful. Restore us like the water in the Negev.”

Here’s a question: Are you happier as a Christian than you would be if you weren’t? What would you say to that? I hope you say, “yes.” Because the Christian Gospel produces real joy! You and I have been chosen and redeemed by God himself! We’ve been forgiven of all our sins because of Jesus. We’ve been given a hope to look forward to after this broken world! We’ve been given a new identity as a child of the King of the Universe! We should be happy, and we should be happier than those who don’t know that! Let me ask you this: Are you sadder as a Christian than you would be if you weren’t? The answer is, surprisingly, also “yes.” If you want proof, look at Jesus himself. I know some of you watch the Chosen, and it’s good that you do. Yes, they add some things in there that aren’t in the Gospels, but what they do incredibly well is show how Jesus is what Isaiah said would be: “A man of sorrows, well acquainted with grief.” Read the Gospels and you’ll see that Jesus is constantly troubled, overcome with pity and sadness, weeping and lamenting. Jesus knew the joy of Heaven and the perfection and glory that he has in store for those who trust him, that’s what made people’s rejection so painful and sad. Jesus was there at the creation of the world, he had the joy of having a perfect relationship with his creation, which made it so sad dealing with the evil of this world. You see, non-believers, those who don’t know Jesus and don’t know or care about the joy and glory and perfection of God and the world he’s going to give us, they can simply deal with the sadness of this world and say, “well, it is what it is, let’s just deal with it.” Christians don’t have that luxury. If you have the joy of knowing your status in God’s family is completely, totally free, it will devastate you when people reject it. The more joy you have of knowing what this world was meant to be, the more you will be devastated by the atrocities, the violence, the immorality, the greed, the hatred that we see in the world. And personally, the more you grow in your Christian faith, the more your heart becomes like Jesus’, the softer it will become. More joyful, and yet more distressed as the sin and evil of this world. Songs of joy, but also, “Lord, restore our fortunes.”

**2. Shouts of Joy are Produced by Tears.** If you thought the first idea was shocking, this idea is even more shocking. In verse 5, we have a striking proverb: “Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Now, it would be one thing if the Psalm simply said, “God will comfort those who weep,” or “weeping may last for the night but joy comes in the morning,” because there are plenty of psalms that say that. But this is different. Not only does joy follow weeping, but joy is actually produced by weeping. What? How? How can this happen? Actually, look closely, you’ll find that this is how God works. The greatest example is Jesus himself. What did he come to do? Not just feel pain on a general, human level, but to suffer the ultimate for our sin. He came to weep the bitterest tears and experience the most wretched, intense, horrible sorrow and anguish and pain in our place on the cross, and the writer to Hebrews says this perfectly: “For the joy set before him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame.” Jesus’ sorrow, his tears, his blood shed as those who should have worshiped him laughed at him and spit at him, has brought you and me the ultimate joy of knowing that our sins have been completely taken away and we are absolutely perfect and holy. Jesus sowed with tears and reaped with songs of joy, because the harvest of his tears that his tears produced was you and me. Now, because we belong to him, because we are in his kingdom and his followers and people who are going to share his glory and joy, this is how it will work with us as well. Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. If I may, I’ll give you practical examples of how this might work in your life.

*The tears of repentance.* This might sound morbid, but I hope that sometimes you are sad in church. You need to be. I need to be. We need to repent. Within us all is our old sinful nature who is selfish and evil, and the way we combat ourselves is, in the words of Luther, daily sorrow and repentance. That means actual sorrow and repentance. Your sins should bother you. Your selfishness, greed, doubt, lies, arrogance, laziness, pride, lust, and whatever you do should bother you more than anyone else’s sins. You should be sad about your sin. And the more you are, the more you realize just how freely Jesus loves you. The more sinful you realize you are, the more bitter your tears of repentance are, the more joyful you become in the fact that while you and I were still sinners, Christ died for us and has made us his own and even though he knows every single thing we’ve done, he still wanted us and still forgives us. Tears produce joy. *The tears of loss.* I’m sure most of you know at least one person who has lived the charmed life. They mostly get what they want. They mostly have no issues. They mostly don’t have severe challenges or trials or hardships. When you are sad or lonely or need comfort, do you go to those people? Probably not. Why not? Because they can’t relate. They might be fun in good times, but in bad times they aren’t very useful. Is it possible that God is having you undergo your trials and having you weep your tears so that you can be a blessing to someone else, so that in that moment when some desperately needs comfort and encouragement from someone who knows what they’re going through, you can be that person? Your tears right now are going to produce joy for whoever it is that needs your comfort.

My final encouragement. This psalm, in the last verse, says something also very profound. *Christians have emotions. Christians are not led by their emotions.* Even while they weep, they must sow. They must get to work. They cannot just sit quietly. Christians sometimes, even in times of sorrow, must do things they do not feel like doing. If you are in that place, and you are weeping tears, and you do not feel like carrying on, you need to know this. God weeps with you. And if you'd like, we'll weep with you. Your tears are valid. Your tears are real. Your tears are also meaningful, and will produce joy in the end. In the same way that God strengthened his Old Testament people through their tears, in the same way Jesus through his tears redeemed us from sin forever, in the same way that through the hardest years for God's people, great things have been done through them by God, God will use your tears.

A quote from a pastor that's helped me tremendously:

*'Tears, I feel you. You make me want to quit life. But there is a field to be sown (dishes to be washed, car to be fixed, sermon to be written). I know you will wet my face several times today, but I have work to do and you will just have to go with me. I intend to take the bag of seeds and sow. If you come along then you will just have to wet the rows.'*

*'Tears, I know that you will not stay forever. The very fact that I just do my work (tears and all) will in the end bring a harvest of blessing. So go ahead and flow if you must. But I believe (I do not yet see it or feel it fully)—I believe that the simple work of my sowing will bring sheaves of harvest. And your tears will be turned to joy.'*