

Lord, Restore Our Fortunes

Psalm 126:1-6

Key verse 4, "Restore our Fortunes, LORD, like streams in the Negev."

Life is hard. To a student, finals are like undigested food in their stomach. To a graduate, job hunting and paying his student loan are like a millstone around his neck. To a parent, a daughter's marriage is like an unsettled illegal immigrant problem in the US. To a pastor, the enmity between the right and the left is like rebellious children living at home. Yet, but, each of us had a time which was like a dream. It was not man-made but God's work. In today's passage, the psalmist reflected on the past (dream), pray with the present (Negev) and prophecy for the future with prayer (Restore). Let us hear what the Spirit says to us--a believing community as we go through Psalm 126 by recalling the past(dreams), praying with the present (Negev) and prophesying for the future (Restoring our fortunes). Amen.

***Dreams**

The Psalmist was reflecting on the past when he and the entire community were like people who dream. It was said that the psalm was written during the post exilic era when Ezra and Nehemiah served the community. Here the word, "Fortune" is נְשִׁיבָה in Hebrew, which can mean "captivity" as people or "fortunes" as possession or land.(Slide 4) "When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Our mouths were filled with laughter, and our tongue with songs of joy(1,2a)." This historical reflection indicates the return of exile from Babylonian captivity. As they stepped onto the promised land, as they saw Mount Zion(536 B.C), as they built the altar and the temple(515 B.C.), they became like those who dream. Their joy knew no bounds and laughter didn't leave their mouths. Their eyes were filled with joyful tears of gratitude. Moreover, the nations around said, "the LORD has done great things for them." They stood in awe of the God of Israel. And the believing community could not but acknowledge with gladness, "The LORD has done great things for us."(Ezra 6:13-22) It was not their righteousness, determination or labor, but God's hand working out everything on their behalf. It was like a dream for them. No, they were like those who dream.

"When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion or when the LORD returned the captives of Zion, we were like those who dream," is also our testimony; yours and mine. As a shepherd, as a missionary, as a bride, as a father and as a part of a believing community, you had once, twice or even a period of time, we had been like people who dream--filled with laughter, sang songs of joy and filled with joy. Those times were when the LORD restored our fortunes by being with us, blessing our labor and making our hearts filled with heavenly glory.

***Negev (present).**

The joyful reflection on the past was such a sharp contrast to the present condition,

which is compared to Negev. Negev is the arid southern region of Israel and accounts for over half of Israel's land area, and has less than 8 inches of rainfall per year (Chicago 38 inches rain; 38 snow). Negev is a hot desert land. Scorching east wind dries up every green. No moisture is found. Scorpions and fiery vipers hiss around. But that doesn't mean that Negev is infertile. It was and is a fertile land. What is lacking is water. When the rain comes, everything changes. The psalmist had a sober assessment of the political, economical, social and spiritual condition of the believing community. The glory was found nowhere. The joy was gone. But exhaustion, hopelessness, and despair plagued the community. They were like Negev, dried, lifeless, and disintegrating. So what did the psalmist do? He prayed. "Restore our fortunes, LORD, like streams of Negev." Negev would have greens everywhere, flowers blossom, and the animals run around grazing, when and only when the streams run their riverbed. Likewise, the psalmist prayed and pleaded with God with all his heart, "Restore our fortunes, LORD, like the streams in the Negev." We can translate verse 4, "Return to our land LORD like the streams of Negev."

Our current situation is not better than the Negev desert. The pandemic has devastated even the churches. Hostile temperature toward the church is scorching hot. Many Christians don't bother to attend their churches. Society is divided between the uberconservative right and the extreme liberal left. So called spirituality is honored but our Savior's name is dismissed. Our children and young generation are very sensitive to social issues with little regard to the truth of the Bible. Our hearts ache and bleed. What do we need to do?

"Restore our children LORD like streams of Negev." "Restore the young people to the truth of the gospel." "Return to us LORD with your mighty presence." "Return to our land LORD like the streams of Negev." We are not just praying for blessings, we are praying for His Revistation. What we need, what we ask and even what God truly desires is His coming to his people, to his church and to his land.

"Return to us, to our children, our church, and our land, LORD, like the stream of Negev." We pray this way because God's visitation is always prior to our repentance.

***Restore (future--greater dream).**

"Restore our fortunes, LORD, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them(4-6)." God's restoration and God's returning commands two actions on our part. First is repentance. "Tears" and "weeping" imply repentance on our part. Negev-like conditions are the result of our sins. The Holy Spirit convicts of our sins for repentance. What do we need to repent? The mature people need to repent first beginning with me. We are to repent with tears and weeping of our rigidity, dishonesty, and poor communication. The young people are also to repent with tears and weeping of their entitlement and life without covenant. We are to repent together of idolatry--insisting and making I-dea, I-wish, I-views, I perspective, as an i-dol. Second is going out to sow the seed. In Hebrew, in V 6 "Those who go out--you must go out" and "Those who return: you shall return" are imperative as Gen 2:17(surely die; *קְוֹת תִּמּוּת*) and 9:25(lowest of slaves: *עֶבֶד עֶבְדִּים*) are. In Hebrew "seed to sow" means "the bag of the seed." We are to go out, labor and do sow the beg of the seed. This is

the fruit of repentance. The Psalmist prophetically invites the believing community to respond to God's returning with repentance and labor of sowing, and harvesting with the promise, "Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seeds to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them." Amen. By the way, do you know how many grains one grain can produce? One grain produces 8 heads and more, and each head has about 40 grains and more. 320 grains out of one! What we need is the streams to Negev, God's coming to our community. As the LORD restores our fortunes, as the LORD returns to his people, we will become, once again, those who dream with joy and gratitude.

Recently, one friend of mine got sick with a fever for 2 weeks. He overworked. When we visited him, he shared with us one verse which inspired me. (Slide 10) It was Habakkuk 3:2. "LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, LORD. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy." God's dream of repetition; revival was at the core of his heart. Last week Dr. Paul Chung, after giving Sunday a message, went to get some rest in his apartment and went to our Father in heaven. It was when his son, Dr. Paul Chung Jr. was giving the message here--missionary's dream came true. Last Tuesday, two intern shepherds and their mentor came to U of I. We walked on the campus and prayed for revival--small but the beginning of our dream becoming a reality. We are not praying for numbers. We are praying for God's revisitation, "Return O LORD to your people here in Chicago, in Urbana and in St. Louis, in Indianapolis, New Jersey, Columbus, Dupage, Kansas City..." By faith, we prophecy for his visitation to his people, his intervention for our work and his anointing on his people. This is our prophecy: "When the LORD will restore the fortunes of the global church including UBF, we shall be like those who dream. Then our mouths will be filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they will say among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them. The LORD has done great things for us; we are glad."

Our dream shall come true because God's dreams have come true in Jesus Christ. When Jesus died on the cross and buried, God's dream of redemption was fulfilled. When Jesus rose again, God's dream of destroying the power of death was realized. When Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, repentance and forgiveness could be proclaimed in every nation. When the disciples began to go out with a bag of the seed, the global harvest became possible. When Jesus will come again with power and glory, God's dream shall be our dream for the new heavens and the new earth as the bride for the King Jesus.

Let us sow with tears of repentance. Let us go out sowing the seed of God's word by faith. We will reap with joy. We will see the season of Christ at UIC, NEIU, Loyola, Oakton, NW, U of C, and U of I. U of I has 15 colleges. Each shall have a sustainable discipleship ministry, we will send out laymen ministers, missionaries and full time shepherds to all the major campuses in the US and the world campuses. Someday, We will together meet Jesus our Lord and King coming with power and glory in the clouds. We will shout with all the saints, "the LORD has done great things. He has done great things for us. Amen." We will worship Him, saying, "Hallelujah our God reigns." "O praise his name forever more. Amen!"